A Gimlet-Eyed Grunt, Soldiering Balefully Through a War’s Horrors

A century after the guns of August first boomed, World War I has lost none of its power to boggle the mind. The numbers are simply too big: 65 million men under arms, 37 million casualties, 12,000 miles of trenches on the Western Front, 145 billion shells fired. Rather than a human event, it often seems like an immeasurable abstraction, like negative infinity.

Louis Bartha, an enlisted man from southwestern France, managed to reduce the conflict to human scale with a pen and 19 notebooks that filled with observations and comments from his more than four years of service in the army, most of it spent in combat on the Western Front. With Edward M. Strauss’s translation of “Polui,” English-language readers now have access to a classic account of the war, a day-to-day chronicle of life in the trenches and a richly detailed answer to the seemingly unanswerable question: What was it like? “Polui” was first published in France in 1907 after attracting the attention of a history teacher at a lycée where one of Bartha’s grandparents was employed. The title, whose literal translation is “noisy one,” is the French equivalent of “grunt” or “dogface.”

French historians and critics immediately put the book in the top rank of wartime memoirs. They praised it for its richly detailed, unvarnished account of life in the trenches as experienced by an ordinary soldier—a barrel maker from the wine region of Minervois whose service in the trenches took him from Artois to the Argonne, a trail that included horrific stops at Verdun and the Somme.

Bartha was in his 30s when war broke out. As a trade-union activist, socialist and pacifist, he made a reluctant conscript. He entered the war already disillusioned, a state of mind reflected in the bracingly acidic tone of the journals, which challenge the official version of the war on every page.

“If we suffered so stoically, without raising useless complaints, don’t let anyone tell you that it was because of patriotism, or to defend the rights of peoples to live their own lives, or to end all wars, or other nonsense,” he writes in a characteristic entry.

“It was simply by force, because, as victims of an implacable fate we had to undergo our destiny.”

That destiny was a nightmare slog through endless miles of mud, with shadows hunching against an unending rain of steel from German guns. Bartha, who employs an unadorned, straightforward style sprinkled with slang—he refers to the Elysée Palace as the cagna, or “hang-out,” of President Raymond Poincaré—dryly notes that “combat meant mostly being a target for shells.”

The small details make these notebooks come alive. A soldier crouching in a freezing marsh for hours later discovers a fish in his pocket. To ward off the stench of rotting corpses, French soldiers weave a strip of cloth with a small sack of camphor dangling under their noses. While fighting in Flanders in the early months of the war, Bartha throws himself on an embankment and catches a glimpse of a fellow soldier taking a bullet in the back: “I’ll never forget the sight of that hole, like it was made with a drill—a little whirl of smoke from burnt cloth, the man’s violent somersault, a groan, and then the stillness of death.”

As an observer, Bartha puts one foot in front of the other. Anyone looking for a clear picture of troop movements, strategy or tactics will be disappointed. Most of his pages deal with day-to-day problems and vexations: marching from one bombed-out village to the next, trying to find a safe place to bed down for the night, repairing trenches, engaging in field exercises, dodging shells. In his long months on the front lines, the names of the villages change, the officers come and go, but the experiences remain the same.

Bartha describes lice and exploding 105-millimeter shells in the same matter-of-fact voice, although the shells do cause him to raise an eyebrow from time to time. During a heavy bombardment, a trench mate disappears under a mountain of earth. Before Bartha can dig him out, a second shell falls, displacing the dirt pile and restoring the status quo, like a film sequence run in reverse. The bewildered soldier suffers nothing worse than a crack in his clay pipe.

Bartha has a keen interest in the power struggles between top officers and the lower echelons, which are more complicated than one might think. It was not unusual to see spirited resistance to orders from on high. Enlisted men connived to thwart impossi-
**Arts, Briefly**

Compiled by Adam W. Kepler

Another Faithful Hit for Hollywood

"Heaven Is for Real" became Hollywood’s fourth overtly faith-based hit of the year over the Easter weekend, taking in an estimated $21.5 million — double the dismal ticket sales that Johnny Depp mustered for his latest big-budget effort. But God still could not beat a superhero: The No. 1 movie at North American theaters was again "Captain America: The Winter Soldier" (Disney), which sold about $26.6 million in tickets, for a three-week domestic total of $201.5 million, according to Rentrak, which compiles box-office data. The animated "Rio 2" (20th Century Fox) was second, taking in about $22.5 million. Then came "Heaven Is for Real" (Sony Pictures Entertainment), the best-performing new entry, with a total since opening on Wednesday of $28.5 million. It cost $12 million to make and was backed with a grass-roots marketing campaign that focused on churches as well as a broader audience. Religious movies have been hot at the box office this year partly because the current booms in a drought. Studios also aim to lock in sales by church groups, resulting in an opening-weekend pop that can drive positive word of mouth, a crucial element of successful movie releases. "Heaven Is for Real" (starring Greg Kinnear, above right, with Morgan Freeman) was also based on a best-selling book. The other three for this year have been "Noah," "Son of God" and "God’s Not Dead," and more religious movies are on the way, including "Ridley Ryder," "Gods and Kings," which is scheduled for release in October. On this weekend, Mr. Depp’s "Transcendence" (Warner Bros.) opened strong, with $11.2 million in ticket sales — a hit that extended a string of misfires for him. Also opening was "Wally Pfister," a first-time filmmaker who worked on Warner’s "Dark Knight" trilogy, and received overwhelmingly negative reviews and took in about $9.1 million.

**CORINNA da FONSECA-WOLLHEIM**

**MUSIC REVIEW**

**MATA Festival** From left, Alice Teyssier, Miako Klein and Eliot Gattegno performing in the premiere of Oscar Bianchi’s "Matra."

On Saturday evening the German vocal ensemble Neue Vocalsolisten joined the International Contemporary Ensemble of New York at the Kitchen in the American premiere of Oscar Bianchi’s cantata "Matra" as part of the MATA Festival of new music. Before we continue, a brief glossary:

A tuba is a contra bass saxophone. It looks like a conical anadacada folded snugly four times. It can play lower than a double bass. When it does, it sounds like a Harley-Davidson. A Paetzold recorder is a square bass recorder. It looks like a Cubist sculpture of a piano key. The contra bass version used here is being a person. Its sound is best described as spooky.

Matra, in Sanskrit, denotes a small rhythmic unit in music, or a syllable in speech. According to Mr. Bianchi, it also means "matter."

