

METROPOLITAN

Percival Everett writes third novel

by Nathaniel Scott

Black Afro-American male novelists are not sprouting like leaves on trees, but at least one such writer living in the Portland area is making himself known on the literary scene.

Percival Everett has written two novels: "Zuder," the story of a Black baseball player, and his latest "Walk Me to the Distance," an intricate love story without racial identity.

Everett first came to Oregon in 1978 and after living here for two years, decided to make Portland his home in 1984. The land, the outdoors, the climate and the people were the reasons.

The holder of a master's degree, Everett will teach Afro-American literature at the University of Kentucky at Covington, Kentucky, this coming year. In the meantime, he is working on his third novel.

Everett is not what you would call a "radical" writer, but he does have his own style, as well as his particular ideas about writing, and is concerned about the usage of Black literature.

"Is it (literature) written by Blacks, or is it (literature) about Blacks?" he asked. As a teacher, Everett's concern for the genre is of a more profound nature. He questions terminologies such as Black literature which he said, "Generally does a disservice to Black writers and people of all races." In "Walk Me to the Distance, Ev-

erett said racial identity was not important to the story. "If I had made the characters Black, everyone would have paid attention to that fact and missed the story," Everett surmised.

"Walk Me to the Distance" is a love story. The central character, a Vietnam War veteran whose name is Harold, tries to find a place for his disoriented life. His search takes him to a place called "Slutis Hole" in Wyoming. While there he meets and becomes a member of a sheep-raising family. Eventually, through the unfolding of the tale, he becomes the foster parent of a 7-year-old girl from Vietnam.

There are many wonderful characters in the novel, including the one-legged mistress of the sheep ranch who takes Harold in, her "idiot" son and three interesting women, two of whom are prostitutes.

Everett said he is not a Vietnam veteran and the setting was the vehicle he used to alienate the character (Harold) from his surroundings.

Everett has that introspective look. He gives the impression all life is serious and seems to challenge the world with his steady gaze.

He refused to explain or defend his writing (a rather common practice with writers), but he did say, "When you read novels written by whites they don't have to identify their characters as white."



NOVELIST PERCIVAL EVERETT

Everett doesn't have a magic formula for writing but attributes his storytelling ability to an enormous amount of reading and the study of philosophy.

He works a great many hours each day but it's not always at the typewriter. To Everett, "thinking is an important aspect of writing."

One literary concern, especially among Black scholars, is the lack of Black male writers being published. Everett approaches the subject from a different, if not a new, perspective. He feels that many potential Black male writers are being ushered into other directions: medicine, law, business and fields of that nature. But, he added, "Something we do have to face is the fact that Black

women writers are selling these days."

So the questions remains, and the arguments rage, whether or not white America continues to keep the Black male in the Black woman's shadow for political reasons even though such perceptive Black women novelists as Joyce Carols Thomas, proclaim: "Black women are the other half of who we (Black people) are."

Everett said writing a novel is really involved because he spends a lot of time thinking about promoting the issues he wants to promote.

In "Walk Me to the Distance," Everett's characterization of a man's search for love and identity definitely accomplished this goal: promoting an issue.

Vietnam revenge movies

by Robert Lothian

What the Vietnam revenge movies have in common is white would-be superheroes who slaughter Southeast Asians by the hundreds.

Armed to the teeth with the latest American death technology for covert actions, Sylvester Stallone ("First Blood" and "Rambo - First Blood Part 2") and Chuck Norris ("Missing in Action," parts one and two), single-handedly set to do what the Army and Air Force were unable to accomplish - win the Vietnam War.

Little matter that the U.S. pulled out of Saigon in defeat 10 years ago. The racism and genocidal hate behind the tragedy that was Vietnam live in the sick minds of these right wing cretons who blame the bureaucratic wimps for losing the war. That's where Rambo's "I'm comin' to get you, Murdock," comes in: In spite of CIA agent Murdock's games and intentional double cross, Rambo returns victorious from a Vietnamese prison camp to confront him with some leftover POWs.

Destruction of an entire hamlet and the massacre of dozens of Vietnamese and Russian soldiers is but a prelude to Rambo's righteous showdown with Murdock. The audience gets off on it: In the paramilitary myth, Murdock is all of those official bunglers who played politics and lost the war to communism.

If only loyal American white men like Rambo could have fought the war their way, the myth goes, America would have won. We'd be riding tall in the saddle again just like in the good old days, and we wouldn't have to take any crap from Cubans, Nicaraguans or Middle Eastern terrorists.

At a crucial point in the film, Rambo's ex CO from 'Nam tells him, "The old Vietnam is dead, Rambo, forget it." Rambo replies that as long as he is alive, Vietnam is alive.

"Rambo is a war machine that can't be turned off," Stallone said in an interview. Truer words about post WW II America, and the deformed, paranoid, militaristic mind it spawned, were never spoken. Rambo is a walking World War Three.

The Vietnam revenge movies are popular, which says something about the post-1984 Reagan-inspired national personality. That these new comic books heroes strike an emotional cord with the mostly white, mostly teenage males that audience is evident in the cheers that Stallone and Norris get as they blast away at "the gooks."

When these young men in the audience, after returning home from some future crusade in Nicaragua, or the Philippines, or the Middle East, sit in their wheel chairs and ponder the war tragedy of their generation, will they remember the way they cheered for Rambo, who prepared their destruction?

Rambo seems the kind of mythic hero appropriate for America now - a sexy messiah with bulging muscles saving fat and flaccid America from its guilt over genocidal wars, and to save us from facing up to our role as the bulwark of reaction and stifler of progress in the Third World.

What can we look forward to with Rambo Three - Rambo trashing terrorists in the Middle East, Rambo in Nicaragua, Rambo single-handedly overcoming the bureaucrats and shooting an MX at Moscow?

The trend is perhaps shown in the Chuck Norris movie, "Code of Silence." Here Chuck brings home from the jungle some of the macho violence needed to clean up the cities. He takes on Latino and Italian drug pushers and wimps in the Chicago police force. He does it all single-handedly, of course, and blows away dozens of Latinos and Italians in the process.

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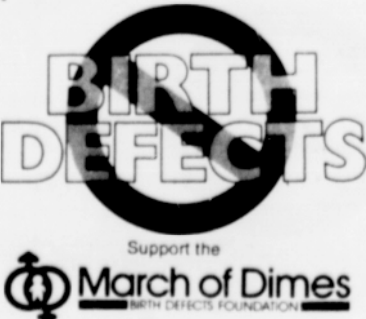
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