UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

February 7, 2017
Jim Logan

The Good Word

For his latest book, “La Virgen de los Boleros” (Isla Negra), Jorge Luis Castillo decided to step outside his literary comfort zone. In the collection of eight short stories, the professor of Spanish and Portuguese at UC Santa Barbara used a variety of voices to tell his tales.

The effort paid off. Castillo has received the PEN Club of Puerto Rico National Award for short stories. Castillo, who was born in Cuba and raised in Puerto Rico, said the honor was unexpected but “validates what I’m doing, because in this book I try something new. I really tried to recreate different voices and different styles. I also aimed for diversity in the topics I chose.”

In one story, a girl and her father are in a California ghost town. After the girl finds some cash and gives it to her father, he disappears, perhaps for good. Old age features in two stories, and in the final story a bolero singer prepares for his final concert. In some stories the prose is minimalist and deals with the quotidian, Castillo noted. “I really focus on everyday stuff. When I don’t, I tend to be more lyrically inclined,” he said. “I painstakingly craft my prose. It took me three years to get this book done.”

“La Virgen de los Boleros” is Castillo’s second book of short stories, after “La Vida Vulgar” (Isla Negra), to win an award from the PEN Club of Puerto and his third work of fiction. He has also written two academic books and authored numerous scholarly articles. His research centers on 19^{th-} and 20th-century Spanish-American literature, with a focus on Hispanic modernism and postmodernism.

The PEN Club of Puerto Rico is affiliated with PEN International, an association of poets, essayists and novelists that promotes literature and freedom of expression. PEN International was founded in 1921 and is based in London.

“The Department of Spanish and Portuguese is extremely proud of Professor Castillo’s second PEN Club award,” said Leo Cabranes-Grant, professor and chair of the department. “He is one of the most prominent short story authors in Puerto Rico today, and this recognition underlines that. Castillo is also a nationally and internationally recognized scholar in the area of literature; his work both as an intellectual and an artist honors a Latin American tradition in which creation and critical investigations walk closely together. This is quite an achievement.”

Tags
Books

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.