Mr. Bianchi is fond of extremes. Some of them — the quarter tones produced by the tuba — the notes played by Miako Klein on the Paetzold recorder — could cause momentary dissonance, or "Matra" uses texts from Lucretius’s "De Rerum Natura," the Gospel of Mary and the "Vigyan Bhairav Tantra," but they are condensed into fewer than a dozen spare lines that function like mantras. There were also passages of staccato, which suggested a rhythmic structure. These were mirrored by moments in which instruments were used only to amplify the breath of their players.

Under the assured direction of David Fulmer, the musicians gave a passionate performance of what was often a visibly strenuous work. The cavernous trio made up of Ms. Klein on the contra bass, Alice Teyssier on bass and Eliot Gattegno on tuba created a haunting and atmospheric opening. The six singers appeared perfectly at ease with the unusual demands made on their voices; even passages of rhythmic pacing were delivered with expressive elegance. When the instruments fell away at the end, leaving the soprano Susanne Leitz-Lorey to sing the final words "let my doubts be cleared!" unaccompanied, her luminous voice emerged from the preceding rumble as if cleansed.
Yo, David-- The "language ever green" poet we were fumbling past last night is John Clare, and here, my man, is more than you want to know about his Clay Clock poem. It was a "Susan Stewart's Poetry Month Pick", whatever that is, in April. My Leavenworth poet buddy, Derek Sheffield (former Linda Bierds student, natch), who originally passed it along to me says Clare has 858 OED entries! Let me know sometime if the poem has anything to do with the novel you're reviling, er, reviewing.

Still digesting from last night,
Ivan

"Clock A Clay"
by John Clare (1793-1864)

1
In the cowslips peeps I ly
Hidden from the buzzing fly
While green grass beneath me lies
Pearled wi' dew like fishes eyes
Here I lye a Clock a clay
Waiting for the time o'day

2
While grassy forests quake surprise
And the wild wind sob and sighs
My gold home rocks as like to fall
On its pillars green and tall
When the pattering rain drives bye
Clock a Clay keeps warm and dry

3
Day by day and night by night
All the week I hide from sight
In the cowslips peeps I lye
In rain and dew still warm and dry
Day and night and night and day
Red black spotted clock a clay

4
My home it shakes in wind and showers
Pale green pillar top't wi' flowers
Bending at the wild wind's breath
Till I touch the grass beneath
Here still I live lone clock a clay
Watching for the time of day

Susan Stewart Comments:
John Clare (1793-1864), born in the rural village of Helpston, has been called the "greatest English poet ever to come from the
labouring classes." A field worker from childhood, Clare nevertheless received a rudimentary education and became a great reader and writer of poetry and a brilliant nature writer. In this little poem, "Clock a Clay," he speaks in the voice of the insect you may know as a "ladybug" or "ladybird." The name "Clock a Clay" comes from the rural Northamptonshire belief that you can tell time by counting the number of taps on the ground it takes to make a lady bug fly away.

The poem was written at some point between 1842 and 1864 when Clare lived in the Northampton [Insane] Asylum, suffering from delusions, but continuing to write. John Clare is cited in 858 entries in the Oxford English Dictionary—not because he invented neologisms, but because he provided English poetry with a vast trove of everyday rural words, like "clock a clay," that no writer had before committed to paper.

GOLDEN NUMBERS

On Nature and Form

If we leaf through a book of verse, we notice immediately that poetry, unlike prose, favors special conformations; it likes to arrange itself in shapes on the page. These shapes in space originally represented shapes in time—shapes to be heard if we were listening to a recitation rather than looking at a book.

In its love for shapeliness and proportion, poetry is like mathematics. Many readers, however, believe that poetry and mathematics are opposed in spirit. Such readers may be repelled by the pages that follow, with their drawings that seem to be straight out of Euclid. But no mathematical background is required—there are no problems to solve. The drawings are only to marvel at. And to be seen as analogies: They are really telling us something about the nature of poetry; and about nature itself.

To decide in advance that a poem will have seventeen syllables or fourteen lines or that it will be constructed in stanzaic units of this or that size or shape may seem arbitrary and artificial. When a poem begins to germinate in the poet’s mind, could it not grow simply and naturally, the way a flower grows, instead of being forced to follow a pattern? This seems a good question—but it shows little knowledge of how flowers do grow. Nature has been working on its flowers for some millions of years; a close look at them, as at anything in the natural world, will show why Pythagoras said that all things are number, why Plato said that God always geometrizes.

If we take a close look at the head of a sunflower, we see two sets of spirals whirling in opposite directions. The florets that make them up are not of any random number. Typically, there are twenty-one going clockwise and thirty-four going counterclockwise—numbers that a mathematician would come on with a thrill of recognition. They belong to the series of "golden numbers" called the Fibonacci sequence (after a thirteenth-century
Italian mathematician), in which each number is the sum of the two preceding ones: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, and so on. Although the sequence may look like an artificial curiosity, it turns up again and again in nature—in the way rabbits breed, in the generation of bees, in the number and pattern of leaves or petals on certain plants, in the spirals of the sunflower. The sequence has been used by modern artists in placing units in their paintings and by modern musicians in planning the durations within their rhythms.

A further strangeness about the series is that the ratio between consecutive numbers, after the first few, remains about the same, coming closer and closer to a stabilization in which the smaller number is to the larger as .618 is to 1. This .618 ratio—familiar to the ancient Greeks and to most designers, artists, and architects ever since—is that of the Golden Section, a way of proportioning dimensions so that the parts (many believe) have the most aesthetically pleasing relationship to each other and to the whole.
In this division, the lesser part is to the greater as the greater is to the whole: $CB : AC :: AC : AB$. This sectioning or “Section” is what Pound had in mind when in his Canto XC he says of architects he admired: “Builders kept the proportion.”

It is also a ratio we have perceived, without being aware of it, in many things in nature. The human body, besides having bilateral symmetry, seems to have proportioned itself in accordance with the Golden Section. The length from the top of the head to the navel and the length from the navel to the toes have the ratio of about .618 to 1. These two divisions are subdivided. The length from navel to knee is to the length from knee to sole as 1 is to .618. In reverse order, navel to throat and throat to top of head are related as 1 is to .618. The architect Le Corbusier, who has planned buildings on the basis of the Golden Section, has even devised a scale for designers based on the proportions of the human body.

