

# A GREAT WRITER

by Bro FRANCESCO DILEO OFMCap

Words of the American film Director, Abel Ferrara, during a news conference in Monte Sant' Angelo on 10 December, before the fourth and final week of shooting for his Padre Pio film, had significant resonance. Referring to the letters of the future saint written to his spiritual directors, used as source material in the screen writing, Ferrara said: "these letters are written by a great writer, comparable to Baudelaire."

It would be a good thing if this assertion helped quell that prejudice of those who write about Padre Pio from hearsay, and say the friar saint was rough and poorly educated.

However, not believing either of these positions to give the full picture of the friar, I would like to consider here the Capuchin friar's profound culture and which comes across clearly to anyone who reads the four volumes of his Letters that he wrote without ever completing, because of poor health, his formal education as a seminarian. Already in 1984, the eminent philologist, specialist in Latin, and ancient Greek, Alfonso D'Errico, in his book "Padre Pio the Writer," had highlighted that the friar of Pietrelcina "had a particular predilection for history and culture. Already in his school essays we find frequent citations of historical figures. He must have certainly been familiar with

Cesare Cantu's 'Universal History' as well as Rohrbacher's 19 volume 'Universal History of the Catholic Church.'

Padre Pio must have spent several hours a day reading, at least until his arduous workload prevented him. From the citations and references that we find in his letters we can clearly deduce that he loved to read the Old and New Testaments [...] St. Augustine's 'Confessions,' [...] various books on the spiritual life and amongst these most certainly St. Francis de Sales' 'Introduction to the Devout Life' and 'Treatise on the Love of God.'"

"Books on the ascetical life, in particular by Saint John of the Cross and Scaramelli's 'Ascetical Directory,' completed his education." Further, the "books by Saint John of the Cross on the mystical life, he did not just read, he studied them profoundly."

More recently, in 2007, Mgr. Carmelo Pellegrino in his book, "Beyond the Wisdom of the Word," underlined in Padre Pio's teaching "the close intimacy to Jesus as role model and to the teachings of Saint Paul and highlighting in particular his remarkable familiarity with the real problems confronting persons, his cautious and meticulous attention in their spiritual progress, his almost 'systematic' good humour, his mental openness to other teaching methods, and his unexpected cultural insights."

As for his expressing this learn-

ing in his letters, professor D'Errico, already cited above, after acknowledging Padre Pio's ability to formulate his language to his state of soul, to the arguments dealt with and to the destined receiver, attested how in the Letters, "the texture of his writing is often interspersed with wonderful imagery and subtle and moving poetic insights."

This style was not something easily attained if we consider how the underlying thread of his writings involved the inexpressible, and how this "meant both the ability to penetrate the mystery in order to describe it fully to his directors so as to receive from them some light, as well as translating that mystery for his spiritual children in a language that was clear, serene and authoritative" (L. Lotti, "The Letters of Padre Pio. A Mystagogical Reading.")

To these profound appraisals of Catholic writers sadly only available to scholars and specialists, we can now add these spontaneous and clearly sincere praises of a famous director who declares himself to be "a practising Buddhist although brought up as a Roman Catholic."

I hope that his non-scientific, but certainly respected opinion from a different and secular cultural environment can help attribute to Padre Pio the just recognition of his capabilities as a writer.



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