

## In Memoriam

### Thomas Matthews Pearce (1902 - 1986)

Thomas Matthews Pearce was born in Covington, Kentucky, on May 22, 1902. He moved with his parents to Missoula, Montana, in 1915. Having completed his undergraduate work at the University of Montana in 1923, he entered the Graduate School of the University of Pittsburgh, receiving his M.A. in 1925 and his Ph.D. in 1930.

He had joined the English Department of the University of New Mexico in 1927, and he retired in 1964, after thirty-seven years. He was chairman of the department from 1929 until 1951. His great love of New Mexico and the seemingly tireless energies he expended in its behalf burgeoned to an extent even mirific to his associates. Governor Jerry Apodaca honored Matt by proclaiming May 8, 1976, "T. M. Pearce Day" throughout New Mexico.

During leaves from his teaching, Pearce studied at the Universities of Chicago and California and at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. Among his many contributions to the literary scholarship of Early English are "Marlowe and Castiglione" published in the *Modern Language Quarterly*, "Christopher Marlowe" published in the *Phi Kappa Phi Journal*, and "Beowulf's Moment of Decision in Heorot" published in *Tennessee Studies in Literature*.

Thorough schooling in traditional scholarly criticism did not stop Pearce from venturing effectively into the "new" criticism. He published "Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*," "Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," and "Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*" in *The Explicator*. A delightfully wry exegesis of eight lines spoken by Lewis Carroll's Alice, entitled "Rebirth of Old Critic," was published in *The CEA Critic* (May, 1955). The enviable balance of drollery, warmth, and meticulous scholarship of T. M. Pearce is best demonstrated perhaps in his own remark about Carroll in this article: "But the full impact can come only from the words of the poet himself, words that dislume while they incise the entablature of form permeated with meaning."

Through his extensive research and writing, Pearce also became recognized as a strong authority on the literature and the language of the Mountain West, especially of the Southwestern United States. In most instances a spate of publications followed his untiring role as primary force in the founding, organizing, and promoting of academic studies and related societies.

A *Gemütlichkeit* existed between Pearce and the early and renowned Santa Fe Circle of writers and artists. His acquaintanceship, appreciation, and understanding of Mary Austin and her writings resulted in three books on her: *The Beloved House* (1940), an accounting of her life and writings as well as a personal memoir; *Mary Hunter Austin* (1965) in the Twayne United States Authors Series; and *The Mary Austin Letters* (1979). As the first official editor of *The New Mexico Quarterly*, from 1931 to 1939, Pearce published the work of Mary Austin, Erna Fergusson, John Gould Fletcher, and D. H. Lawrence, among others. In his recent *Poets' Fellowship* (1984), two poems "To D(avid) H(erbert) Lawrence" and "Frieda Lawrence" show his lasting pleasure in this circle.

Concurrent with his duties in editing *The New Mexico Quarterly* and with his characteristic brio, Pearce was one with four others founding the New Mexico Folklore Society, in 1931. Katherine Simons, an esteemed colleague, remarks that during "his long association with the group, his influence extended beyond campus and classroom. He fostered the collection of New Mexico folklore, exhibits of Spanish Colonial arts, cooperation with projects of the American Dialect Society, association with the Texas Folklore Society, and publication of the *New Mexico Folklore Record*."<sup>\*</sup> In the mid-fifties, he was editor of the "Names and Places" section of *Western Folklore*, under the general editorship of Wayland D. Hand and published for the California Folklore Society.

In his continuing role as prime mover, in 1934 Pearce established one of the first courses in Western and Southwestern Literature at the University of Mexico. Among the long list of books that he wrote by himself, or in collaboration with others, and that were used at UNM and at other Southwestern educational institutions are: *American in the Southwest*; *Southwest Heritage: A Literary History with Bibliography* with Mabel Major and Rebecca S. Smith; *Southwesterners Write* (1946); and *Signature of the Sun* (1960). A second book in the Twayne United States

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\* "Memorial Minute for Professor Thomas Matthews Pearce," *Faculty Minutes*, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Authors Series was *Oliver La Farge* (1972). Additional and notable are *Lane of the Llano*; *Cartoon Guide of New Mexico*; *Literary America, 1903- 1934* (1973); and *Stories of the Spanish Southwest* (1977), a bilingual volume.

Almost *sui generis* in his sustained energies in motivating and furthering academic pursuits, Pearce was the initial force in establishing the American Studies program at the University of New Mexico. He was the chairman of this acclaimed program from the time of its founding in 1943 until 1950. He was also a primary force in organizing the Rocky Mountain MLA, and served as its co-president during its first year.<sup>†</sup> His research and his artist-wife's excellent maps were incremental in determining isoglosses for the Rocky Mountain region of the *Linguistic Atlas*.<sup>‡</sup>

Pearce's interest in names began even before his long association with the American Name Society. His continuing involvement in the New Mexico Folklore Society, since his co-founding of it in 1931, heightened his awareness of placenames that were being compiled by workers of the Federal Writers Project between 1936 and 1940. Ina Sizer Cassidy, serving as this society's president in 1948, appointed him to edit and organize the thousands of card-file histories of New Mexico placenames and to prepare a manuscript. Three mimeographed *Collections* appeared from 1949 to 1951.

Among his articles which appeared in *Names* in the fifties and early sixties was "The Names of Objects in Aerospace," from his presidential address, delivered at the ninth annual meeting of ANS in Philadelphia, December 27, 1960. In 1962, the University of New Mexico selected him as its Ninth Annual Research Lecturer. This lecture was entitled "The Lure of Names."

*New Mexico Place Names: A Geographical Dictionary*, considered by many to be pre-eminent among Pearce's contributions to the canon of Southwestern writing, was published by the University of New Mexico Press in 1967. As editor, he was assisted by Ina Sizer Cassidy and by Helen S. Pearce, his wife. The *Dictionary* is in its sixth printing. Strongly loyal and never unmindful of the book's origins, he turned over royalty checks to the New Mexico Folklore Endowment Fund. The placename scholarship of the book is imbued with vitality; in his words "for many of us names are alive and not so much dead tissue or anatomical

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<sup>†</sup> George Warren Arms, University of New Mexico, personal communication.

<sup>‡</sup> T.M. Pearce, personal communication.

specimens."<sup>‡</sup> *Nevada Place Names: A Geographical Dictionary* owes a huge debt to Matt Pearce.

He was a teacher. His wit was keen, but never harsh. His warmth was genuine. He demanded good performance, while being an inspirational model. Beneath his professorial regard for propriety, there was an impish quality soon recognized by students in his Beowulf seminar. In Bandelier Hall, following a discussion of the hero's *mundgripe* and partial dismemberment of Grendel, the class presented Pearce with an artful construction of the gory arm. Suppressing a shudder, he promptly took the grisly trophy to his office, hung it over his office door, and returned to pass out assignments, not gifts. During a class on religion writers of the Renaissance, he rendered a spoonerism, whether accidentally or impishly, with speedy dignity. Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" became "Moxe's" and the Martyrs were thus defamed.

Thomas Matthews Pearce married Helen Spang Ancona, a widow with two daughters, in 1941. At about the time of their marriage, she became well known as a regional painter, most Southwestern museums and elsewhere.<sup>†</sup> He thought it an amazing development that "old bachelor Pearce" should have seven grandchildren and eleven great grandchildren.<sup>‡</sup> In his *Poets' Fellowship* is the poem "Death" identified as (Metaquizzical Poem #2). Near its conclusion, he writes:

Remembrance lives  
somewhere, somehow,  
within and outside  
of me.

And so it does, Matt Pearce.

Helen S. Carlson

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