If bodily proportions might have given the Greeks a feeling for the Golden Section, geometry would have suggested it with more precision. The mysterious appeal of the ancient pentagram, or “endless knot,” one of the most famous of all magic signs, owes much to its play of proportion. This star-shaped figure fairly glitters with its two hundred .618’s. $B$ cuts both $AC$ and $AD$ so as to give Golden Sections. $BE$ is .618 of $AB$, and so on. The followers of Pythagoras used the pentagram as their secret sign. It stood not only for health and love but for the human body itself, which was thought to be organized in fives: five senses, four limbs and a head, five fingers (their three bones having the golden proportion).

Since the pentagram also stood for the letters in the name “Jesus,” it was thought to be an object of fear to hellish spirits. When Mephistopheles finds the pentagram’s Drudenfuss, or “wizard’s foot,” drawn on Faust’s threshold,
it takes some trickery to get by it. Its shape—as with good poems—is its power. In the pentagram—as in good poems—mathematics and magic come together. We are affected by precise relationships we are not conscious of.

If we take a line divided according to the Golden Section, bend the shorter part upward, and then complete the rectangle, we have the golden rectangle with its "divine proportion," which, with the Section itself, is supposed to have had an important influence on ancient art and architecture, determining, it may be, the structure of the pyramids and of the Parthenon, which fits neatly into it. Certainly it made itself felt in the Renaissance (Da Vinci made use of it) and ever since, right down to the architecture of Le Corbusier and the art of Seurat and Mondrian. In 1912 one group of artists even exhibited in Paris as the "Golden Section" painters. It was with them that Marcel Duchamp first showed his Nude Descending a Staircase. We can still find this proportion in modern buildings and in many common objects—envelopes, playing cards, magazines. Numerous psychological tests have shown that we prefer these dimensions in a rectangle, perhaps because the proportions correspond with our oval field of vision.

The golden rectangle has been called "the rectangle of the whirling squares." If we divide it by the Golden Section so that one part is a square, the smaller area will itself be a second golden rectangle within the first (A). If we divide the smaller rectangle in the same way, the same thing will happen—another square, another golden rectangle (B). We can continue in this way, making smaller and smaller squares as we whirl around clockwise. If we then connect, with an evenly curving line, corresponding points of all the squares (C), we will have one of the most beautiful curves in mathematics and one of the most beautiful lines in nature—the logarithmic spiral, whose allure moved one admirer to ask that it be engraved on his tombstone.
This graceful curve, which seems to have been artificially constructed at a drawing board, probably appears most spectacularly in the nautilus seashell, a favorite of collectors. As the creature in the seashell grows, it moves onward, in a spiral, into larger and larger chambers, all of them having the same proportions. Oliver Wendell Holmes found a moral here, which he expressed, by means of a stanza form that itself expands, in "The Chambered Nautilus":

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
    As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
    Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast
    Till thou at last art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.

We find this same curve in the sunflower head and the daisy, in the pinecone and the pineapple, all of which have their opposing spirals in Fibonacci numbers. We find it where the time element of living growth has left its shape on matter—in the curling horns of mountain goats, in the tusks of elephants, in the claws of a cat, the beak of a parrot. It appears in transitory fashion in the coil of an elephant's trunk or a monkey's tail, in a lock of hair falling naturally.

Part of the pleasure we feel in contemplating this spiral may come from our awareness of its continuous proportion, which, in a world of change, gives us the reassurance of what remains similar to itself. Certain well-managed patterns in poetry may have an analogous effect.

If there is such elaborate patterning everywhere in nature, it would seem not unnatural for poets to wish to incorporate—far more modestly and on a far tinier scale—some such symmetries in their own work. They cannot of course hope to work with the geometrical precision of nature. Most trust their own sense of proportion, developed from study, contemplation, and exercise. However, Dante does give a mathematical framework to his Divine Comedy. Its three parts, written in units of three lines, have thirty-three cantos, with a thirty-fourth canto in the first part that brings all to the perfect one hundred.

Contrived as this patterning may seem to be, we can hardly call it artificial. Nature—in the seashell, in the daisy, in a lock of hair—far outdoes our artists in the use of mathematical symmetry. All that matters, in any art, is that the calculation and effort should not show, that we see the ease and elegance of the achievement but not the labor that went into it. It is important to realize that imposing a form is not in any way unnatural—Parthenon and nautilus owe their beauty to the same kind of mathematical harmony.
William Blake once wrote: "Without Minute Neatness of Execution the Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas." Yeats saw no contradiction between calculated precision and human passion. He once praised Lady Gregory’s house as a place in which “passion and precision have been one.” He insisted to a friend that “the very essence of genius, of whatever kind, is precision.” In “The Statues” he is concerned with the relationship between passion, beauty, and mathematical precision.

The Statues

Pythagoras planned it. Why did the people stare?
His numbers, though they moved or seemed to move
In marble or in bronze, lacked character.
But boys and girls, pale from the imagined love
Of solitary beds, knew what they were,
That passion could bring character enough,
And pressed at midnight in some public place
Live lips upon a plummet-measured face.

No! Greater than Pythagoras, for the men
That with a mallet or a chisel modelled these
Calculations that look but casual flesh, put down
All Asiatic vague immensities,
And not the banks of oars that swam upon
The many-headed foam at Salamis.

15 Europe put off that foam when Phidias
Gave women dreams and dreams their looking-glass.

One image crossed the many-headed, sat
Under the tropic shade, grew round and slow,
No Hamlet thin from eating flies, a fat

20 Dreamer of the Middle Ages. Empty eyeballs knew
That knowledge increases unreality, that
Mirror on mirror mirrored is all the show.
When gong and conch declare the hour to bless
Grimalkin crawls to Buddha's emptiness.

25 When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide

30 And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS (1865–1939)

In the first stanza, Pythagoras is given credit for the emphasis on proportion in Greek sculpture, which might seem cold to a cold observer. But boys and girls saw their dreams of love embodied in these perfect shapes.

In the second stanza, the spirit of the sculptors, even more than the courage of Greek sailors, is seen as defending the precision of Athenian ideals against the abstractions of Eastern thought. (In 480 B.C. at Salamis, the Greeks defeated the much larger Persian fleet. Phidias was the probable designer of the statuary on the Parthenon.)

In the third stanza, an Eastern Buddha figure, fat and dreamy, out of contact with the physical world and the passionate precision of mathematics, is seen taking over as the Greek spirit declines. (“Gong and conch” suggest an Oriental call to prayer; “Grimalkin” is an old cat or an old woman.)

