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News Reporting/Xavier Herald
Professor Bales
September 20, 2002

Spanish professor uses writing to reflect on Cuba and Spirituality

“Number one—discrimination. Number two—discrimination. And number three—discrimination.” These are the top three issues that Milton M. Martinez, a Spanish professor at Xavier University of Louisiana, said he has faced in the U.S.

Martinez said his transition from Cuba was made difficult by the way people treated him. “When the ignorant Americans know that you don’t know English, they try to humiliate you,” he said.

Martinez said that his spirituality has helped him to deal with the trials and tribulations he has experienced throughout his life.

Besides being openly vocal about his beliefs, the 54-year-old professor uses his writing skills to voice his views regarding his native Cuba and spirituality.

Martinez, who emigrated to the U.S. in 1980, said that living in this country has caused him to be more appreciative of the freedoms he has. “In Cuba I cannot demonstrate my spirituality because it’s Communist,” he said.

Currently working on his sixth novel, the husband and father of three has 23 years of teaching experience in both the United States and Cuba. However, Martinez said he treasures his gift of writing most.

“Writing is a gift from God,” he said, pointing to the ceiling. “The only one who can take it [away] is God.”

In his fifth—and most recent—book, Domingo, el abuelo astral (Domingo, the Astral Grandfather), Martinez draws inspiration from both his spirituality *and* Cuban roots.

Self-published in 1999, the novel is about the life Leopoldo, a wayward young man, and how the spirit of his deceased grandfather, Domingo, guides him to a better path in life.

Leopoldo falls into a life of sexual promiscuity and alcohol addiction due to the repressive regime he faces in Cuba. His grandfather, Domingo, serves as his guardian angel and provides Leopoldo with the knowledge and support he needs to make positive changes in his life.

Dr. Elizabeth Rousselle, a Spanish professor at Xavier University of Louisiana, said she admires the works of Martinez. “I think he is an amazing gift to this campus,” she said of her coworker. “We are incredibly fortunate.”

Rousselle said that individuals should be receptive about the messages that Martinez communicates through his writings. “He is a writer living in exile here,” she said.

Rousselle provides a detailed review of Domingo, El Abuelo Astral on a personal website designed by Martinez. In her review, she describes how the novel contains information about the harsh conditions lives that Cubans face under the rule of Fidel Castro.

In her review of Martinez’s fifth novel, Rousselle describes the spiritual elements of the story. “Domingo, el abuelo astral succeeds in painting a dynamic picture of the beauty and unconditional love of human existence *despite everything*—that is, despite our inescapable enslavement as human beings to the death-fearing entities of capitalism and communism,” she wrote.

Martinez is outspoken about the Cuban government, both vocally and in his novels. “Communism is evil--it’s the devil,” he said, peering through his gold-rimmed glasses. “[Fidel] Castro is Satan.”

In addition to his views regarding the circumstances in Cuba and Castro’s regime, Martinez said that he disagrees with the manner in which the United States allows students to visit his native country. Martinez said that visitors are often oblivious to the horrors that natives endure daily. American students are not prepared to discover the truth about Cuba, he said.

Martinez describes other tribulations that natives endure in his novels, including the daily rationing of food and electricity, and even segregation of Cuban dignitaries and tourists from other Cubans.

“It’s a disgrace,” he said. “They are only going to see what the [Cuban] government wants them to see.”

Martinez said that this false sense of Cuban life misleads visitors about the harsh realities plaguing the native people.

The Cuban people have little meat to feed their families, he said. “The [monthly] quota that they have only lasts one week. Why don’t they show that?”

Martinez said that the oppressive way of life he experienced in Cuba as well as his struggle to give a voice to the oppressed people of his native country have reinforced his belief in a higher power.

“God showed me that I got to believe in Him to survive,” he said.

Consequently, Martinez said that he is steering his writing career in a direction that will express his spiritual beliefs more.

“You’re going to see less humans and more angels in my books,” he said. In addition, Martinez said that his future novels will also emphasize the concept of love, which he believes is the foundation of all great things.

Martinez said that his experiences in both Cuba and the U.S. have taught him some important lessons about human beings and spirituality. “Don’t copy anybody’s life,” he said. “Make your own path to follow God—it is individual and private.”

For more information about works of Milton M. Martinez and to read Elizabeth Rousselle’s complete review of the fifth novel, visit <http://webusers.xula.edu/mmartine>.