

see "Techniques" category in WINTER BROTHERS big file box

winter

Winter Light: one more set of muscles I have to exercise before tackling a novel.

(written in '78?)

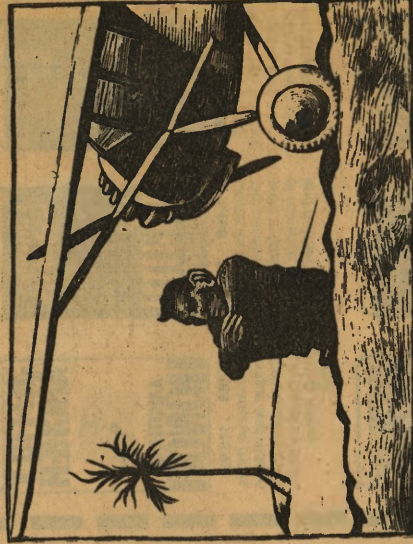
take a look at the voice of For Whom the Bell Tolls, on Carl Breidahl's suggestion,
for ex of narrative voice that is personal(?) but not first-person.

NY 7BR

Sept. 14, '86

Noted With

A Medley of Silences



BILL MCKEARN

While Frenchmen are not known for their silences, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry makes nice distinctions between various kinds. This is from his "Wartime Writings 1939-1944" (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), with an introduction by Anne Morrow Lindbergh.

One silence even differs from another. There is the tranquil silence when the tribes are at peace, when night brings coolness and one seems to be anchored with furled sails in a quiet harbor. There is the midday silence when the sun suspends all thought and movement. There is the deceptive silence when the north wind bears down, bringing insects borne like pollen from the oases of the interior and heralding the advent of a sandstorm from the east. There is the silence of conspiracy when it is known that a distant tribe is preparing to revolt. There is the silence of mystery when the Arabs are gathered together for one of their secret meetings. There is the pregnant silence when the messenger is late in returning, the shrill silence when in the night one holds one's breath in order to hear, the melancholy silence when one remembers one's beloved.

make this point of "multiple silences" in mood piece about Missouri R. country?

Construction of the dam can be conveyed in a deliberate motif, done 3 times--once each in the chs. The Missouri, Peckerstroy, and Ice and Mercury (maybe a winter descptn in this one; maybe a chapter-ending graf in Peckerstroy). Each time, simply begin with:

The dam.

Then begin w/ new graf, sketching the design, procedures, state of the work...

possible device: italicized Crawfurd, the word standing alone, as a ghost to Darius when his thoughts or conversations turn to Scotland. Probably only do this twice:

--when D. first appears at Fort Peck, talking to Meg in the doorway. Crawfurd. Why
had he...

--when he's telling Easter about the radicals' lost chances in Scotland.

(This second time, possibly make it: Crawfurd. His candy-sweet breath. i.e., Crafurd had a habit of eating toffee or some other sweet, Darius smelled it when he grabbed C. to search for the food tickets.)

--possible technique on incidental characters such as Nan Hill, Tom Harry, the Hutterite Peter Kiefer: to signal conclusion of their role in the story, simply do a last graf of summary of what happened to them afterward.

Probably do this first w/ Peter Kiefer, who has a one-shot appearance (Nan Hill and Tom Harry likely have more than that), to establish the technique.

2 Jan. '93: As of now, beginning to elaborate the plot of Bucking the Sun, I think I should avoid devices such as newspaper pieces, letters, and the most tempting of all as an omnium-gatherum of Fort Peck voices and facts, the 50th reunion where MHS oral history team taped so many people. What I might consider is a single oral-history slice, perhaps keyed to 50th anniversary of the slide. The interviewee cd be somebody nameless, just seen on the dam crew in earlier part of book, or this cd be a way, again, to show what the future had held for some character.

--This interviewee probably should have suspicions that the engineers "knew" the dam face was giving way. (He definitely should say if the slide had happened a few minutes different, he 'd've been caught in it himself; the interviewer can think to herself, they all say that.) (interviewee probably shd use the contraction, I'd've)

The major construction aspects--the diversion of the river, the dam's progress, the tunnels, and the spillway--need to be treated, and explained through just enough narrative but mostly scenes that show what's going on, separately. They can be a kind of pace for the book.

The spillway should be used as a surprise: entire separate project, miles away from the dam, when the reader should think he's grasped the dam scene.

--The spillway can play a continuing role: a side-set where occasional scenes happen--Darius learning to drive, Bruce and Owen bowling--leading to a big one, where Owen contemplates killing himself after the slide.

--Some character, probably Owen, longs to see the pattern the water will make as the spillway at last comes into use.

Cloudstreet, by Tim Winton, as an example of handling a large cast of characters
across considerable time. (family)

--also wonderful, alive language.

look at dialogue, and possibly plot, by mock-excising every other line of exchange,
to see if it reads more strongly...

If the italicized sections, such as The River: gathers..., don't seem to work, consider using numerals to designate scenes. (Pat Barker do so in Regeneration?)

possible technique: Peckersstroy could be done, at least partially, as 1st-person narration by Darius.