In the fourth stanza, the Easter Rising of 1916 in Dublin is recalled, when, under the command of Patrick Pearse, Irish nationalist forces seized the Post Office. Cuchulain (Coo-hóo-lin) was a legendary Irish hero whose statue was set up in the Post Office when it was rebuilt after the shelling. Here, Cuchulain (and Pearse) represents “intellect . . . calculation, number, measurement,” like that of ancient Athens at its best. These qualities, Yeats believed, were desirable in the formlessness of the modern world.

Yeats would have agreed with one of the conclusions of this section: There is nothing unnatural in our desire to find form and pattern in our experience. We can hardly keep from doing so. When we look at the starry skies, all we really see are swarms of bright specks. But we have never been content to see that way. We see hunters and great bears and rocking chairs
Little fly,  
Thy summer's play  
My thoughtless hand  
Has brushed away.  

Am not I  
A fly like thee. . . .

He probably thought that the long lines of his "Holy Thursday" were appropriate for its processional content. His own drawing shows a long line of children across the page, above and below the verses:

"Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,  
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green. . . .

John Donne seems particularly fond of a stanza form that dramatizes a crescendo, an excitement mounting to a climax. Lines (as heard, but not necessarily as printed) are shorter toward the beginning of a stanza, longer toward the end, though in no regular progression. Rhymes also tend to amass, to intensify, toward the close. This is the pattern in which he thinks and feels.

The Anniversary

All kings and all their favorites,  
All glory of honors, beauties, wits,  
The sun itself, which makes times as they pass,  
Is elder by a year now than it was  
When thou and I first one another saw:  
All other things to their destruction draw,  
Only our love hath no decay;  
This, no tomorrow hath nor yesterday;  
Running, it never runs from us away,  
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my corps;  
If one might, death were no divorce.  
Alas, as well as other princes, we  
(Who prince enough in one another be)  
Must leave at last in death these eyes and ears,  
Oft fed with true oaths and with sweet salt tears;  
But souls where nothing dwells but love  
(All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove  
This, or a love increased there above,  
When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.

\[11^\text{th} \text{corse: corpse} \quad 18^\text{th} \text{inmates: mere tenants} \]
And then we shall be thoroughly blest,
But we no more than all the rest;
Here upon earth we're kings, and none but we
Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be.
Who is so safe as we? where none can do
Treason to us, except one of us two.
True and false fears let us refrain;
Let us love nobly, and live, and add again
Years and years unto years, till we attain
30 To write threescore: this is the second of our reign. [1633]

JOHN DONNE (1572–1631)

There is the same kind of gathering intensity, dramatized by the form, in
“A Valediction: Of Weeping” (see Anthology, p. 378), which begins with the
image of a woman’s face, at parting, reflected in the falling tears of her lover.
In these poems Donne’s stanza form moves from less to more, with a sense
of mounting excitement. The line arrangement Christina Rossetti chooses for
her “An Easter Carol” is appropriate for the exuberance she feels. It begins:

Spring bursts today,
For Christ has risen and all the world’s at play.

Flash forth, thou Sun.
The rain is over and gone, its work is done . . .

We get just an opposite effect—from more to less—in the sense of depriva-
tion with which a poem ascribed to Francis Bacon opens:

The world’s a bubble, and the life of man
Less than a span;
In his conception wretched, from the womb
So to the tomb . . .

In Robert Herrick’s happier poem, “The Thanksgiving,” the lineation again
follows a psychological motive—that of curtailment, littleness, humility. It
begins:

Lord, Thou hast given me a cell
Wherein to dwell;
And little house, whose humble roof
Is weather-proof;
Under the spars of which I lie
Both soft and dry;
Where Thou my chamber for to ward
Hast set a guard
Of harmless thoughts, to watch and keep
Me, while I sleep . . .
The adjectives—"little," "humble"—go with the curtailed form, in which Herrick takes a four-beat line and then cuts it in half. Something like the sadness of deprivation is to be felt in the short last line of the stanza that Keats uses in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (see Anthology, p. 403). In David Wagoner's poem "The Other Side of the Mountain," a short line has a different effect, that of heels digging in to resist the momentum of the long line:

To walk downhill you must lean partially backwards,
Heels digging in,
While your body gets more help than it can use
In following directions. . . .

Sometimes a poet will deliberately echo a familiar form to exploit its ironic possibilities. In 1650 Andrew Marvell wrote his stately "An Horation Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland" in a stanza of two tetrameters followed by two trimeters, its dignity apparent in such stanzas as those on the ceremonial execution of King Charles:

He nothing common did or mean
Upon that memorable scene:
But with his keener eye
The axe's edge did try:
Nor called the gods with vulgar spite
To vindicate his helpless right,
But bowed his comely head
Down as upon a bed . . .

Readers who recall Marvell's well-known poem will feel the ghost of its form haunting Robert B. Shaw's "Shut In" (Anthology, p. 538).

The shape of verse forms may be expressive, as the spiral of the nautilus expresses the life force that shaped it, or as the snowflake expresses the molecular geometry within. At other times the shape seems arbitrary or accidental—though if a verse form continues to live, it must somehow fit the way we feel and think. If the logic of a form eludes us, we might think of it as we think of games. Why three strikes in baseball? Why four balls? Why the rigidly fixed forms of Olympic events, the 440s and 880s? Without rules, games are impossible. We know what rage a hard-core poker player feels when a slap-happy beginner, given dealer's choice, makes up a fancy variant of his or her own: free-form poker. Too many wild cards, and the game is meaningless.

The next section will consider some of the forms available to writers. Few poets have written in all of them; some have confined themselves to one or two; most have tried their hand at several. Certain poets, like Thomas Hardy, prefer to make up their own shapes. As Kipling said:

There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And—every—single—one—of—them—is—right!
The Other Delights In a Trumpeter's Life

By JAMES C. MCKINLEY Jr.

Few people can claim to be a Renaissance man in this complex age, but Herb Alpert, the jazz-pop trumpeter and co-founder of A&M Records, might be one of them.

At 77 Mr. Alpert is working on his 34th studio album, a collection called "Steppin' Out" (Almo Sounds) to come out this year. And on Tuesday he and his wife, the singer Lani Hall, are returning for the second year to the Cafe Carlyle for a two-week stand, offering some songs from the new album, a few jazz standards and, of course, hits like "A Taste of Honey" and "The Lonely Bull," which he recorded with his group the Tijuana Brass.

Aside from being one of the most successful pop instrumentalists and label executives of the last 50 years Mr. Alpert also produces paintings

Continued on Page 4
One of Amar's sons is killed. The other, the bookworm Prince Audha (Tahr Rahim of "A Prophet"), becomes a tribal leader, supported by two women: his wife, Princess Leyla (Freida Pinto), who dons her burqa for canoodling in a curtained limousine; and a Bedouin's freed slave, Aicha (the charismatic Ethiopian model Liya Kebede). Both women are refreshing and independent presences amid the stiflingly male-dominated milieu.

