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THE BATTALION

Thursday, November 8, 2001

Up Close with Percival

Author Percival Everett talks about his latest book, Erasure, and on being a writer

By KEVIN BURNS
THE BATTALION

Fiction writer Percival Everett will visit Aggieland for a reading at 7 p.m. in Bernie's Café Express-O.

Everett is the author of 15 books, and his latest book, *Erasure*, was released in October. He is in his fourth year as the head of University of Southern California's English department and teaches literary theory, fiction writing and an experimental workshop.

Everett was invited by Texas A&M-housed scholarly journal of African American Arts and Letters, *Callaloo*. *Callaloo* is a 25-year-old publication that began in Baton Rouge, La., and has been located in Kentucky and Virginia.

"*Callaloo* is a great publication," Everett said. "It's my first choice of venue for publishing work because the work inside is always so good."

Erasure is set in present-day Washington, D.C., and around the character Thelonious Ellison.

"Basically he is an experimental novelist, not unlike me, and he's dealing with the fact that he's often told by the publishing world that his work is not black enough — left to wonder what that means," Everett said.

Everett said that *Erasure* is not a book about him, but it is very personal and closer to himself than other books he has written.

"It's certainly not autobiographical," said Everett. "Although I certainly share more with [*Erasure's* main] character than any other of my characters."

In the past, Everett has been accused of not revealing all the answers to his books in favor of making readers labor.

"I suppose that's true," Everett said. "I think a reader needs to do some work too. After all, I'm working, so why not everybody else?"

Everett, hesitant to say how his novel speaks to society or what it should mean, said he, the novelist, is not the correct person to address its meaning.

"The writer is always the wrong person to capture," Everett said. "If I could say it succinctly, then I probably wouldn't have to write the novel."

Everett said his novel is a statement "against the marginalization of any art," and as a novel, it does not have a message.

"I have questions," he said. "I pose them, and my hope is that the writer is already evidence that I'm not somebody to be feared. It's there, what I think, what I see, and it's up to the reader to figure out what they are going to figure out ... I don't have a picture of the world that I want to impose on any one person."

Everett said he spent countless hours of research during the novel-writing process. He said there were ups and downs for his writing comes both hard and easy. Research is his primary support.

"I always do a lot of research," Everett said. "Things are slow at points and not at others. Writing is always a bit of a fight."

Beyond being a professor and novelist, Everett is a painter.

"It's another art form I love — a completely different way of expressing myself than writing," Everett said. "It's more immediate and emotional."

His painting "Deception" serves as the cover art for *Callaloo*, Vol. 24 No. 2 edition.

Everett's undergraduate work was in both philosophy and biochemistry. Looking back, he said, "lack of good grades caused him to study hard, and he also enjoyed science and mathematical logic."

Seemingly a prodigy, Everett wrote and sold his first novel before completing his graduate studies in philosophy.

"It was exciting," Everett said. "I was pretty fortunate to have sold the novel before I graduated. I feel a little guilty that I didn't pay my dues that we all talk about."

For himself, Everett enjoys reading all types of books, but finds Mark Twain "hilarious."

In the end, he mentioned is "OK" during oral reading such as the one he will do at Bernie's Cafe, but please do not to be in front of people.

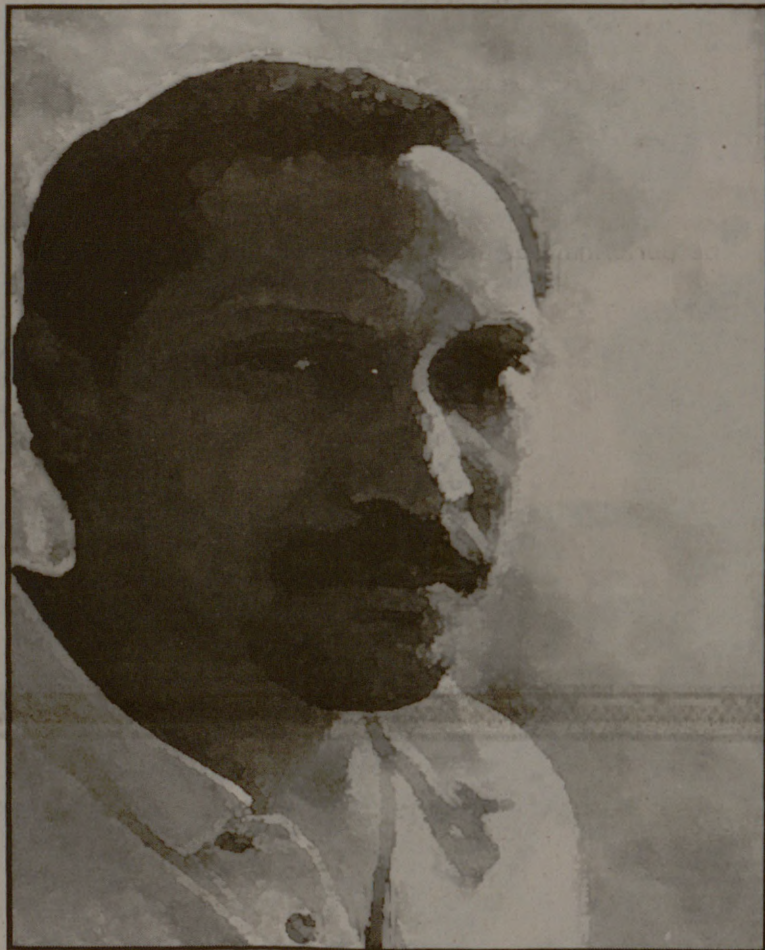
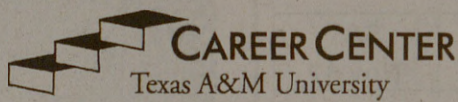


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"Basically [Ellison] is an experimental novelist ... he's dealing with the fact that he's often told by the publishing world that his work is not black enough ..."

— Percival Everett
author of *Erasure*

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