

Battalion photo by Phyllis West

# Writing is rewriting

"Legion sat for a moment, his mouth gaping, color suffusing his face. He seemed to grow large, become increasingly apoplectic. Then, in a puff of smoke, he was gone, and a faint odor of sulfur tainted the air."  
— "Devil to Pay," a short story by J.F. Pierce

BY PHYLIS WEST

Mystery writing is a game, said J. F. Pierce, Texas' most prolific mystery writer.

Pierce, an English professor at Texas A&M for about 31 years, said Wednesday he believes his mind is built for mysteries.

"I like mental puzzles. It gives me satisfaction to solve mysteries."

"Writing is only one part of my life," said Pierce. He also likes teaching, spending time with his family, living in a small town and being at A&M.

Pierce writes off-beat mystery stories in which he tries to make the reader believe a plot that is far from reality. Pierce was honored for the seventh time by the Honor Roll of Best Detective Stories of the Year.

Making the reader suspend his disbelief is what mystery writing is all about, Pierce said.

Conservatively dressed in a checkered suit coat, Pierce leaned slightly back in his chair. After a pensive moment, he lifted his brows and his serious frown turned into a smile. His eyes seemed to sparkle whenever he talked about his writings.

"When I see and hear something, I see a relationship between reality and illusion — from that I develop a plot," he said.

"I get inspiration from reading newspaper columns, dreams, reading quotations, a picture or group of pictures or something that arouses me," Pierce said.

Chaloupka cited the farmer's plight of being in a period of rising production costs and falling farm prices—a 6 percent decline during the past year.

"During the same period, our production costs rose by 5 percent," said the Texas Farm Bureau president. "And our costs would have been greater had it not been for bargain feed prices. The cost-price squeeze in agriculture has brought the many Texas farmers and ranchers to the breaking point."

Our present situation demands that we reduce our costs," he continued. "For this reason, farmers and ranchers in Texas and particularly those of us in this area are looking to the results that could come from this research and extension center."

In officially opening the new Amarillo center, Wells said the facility will help pave the way for determining new and more efficient techniques for producing and marketing products economically important to the High Plains.

"Nowhere in Texas is the economic base so dependent on agriculture as it is in the High Plains," noted Wells. "This vast land resource, devoted to both irrigated and dry-land agriculture, produced over 18 percent of the total agricultural income in the state last year."

Agriculture in this area faces several severe tests with the list headed by problems involving irrigation water and the large increase in energy costs," he said.

He has recently sent out a 55,000 word novel for publication that was based on a newspaper picture of chalk lines drawn on a sidewalk.

"I wondered what kind of person would draw such lines," Pierce said. He entitled the book "The Outline of Death."

"My characters are not as interesting as I would like them to be," he said.

But he said his characters are also made up of bits and pieces of people he has known. He partially used the A&M campus for background in his stories occurring at college campuses.

"I'm mentally involved in my stories, but I'm seldom emotionally involved," he said. He added that he has been emotionally involved in only two or three stories.

One of which was "The Pale Face of the Rider." The story was about an artist who thought his child was special because she was a dwarf. Because the artist couldn't change the world in which the child lived, he decided to create a special world for the child.

"Writing is the act of rewriting," Pierce said. It takes him six drafts to write a story, whereas he has a friend who can write smoothly in one draft. He said that writing is difficult, but "it's a compulsion with me to write," he added.

Pierce's interest in writing came when he was a child from an English teacher who used to read "The Hardy Boys," "Tom Swift" and other stories to him and other neighborhood children.

Pierce said that because there was no television when he was growing up, he would create his own mental pictures by reading several books a week.

"I think that is why I'm so descriptive in my writings now," he said.

At college, Pierce studied speech, theater and English.

And although he said he has to "find the time to write," Pierce has written six novels and 125 to 150 stories.

"I prefer being a teacher to a writer," Pierce said. Chairman of creative writing at A&M, he also teaches writing classes.

Pierce said that he lets his students write what they are interested in. "They shouldn't be writing for money. In most cases, their stories will never see publication so they should write what gives them pleasure," he said.

Pierce likes the students and the atmosphere of A&M. He remembers when A&M was in a small town atmosphere.

"Now it's getting too big. I'd like to go back to when there were 5000 people," he said smiling.

Not only has A&M changed, but the writing market has shrunk dramatically, Pierce said. There will always be a market for mysteries though, he added.

"I do believe we need to change. I've tried to change. But I prefer an old-fashioned story with a beginning, a middle and an end. Very little experimental writing appeals to me," Pierce concluded.

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# Ag research post opens in Amarillo

Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Bert Cutler cited agriculture's top profile at the formal opening of the Texas A&M University Agricultural and Research Extension Center in Amarillo.

The opening of the Amarillo facility completes Texas A&M's multimillion-dollar statewide network of research and extension centers. The centers emphasize crops and commodities economically important to various regions of Texas. They are jointly operated by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service and Texas Agricultural Experiment Station.

The Amarillo center specializes in grants supporting the beef cattle industry in the High Plains.

Cutler was joined in dedicatory remarks by Carol Chaloupka, Texas Farm Bureau president, and Clyde Wells, chairman of the Texas Agricultural University System Board of Regents.

The assistant secretary said the beef and fiber industry is enjoying a top profile today than it has for years.

"This is a climate in which we need to do our basic jobs—to see that needed food and fiber are there when we need it, while promoting the quality of human life in America."

He pointed out that the federal-partnership in agriculture has helped by providing the strength to work problems at all levels. Agriculture is the nation's largest industry, having assets of \$531 billion and representing 45 percent of the total capital assets

of all manufacturing corporations in the nation.

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# Mobil donates to engineers, adds \$5,300

Officials of Mobil Oil Corporation awarded Thursday \$5,300 to Texas A&M University's engineering program.

Charles Reinke Jr., senior regional recruiting coordinator from Dallas, and Bruce Holman, division operations engineer from Mobil's Houston offices, delivered the checks.

Reinke noted that the grants are part of a giving program that will net Texas A&M a total of \$29,000 from Mobil this year.

The checks included \$1,700 for petroleum engineering, \$1,200 for chemical engineering, \$1,200 for civil engineering and \$1,200 for mechanical engineering.

Department heads Dr. Charles Holland, Dr. Gordon Hopkins, Dr. Charles Samson, Dr. William Vongonten and Robert Walker, vice chancellor for development represented Texas A&M.

Earlier in the week, Mobil representatives delivered \$8,500 to support other programs at Texas A&M.

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Freshman transfer students can still sign up to interview for the Town Hall committee. All applicants must sign up in the student programs office of the M.S.C., by 5:00 p.m. Friday, September 30.

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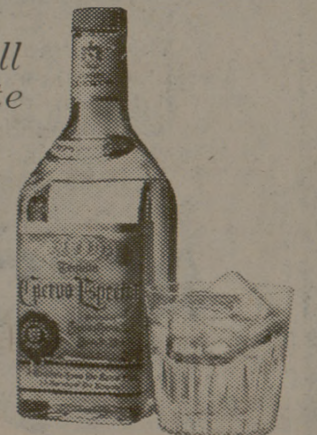


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