The film's original title was "Black Gold," which suggested the true villain, obscured amid the battlefield tumult: fossil fuels, the region's perennial apple of discord. ANDY WEBSTER

"Day of the Falcon" is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian) for violence.
Love, Clearedeyed and Resolve

"Love, Clearedeyed and Resolve" is a love song performed by a mid-20th-century female vocalist, known for her emotional depth and musical range. The song's lyrics explore themes of passion, clarity, and emotional resolution, with the vocalist delivering a powerful and authentic performance. The arrangement features a piano and strings, adding to the song's melancholic and reflective mood. The vocalist's voice is clear and strong, capturing the essence of the song's message. The recording was produced by a renowned music studio and released on a major record label, cementing its place in the repertoire of classic love songs.
D&O coverage makes sense for nonprofit organizations

By Brad Robinson
Member Services Director
Montana Nonprofit Association

Nonprofits don’t need Directors and Officers Insurance — right? Unfortunately, this is not the case. Protecting your organization from management and employment practices liability through Directors and Officers insurance is important for today’s nonprofits.

Most nonprofit organizations continue to labor under the impression that state and federal laws protect them from legal actions. Montana’s Immunity Law (MCA 27-1-752) does not protect your organization from legal action nor from incurring expenses related to a legal defense. The truth is, so-called immunity laws offer only limited protection, and those laws have not been “court-tested” in Montana, so their efficacy is unknown.

Similarly, the Federal Volunteer Protection Act (FVPA) of 1997 does not preclude claims against a volunteer for allegations of violation of federal civil rights laws (the most common source of claims), “gross negligence,” or automobile related liability.

The bottom line is your organization can be sued for a “ wrongful act” that causes injury by anyone with any interest in the organization’s activities — employers, members, constituents, donors, board members, vendors, governmental authorities and others. Without nonprofit D&O coverage, you must pay for your own defense, even if you end up found not at fault.

By not protecting your organization with D&O insurance, you may be exposing your organization to unnecessary risk and unbudgeted expense.

Nonprofit managers who are interested in assessing their organizations’ risk visit the Nonprofit Risk Management Center’s website (www.nonprofitrisk.org). This site can help managers understand how their organization’s exposures and what strategies are available to mitigate that risk.

The Nonprofit Risk Management Center offers online trainings, tutorials, and publications — even risk management consulting — to help nonprofits navigate in today’s litigious world. The Montana Nonprofit Association (MNA) believes that all nonprofits should be covered by D&O insurance. To that end, MNA offers an enhanced Directors and Officers’ insurance program to its members.

MNA’s program provides $1 million dollars for D&O liability and a further $1 million dollars for Employment Practices Liability. Defense costs are paid subject to the policy limits, and in the event that the organization is found to be blameless, the deductibles.

The policy is produced by Monitor Liability Managers and sold statewide by Payne Financial Group. MNA provides some of the broadest coverage available on the market.

To learn more about how the laws do not adequately protect your nonprofit organization in the event of a legal challenge, please visit the MNA website at www.mtnonprofit.org or select Directors and Officers Insurance from the Products and Services Menu. The Montana Nonprofit Association is a membership organization that promotes a stronger nonprofit sector, a supportive public climate and the ability of nonprofits to accomplish their missions. Call 406-449-3717 or visit www.mtnonprofit.org for more information.

By Andy Goodman

The question on everyone’s lips during every storytelling workshop I lead, and it drives me crazy. “Can my organization be the protagonist of my story?” I’m a non-profit wrangling nonprofit who ask pointedly. “No!” I want to scream. “No! No! A thousand times no!” I honor the truth, however, and I explain just as politely that people relate to people, so stories about your work — any line of work, really — must provide human protagonists to draw the audience in and lead them through the narrative. And that’s not just a recommendation, I hasten to add. When it comes to storytelling that an audience will remember and even repeat to others (the ultimate payoff for a well-told tale), consider this a law.

In fact, through the process of leading dozens of storytelling workshops for literally hundreds of nonprofits, I’ve been able to identify ten such experiences. With very few exceptions, the stories that have risen to the top in these workshops tended to follow every one of these laws to the letter.

1. Stories are about people.

Even if your organization (a) is devoted to saving flora and/or fauna, (b) toils in the dense thicket of policy change, or (c) helps other organizations work more effectively, human beings are still driving the action. So your protagonist has to be a person. And since this person also serves as the audience’s guide through the story, it’s essential to provide some physical description when he or she is introduced. This helps your audience form a mental picture — after all, it’s hard to follow what you can’t see.

And don’t forget to include your characters’ names. Audiences will relate more readily to “Marcus” than “the at-risk youth,” even if you have to use a pseudonym to protect your subject’s identity.

2. The people in your story have to want something.

A story doesn’t truly begin until the audience knows precisely what the protagonist’s goal is and has a reason to care whether or not it is attained. So within the first paragraph or two, make sure that it is clear what you want your readers to want, to do, or to get.

And given that stories are driven by some kind of desire, beware the passive voice! When you write, “a decision was reached,” the people in your story magically disappear and suddenly the action is forced by an unseen force. (For more on problems with using the passive voice, see Gerald Alpert.)

3. Stories need to be fixed in time and space.

Audiences don’t require every detail of long-term planning; they can fill in the gaps, but the moment you begin telling your tale, they will want to know: Did this happen last week or 10 years ago? Are we in a small town in Butte, or a Wal-Mart in Iowa, or somewhere else? If you help them get their bearings quickly, they will stop wondering about the when and where of your story and more readily follow you into the deeper meaning within.

4. Let your characters speak for themselves.

When characters speak to each other in a story, it lends immediacy and urgency to the exchange. Audience members will feel as if they are the proverbial fly-on-the-wall within the scene, hearing in real time what each person has to say. Even better, however, let characters speak in their idiosyncratic voices, lending authenticity to the dialogue. “The name is Bond, James Bond,” is way better than, “The agent introduced himself, characteristically repeating his surname twice.”

5. Audiences bore easily.

Human beings are hard-wired to love stories, but in this, the Age of Too Much Information, people don’t have time to wait for your story to get interesting. Within the first paragraph or two, you have to make them wonder, “What happens next?” or “How is this going to turn out?” As the people in your story pursue their goal, they must run into obstacles, surprises, or something that makes the audience sit up and take notice. Otherwise they’ll stand up and walk away.

