

## Professor *pens* novel

By Lacey Raper, Staff Reporter

Truman professor hosts reading for his well-received novel



English professor Joe Benevento will host a reading of his latest novel, "The Monsignor's Wife," at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 13 in the Student Union Building Alumni Room. He said he plans to talk about the novel and some of his experiences, followed by reading few passages.

Benevento's new book is a mystery novel centered around Tony Cupelli, a Catholic monsignor living in a parish in Queens, N.Y., whose controversial views regarding women's rights and the Holy Spirit are well-known.

"He's a very controversial priest who has written books, and one main book he's written is about how he thinks the Holy Spirit is a feminine principle, and it's kind of gotten him in trouble with the church," Benevento said.

Along with his contentious views, Cupelli is having an affair with a woman named Maggie Rosario. But when an unknown killer murders Rosario, Cupelli is thrown into the mix and is named as a suspect.

"He becomes a suspect, but he also then tries to figure it out and becomes, like in many mystery novels, a kind of amateur detective who tries to figure out who did it, especially because there are other murders that have been forewarned by these notes that they're getting from whoever the killer is," Benevento said. "So the rest of the book is essentially him trying to figure it out while other murders are occurring and while things are happening around him."

Some professors on campus have spoken highly of the novel. English professor Adam Davis has applauded

Benevento for straying from the conventional writing path.

"Most good literature has its roots in popular genres, but it takes maturity and experience to use rather than be used by the established conventions of those standard forms," Davis said. "And he did not take the well-worn path of writing a campus mystery with an academic sleuth. Readers of mysteries are going to be surprised by the central figure, who is as easy to believe in and identify with as he is difficult to like."

English Department Head Royce Kallerud said the reading isn't something to be missed.

"Dr. Benevento's a fantastic reader. He really has a great presence when he reads from his work," Kallerud said. "He's a very experienced author who's published multiple books of poetry, nonfiction, short stories and novels so I think it's a really entertaining event. At every event of his I've been to, people are just really taken by his stories and storytelling ... It's someone who's doing really exciting work on campus and you get a chance to see what they're doing. His book is being read all over the United States, and we get to see him talk here. He's one of many talents we have here."

Benevento said his initial inspiration for the novel came from a simple questioning of the form of a word. Benevento said he always wondered why there were no feminine principles within the Catholic church. He said he looked up the original Hebrew and Aramaic words for the term "Holy Spirit." A search showed that unlike the Latin phrase, which was masculine, the Hebrew and Aramaic transla-

tions were feminine, meaning the Holy Spirit would have been referenced as a woman in the original biblical times and texts, he said.

Benevento said he wondered why this idea wasn't preserved, because he thinks God is not really a man or a woman. God is referred to as the Father, and Jesus historically was a man, so Benevento said those two typically are considered masculine. However, he said he believes the Holy Spirit was feminine in the original language of Christ. He said the idea of having a priest who writes about and promotes a feminine Holy Ghost would make an interesting book, especially if the character takes it "too far" and makes the excuse to himself that men and women should be able to get married, even if they're priests.

Benevento said he worked some of his own thoughts into Cupelli's mind to create a complex, dark character.

"I myself went to Cathedral prep as a high school student, which is called a minor seminary, which was kind of the first step if you were thinking about being a priest," Benevento said. "So like Tony Cupelli, I had that experience of going to Cathedral prep. But I thought, what if a person, sort of like me, had gone further? It was like taking a really dark version of myself really, in that character, if I had made some bad choices and had allowed myself to become so full of myself that I thought, 'Since I'm thinking it, it must be true.' So, scarily, the character is a little like me ... but of course the ways that he's being a hypocrite and the ways that he's living a kind of double life, of

course I never experienced, but I can imagine someone doing it."

Benevento said he set the novel in Queens, New York City, where he grew up.

He said the novel is about people who grew up in his neighborhood in Queens, so he feels transported back the time he spent there. But Benevento said he has a feel for what the contemporary neighborhood is like because he still has ties to that neighborhood.

Since its release, "The Monsignor's Wife" has received positive reviews from authors, such as Lee Slonimsky, who said it was "masterful and profound" and Carol Goodman, Hammett Award Winning Mystery Writer, who dubbed it "a great debut."

"It's very gratifying," Benevento said. "When you write a book and then you re-write it, you have people who help you, you get some other writers to look at it, and you put it out, you're always hopeful that it will get a good response."

Following the reading, the novel will be available for purchase. Benevento said he is more than willing to talk to them if anyone has questions about publishing.

"You can just come to the reading for fun, too, even if you don't really want to or aren't in a position to buy the book," Benevento said. "Most of the people aren't going to necessarily buy a book, but it should be a fun time. If students want to see what a reading is like, then they should come."

In addition to being sold at the reading, "The Monsignor's Wife" is available at the University Bookstore and Hastings. The book also can be bought online at Amazon, Barnes and Noble and The Mysterious Bookshop.

