

Had to buck the sun--i.e., drive against it.

bucking the sun--also means, fighting time, fighting the calendar, the passing of life.

The Duffs

The Duffs are three brothers and their wives, their father and mother, and the uncle from Scotland, a fierce Glaswegian leftist who went through the '26 General Strike.

One brother--Owen, married to Rosellen--probably the oldest, got away to college, has become an engineer or project bigshot on the building of Fort Peck dam.

Another brother, the rakehell one--Bruce, married (stormily) to Rhonda--becomes the diver in the pilework under the Missouri River.

Last brother--Neil, married to Phoebe--has tried to tough it out on the land with his parents, but starved out and is now a carpenter on the dam project, works at drilling and fastening (bolting) the pilings and braces, as my interviewee Frank Henderson did.

The father, Hugh Duff, is a nephew of Ninian; has been driven from the land by the Depression, now oddjobbing at Fort Peck. His wife Dora is somewhat at a loss in Fort Peck, so different from the homestead life.

The uncle, Darius Duff, has abandoned Scotland for America, hoping the political/economic system will fall and a quicker cleaner start on a new society can happen here. He ends up in a rough marriage of convenience with Wyomia, who has a tough past and came to Fort Peck as a "taxi dancer."

The "solve" theme, playing off the sheriff's opening scene where witnessing is, at least in theory, the first step to solving a crime. The dam, too, has been meant to solve some things--flood control, joblessness--but as with the sheriff's revelation that he can't really see through to the deaths in the pickup, the river and the consequences of the dam prove not to be soluble.

--"soluble" or solve or solution, some form of this, might be a final phrase or sentence to work toward.

Jim Todd letter in Writer's file, w/ my Feb. 16 '89 reply: he offers to collaborate on illustrations sometime, I told him maybe eventually. What I had in mind was ch. head ill'ns of the Missouri R. and Ft. Peck dam for Bucking the Sun.

possible chapter-ending scene:

One of the Duff men is alone with one of the Duff women in sexually charged situation. Nothing has happened yet, but he is touching her somewhere high on her body, maybe hand on her shoulder in inconclusive style. Then, ~~xx~~ their affair begins with this final line of the chapter:

He put his hand down to where things begin.

(This may need setting-up with him fantasizing about where he'd like to put his hands on her.)

complications of the Duffs:

--Wyomia has a fling with Bruce, and Hugh is also drawn to her.

--Owen and Phoebe have a fling

in slide

--Darius hints to Neil, after Owen has saved Neil's life, about Owen or Phoebe; or threatens Owen with telling.

--Darius and Dora: Dora has felt all her life, all the way back to Scotland, that she married the wrong brother?

Plot conclusion, two bodies in the pickup: they are ^{Rosellen} Phoebe (Neil's wife) and Darius; Phoebe has slipped the pickup out of gear, letting it roll into the river, to kill them both and free Owen (who she's having an affair with, and who is being blackmailed by Darius' threatening to tell ~~Owen~~ Neil) of Darius, and of herself as well.

This conclusion would leave:

- Owen and ^{Rosellen} Rhonda still together
- Bruce and Rhonda as they were (together, or heading apart?)
- Wyomia alone, but out of her tough past, unsurprised at Darius's betrayal.
- Neil the tragic figure, particularly if he has suspected Phoebe and Owen.
(Phoebe's act of drowning herself and Darius would take away the suspicion Neil had of Owen, i.e. shift it to Darius.)
- Hugh and Dora as they were (Dora lifelong half-in-love with Darius, Hugh both drawn to and fearful of his radical brother.)

use the interior of the sheriff's mind, failing to figure out what happened in the pickup, as a carrying theme?

This could be the sub-mystery of the book: does he figure it out or doesn't he?

Possibility: use as chapter breaks, or some other regularity (without being plodding about it), the sheriff in old age, alone (familyless) in retirement home, his mind back on the pickup case. This could even take place at the turn of the century (book to be published in '97) or in 1998, sixty years after the pickup incident.

--the sheriff is even smaller and meaner than ever, in great old age (his 90's).

--the retirement home attendant could have some connection to someone tangentially involved in the pickup case, although the sheriff doesn't know it, can't know it; she's possibly the niece of Nan Hill, or offspring of Tom Harry and one of the Fort Peck prostitutes or taxi dancers. Have her possess, in some story within her family, a detail about the pickup case w/ which the sheriff could solve it, if he only knew/

MHS, April '93:

from Lorie Morrow: her parents tell of people switching IDs on dam jobs, to share the work and wages around.

- possible plot turn, somebody w/ somebody else's ID (in slide?)
(fingerprinting?)

the reader doesn't have to be told characters' internal passions for each other before they happen.

use my Roosevelt, Wyoming, eclipse experience: Kate Duff? Rhonda? Owen?

The Missouri chapter needs some foreshadowing of radical politics.

The story of Hugh and Meg (and Darius) has to "advance backward"--to root causes of everything between them--while the chronology of the family and the dam comes forward in time. The pivots for the background scenes can be bits of knowledge or happenstance such as Birdie asking his twins-or-brothers question, and Nan Hill recalling Ninian Duff.

The "must" of this book, in its story and how the publisher presents it: that this is the story of a sprawling, troubled family. (i.e., not story of the dam, nor of the West, nor of the Depression, etc.)

show the Duffs across a range of emotions, particularly an occasional sadness.

(Hugh's, over loss of farm? Meg's, unspecified until Darius shows up?)

resuming Booking, Oct. 21 '93:

50 more ms pp. by end of yr

400 ms pp. in '94

- try to work up to 4pp/day rate by Feb. '94

simplify:

- finances

- clutter (chores, correspce)

In the day of work beginning @ Ft. Peck, the makework-for-pay debate can run through various characters' minds, Neil's, the sheriff's, Owen's...

How do I put a sense of the land into this story?

show characters in the wrong, once in a while.

plot

The texture in our heads