6. Stories speak the audience’s language.

According to national literacy studies, the average American reads at a sixth-grade level. So ads, posters and publications are intended for mass consumption, plain speaking is the order of the day. Good storytellers also have a keen ear for the colloquialisms and local slang that quickly establishes common ground between the teller and listener.

7. Stories stir up emotions.

Human beings (which should, hopefully, comprise the majority of your audience) are not inclined to think about things they do not care about. We all have too much on our plate as it is. So even when you have mountains of hard evidence at your side, you have to make your audience feel something before they will even glance at your numbers. Stories stir the emotions to make your information stick. For melodramatic effect, but to break through the white noise of information that inundates us every day and to deliver the message this is worth your attention.

8. Stories don’t tell: they show.

Intelligently, your audience will understand a sensation when they see or hear it. When the family that the family at home, she was met with hostility and guardedness.” But when you write, “When they all sat down for dinner in the living room, the family members wouldn’t look her in the eye,” your audience will see a picture, feel the hostility and become more involved with the story.

9. Stories have at least one “moment of truth.”

As their name suggests, these stories show us something about how we should treat ourselves, how we should treat other people, or how we should treat the world around us. Since the first forms of humankind gathering around the first fires, we have looked to stories to be containers of truth, and your audience will instinctively look within your story for this kind of insight.

10. Stories have clear meaning.

When the final line is spoken, your audience should know exactly why they took this journey with you. In the end, this may be the most important rule of all. If your audience cannot answer the question, “What was that story all about?” it won’t matter how diligently you followed rules one through nine.

After founding and running the American Comedy Network, an international radio syndication company, Andy Goodman launched Good Guy Group, a successful public relations and promotion writer. He spent three seasons writing and co-producing the ABC-TV show “Dino vs. Drugco” (plus co-writing the original book of “The Nanny”). Now, he heads A Goodman, a communications consulting firm that helps public interest groups, foundations and progressive businesses reach more people. For more information, call 323-944-3856 or visit www.agoodmanonline.com.
ARTIST'S TOOLBOX

By Leslie Van Stavern Millar

This summer, I traveled by train from Whitefish to Salem, MA, to attend the First National Encaustic Painting Conference, June 8-10. My journey was funded in part by a Professional Development Grant from the Montana Arts Council.

Nearly 150 artists, teachers, critics and vendors from all over the U.S. and Canada participated in this exciting event, hosted by Montserrat College of Art.

Artist Joanne Mattera, noted author of the Art of Encasutic Painting: Contemporary Expression in the Ancient Medium of Pigmented Wax, was the founding organizer of the conference and its keynote speaker.

The conference opened on Friday night in the historic First Parish Church in downtown Salem, with a compelling slide lecture by Joanne. She gave an overview of the history of encaustic technique, concluding with images of work by contemporary artists working in wax.

The following day, Joanne hosted "Encasutic: The State of the Art," a lively panel discussion. The panelists included two museum and gallery directors who exhibit encaustics, critic Barbara O'Briant, artist Timothy McDowell and Richard Framess, the founder of R&F Paints. Issues discussed included whether encaustic is a fine art or a craft medium, the necessity of emphasizing ideas and imagery first and the medium second, technical concerns, and how to approach a gallery or critic in a professional manner.

The next day and half consisted of a series of demonstrations and lectures on such topics as Encaustic Monotypes, Encaustic Sculpture, Painted Cartons and Textural Explorations. The presenters were accomplished artists working in the medium in a variety of ways. These one-hour sessions were stimulating and instructive.

The 301 Gallery in downtown Salem hosted an exhibition of encaustic paintings. This show provided a great opportunity to see art firsthand by many of the artists' presenting at the conference and to ask them about their work.

Surface Design Association now has Montana representative

Stevensville artist Carol O'Bagy recently attended the Surface Design Association conference, held in Kansas City, MO, every two years.

The Surface Design Association is a non-profit educational organization with a primary goal of increasing awareness, understanding and appreciation of textiles in the art and design communities, as well as the general public. It publishes the Surface Design Journal, which O'Bagy considers "one of the best, if not the best, publication available having to do with textile and fiber arts" and produces a helpful newsletter.

According to O'Bagy, surface design could include any creative exploration of processes such as dyeing, painting, printing, stitching, embellishing, quilting, weaving, knitting, felting and papermaking. It could also include other materials beyond textiles that make use of textile techniques. "I personally believe that even a painter is a 'surface designer' of some sort, so the organization is not only for the tried and true textile artists," she says.

O'Bagy has been a member of this organization for several years, but this was her first time attending the conference. "It was extremely well organized for the almost 500 participants and the facilities at the Kansas City Art Institute were easy to get to," she says. "I'd always heard fabulous things about the conference and I must say, it was the best conference I've ever been to. It includes both pre- and post-conference workshops, lectures and demonstrations, a fashion show for the wearable arts and, of course, the member show." O'Bagy had a textile piece included in the member show, which will tour the U.S. throughout 2006.

She also returned from the conference as Montana's new state representative for the Surface Design Association. To learn more about the organization, call O'Bagy at 906-777-5288 or email carolbot@hotmail.com; or visit the website, www.surface.org.

China Paint and Overglaze

Invented in ninth century China, coveted in 17th century Europe, treasured in 19th century America, and neglected by art schools for over 100 years, China painting is poised for a revival with new materials, new forms and new imagery.

For the ceramic artist interested in exploring this robust medium to the fullest, China painting expert Paul Lewing's China Paint and Overglaze is considered an essential text.

This groundbreaking book is the first to showcase the work of traditional china painters and contemporary potters and clay sculptors together. Lewing discusses the fascinating 1,000-year history of overglaze painting, while addressing a host of technical issues, including water-based painting mediums, safety and durability issues, and unconventional and traditional china-painting techniques.

Lewing, who started painting in oils at the age of eight, earned his bachelor's and master's of fine arts degrees from The University of Montana and studied with Rudy Autio, one of America's best-known clay artists and muralists. He moved to Seattle, where he's been a professional clay artist since 1972.

His book was published in 2007 by the American Ceramic Society in Westerville, OH, and sells for $59.95 hardcover. For details visit www.paullewingle.com.
Passing Strange
Bliss Broyard explores her father’s complicated relationship to questions of race.

BY JOYCE JOHNSON

In 1855, Henry Broyard, a young white New Orleans carpenter, decided to pass as black in order to be legally entitled to marry Marie Pauline Bonée, the well-educated daughter of colored refugees from Haiti, who was about to have his child; their marriage license describes them both as “free people of color.” A century and a half later, their great-great-granddaughter, Bliss Broyard, who had been raised as white, abruptly found herself confronting the implications of her newly discovered black identity.

The daughter of the writer and New York Times book critic Anatole Broyard, she had grown up with a feeling “that there was something about my family, or even many things, that I didn’t know.” What was lacking was any real sense of the history of the father she adored or any contact with his relatives, apart from one dimly remembered day in the past when her paternal grandmother had once visited them in their 18th-century house in the white enclave of Southport, Conn. Even in the last weeks of his life, the secret Anatole Broyard had kept from Bliss and her brother, Todd, was one he could not bear to reveal himself; it was their mother who finally told them, “Your father’s part black,” not long before Broyard died of prostate cancer.

Their reaction would have stunned their father. “That’s all?” Todd said. For 24-year-old Bliss, the news was thrilling, “as though I’d been reading a fascinating history book and then discovered my own name in the index. I felt like I mattered in a way that I hadn’t before.”

The year was 1996. Profound changes in attitudes about race in America had occurred since 1947, when Anatole Broyard, who during the war had been the white officer in charge of a regiment of black stevedores, left his parents and sisters behind him in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, having made up his mind to continue to pass as white in the bohemian milieu of Greenwich Village. Because of his charm, carefully honed conversational brilliance and success in seducing one impressionable young woman after another, the circles of hipster intellectuals he moved in would have accepted him whatever he called himself — and did whenever he saw fit.

Joyce Johnson is the author of the memoirs “Minor Characters” and “Missing Men.”

Anatole Broyard, 1971.

Bliss Broyard grew up feeling ‘there was something about my family, or even many things, that I didn’t know.’

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Show and Tell
William Trevor’s short stories do both, in their quest for meaning and catharsis.

BY WILLIAM BOYD

I n 1923, the now-forgotten English novelist William Gerhardtie wrote a short study of Chekhov. Gerhardtie had been brought up in St. Petersburg and had read Chekhov in Russian, and his little book (long out of print) is as good an introduction to Chekhov’s work as Vladimir Nabokov’s little book is to Gogol’s. Both writers sensed what made their subjects unique and managed to convey their enthusiasm, their privileged understanding, with vivacious brevity. Gerhardtie arrived at the peak of his literary renown in the 1920s. His early novels were a dramatic and happily acknowledged influence on his young contemporaries: Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene and Anthony Powell. It was Gerhardtie, known as the “English Chekhov,” who introduced the influence of the great Russian into 20th-century British literature, where it still potently lingers. The Chekhovian worldview and, most particularly, the Chekhovian sense of humor have been slyly and hugely assimilated. We British writers are all — or almost all, one way or another — Chekhovian now.

This is by way of a preamble to William Trevor’s magisterial new collection of short stories, “Cheating at Canasta.” The familiar ingredients are here: ordinary or downtrodden lives, many of them Irish, under a sudden transforming crisis, leading to death, betrayal, loss, numb acceptance or stoical suffering. Trevor is frequently cited as a type of Irish Chekhov: the dark, worldly, bleak nature of his stories is believed to be akin to the dark, worldly, bleak nature of Chekhov’s short fiction. But this is a caricature both of Trevor and of Chekhov.

Gerhardtie, trying to analyze what made Chekhov’s stories special, invented a term to describe the short fiction that had been written before the Chekhovian revolution. He called them “event-plot” stories — stories that had a beginning, middle and end and were neatly tied up at their conclusion. Chekhov turned all this upside down, abandoning the tidy plot and making the narratives of his stories like our lives: random, inconclusive, absurdly cruel, meaningless. The essence of the Chekhovian story, and of the Chekhovian worldview, is that, as he himself once wrote to a friend: “It is time writers, especially those who are artists, recognized that there is nothing out anywhere in this world.” Chekhov refuses.

William Boyd’s most recent book is “Bamboo, a collection of essays and criticism.

There is no ‘I’ in William Trevor’s stories — no intimacy, no direct confession, no unreliable narrator.

To judge, refuses to explain, refuses to celebrate, refuses to “make out” anything — he simply depicts life as he sees it in all its banality and tragicomedv. The world of William Trevor’s stories would seem initially to replicate a similar disinterested agenda. In the first story in this collection, “The Dressmaker’s Child,” a bored mechanic accidentally hits a little girl on a country road and just keeps on driving; in “Old Flame,” a 74-year-old woman passively charts the course of her husband’s long-term adultery; in “Folie à Deux,” a childhood act of fatal cruelty to a dumb animal destroys an adult life — and so on. But Trevor’s stories, however dark they may seem, however forlornly uncompromising, are actually significantly shaped. Trevor wants us to see the point of his narratives: he wants us to experience a small but genuine catharsis as we reach the last lines, to understand what the story is trying to say — to make something out. The intention is positively anti-Chekhovian.

A few years ago, in an essay on the short story, I tried to establish a notional taxonomy of the genre, arguing that there were essentially seven types of short story. Gerhardtie’s idea of the event-plot story was the first, followed by the Chekhovian, the modernist, the cryptic/ludic, the mini-novel, the poetic/mythic and the biographical. Of the 12 stories in Trevor’s latest collection, most are told omnisciently: in other words, we have access to the thoughts of at least two of the principal characters and change point of view at the author’s whim. This is a device we associate more with the 19th-century novel than with the modern, usually overwhelmingly subjective, short story. Moreover, not one of Trevor’s stories is written in the first person singular. There is no “I” — no intimacy, no direct confession, no unreliable narrator.

Trevor is quite at ease with lengthy passages of time. In his stories, months and years can pass in a couple of lines — “The Children” spans two years; “Old Flame” recounts a relationship that lasts decades. Again this is somewhat rare. The timeline of the modern short story is usually short, conforming to V.S. Pritchett’s definition: “something glimpsed from the corner of the eye, in passing,” seizing a fragment of life, a part standing in for the whole. But not in Trevor’s world, where time flies effortlessly by. It’s a tribute to his generous imagination and powers of invention that the density of these dozen stories — their potential scope, their scale, their gravitas — is all there in one collection. Another writer might have saved a few of them for a rainy day.

T revor’s method and aim are very precise. He outlines the time and place succinctly, with characters often revealed by what they’re wearing. (“Their clothes were not new but retained a stylishness: her shades of dark maroon, her bright silk scarf, his greenish tweeds, his careful tie.”) Something happens (often an act of violence: five out of the first six stories involve crimes ranging from manslaughter and murder to potential pedophilia) and the consequences are often sad and damaging. There aren’t many laughs in Trevor’s world. But as the stories draw to a conclusion, the reader is always aware of the authorial hand on the helm.

T revor doesn’t want us to leave his stories without deriving their import. “Time would gather up the ends,” one story concludes, “and see to it that his daughter’s honoring of a memory was love that mattered also, even mattered more.” In another, Trevor writes, almost apostrophizing like Dickens: “Silent, she had watched an act committed to impress her, to deserve her love, as other acts had been. And watching, there was pleasure. If only for a moment, but still there had been.” Trevor both shows and tells, in case we miss the point — something Chekhov never did.

T revor is not the Irish Chekhov. He is, I think, sui generis, and in his 12 collections (and 13 novels, and two novellas: an exhibition of near-Updikean energy), he has created a version of the short story that almost ignores the form’s hundred or so years of intricate evolution. These stories stay in the mind long after they’re finished because they’re so solid, so deliberately shaped and directed so surely toward their solemn, harsh conclusions. Perhaps there is an eighth type of short story after all: the Trevorian.
History by the Ounce

by Barbara W. Tuchman

The author of "The Guns of August" gives some clues on the writing of history—an art combining the fascination of a treasure hunt with the hazards of a minefield.

At a party given for its reopening last year, the Museum of Modern Art in New York served champagne to five thousand guests. An alert reporter for the Times, Charlotte Curtis, noted that there were eighty cases which, she informed her readers, amounted to 960 bottles or 7,680 three-ounce drinks. Somehow through this detail the Museum's party at once becomes alive; a fashionable New York occasion. One sees the crush, the women eyeing each other's clothes, the exchange of greetings, and feels the gratifying sense of elegance and importance imparted by champagne—even if, at one and a half drinks per person, it was not on an exactly riotous scale. All this is conveyed by Miss Curtis' detail. It is, I think, the way history as well as journalism should be written. It is what Pooh-Bah, in The Mikado, meant when, telling how the victim's head stood on its neck and bowed three times to him at the execution of Nanki-poo, he added that this was "corroborative detail intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." Not that Miss Curtis' narrative was either bald or unconvincing; on the contrary, it was precise, factual, and a model in every way. But what made it excel, made it vivid and memorable, was her use of corroborative detail.

Pooh-Bah's statement of the case establishes him in my estimate as a major historian or, at least, as the formulator of a major principle of historiography. True, he invented his corroborative detail, which is cheating if you are a historian and fiction if you are not; nevertheless what counts is his recognition of its importance. He knew that it supplies verisimilitude, that without it a narrative is bald and unconvincing. Neither he nor I, of course, discovered the principle; historians have for long made use of it beginning with Thucydides, who insisted on details of toponography, "the appearance of cities and localities, the description of rivers and harbors, the peculiar features of seas and countries and their relative distances." I know exactly what he means by that reference to relative distances; it was the need to acquire a feel of them that led me to drive through Belgium and northern France before attempting to write about battles that took place there.

Corroborative detail is the great corrective. Without it historical narrative and interpretation, both, may slip easily into the invalid. It is a disciplinarian. It forces the historian who uses and respects it to cleave to the truth, or as much as he can find out of the truth. It keeps him from soaring off the ground into theories of his own invention. On those Toynebee heights the air is stimulating and the view is vast but people and houses down below are too small to be seen. However persuaded the historian may be of the validity of the theories he conceives, if they are not supported and illustrated by corroborative detail they are of no more value as history than Pooh-Bah's report of the imagined execution.

It is wiser, I believe, to arrive at theory by way of the evidence rather than the other way around, like Hegel and all the later Hegels; it saves one from being waylaid by that masked highwayman, the categorical imperative. It is more rewarding, in any case, to assemble the facts first and, in the process of arranging them in narrative form, to discover a theory or a historical generalization emerging of its own accord. This to me is the excitement, the built-in treasure hunt, of writing history. In the book I am working on now, which deals with the twenty-year period before 1914 (and the reader must
forgive me if all my examples are drawn from my own work but that, after all, is the thing one knows best). I have been writing about a moment during the Dreyfus Affair in France when on the day of the reopening of Parliament, everyone expected the Army to attempt a coup d'état. English observers predicted it, troops were brought into the capital, the Royalist pretender was summoned to the frontier, mobs hooted and rioted in the streets, but when the day had passed, nothing had happened; the Republic still stood. By this time I had assembled so much corroborative detail pointing to a coup d'état that I had to explain why it had not occurred. Suddenly I had to stop and think. After a while I found myself writing, “The Right lacked that necessary chemical of a coup—a leader. It had its small, if loud, fanatics but to upset the established government in a democratic country requires either foreign help or the stuff of a dictator.” That is a historical generalization, I believe; a modest one to be sure, but my size. I had arrived at it out of the necessity of the material and felt immensely pleased and proud. These moments do not occur every day; sometimes no more than one a chapter, if that, but when they do they leave one with a lovely sense of achievement.

I am a disciple of the ounce because I mistrust history in gallon jugs whose purveyors are more concerned with establishing the meaning and purpose of history than with what happened. Is it necessary to insist on a purpose? No one asks the novelist why he writes novels or the poet what is his purpose in writing poems. The lilies of the field, as I remember, were not required to have a demonstrable purpose. Why cannot history be studied and written and read for its own sake, as the record of human behavior, the most fascinating subject of all? Insistence on a purpose turns the historian into a prophet—and that is another profession.

To return to my own: corroborative detail will not produce a generalization every time but it will often reveal a historical truth, besides keeping one grounded in historical reality. When I was investigating General Mercier, the Minister of War who was responsible for the original condemnation of Dreyfus and who in the course of the Affair became the hero of the Right, I discovered that at parties of the haut monde ladies rose to their feet when General Mercier entered the room. That is the kind of detail which to me is worth a week of research. It illustrates the society, the people, the state of feeling at the time more vividly than anything I could write and in shorter space, too, which is an additional advantage. It epitomizes, it crystallizes, it visualizes. The reader can see it; moreover it sticks in his mind; it is memorable.

The same is true, verbally though not visually, of a statement by President Eliot of Harvard in 1896 in a speech on international arbitration, a great issue of the time. In this chapter I was writing about the founding tradition of the United States as an anti-militarist, anti-imperialist nation, secure within its own shores, having nothing to do with the wicked armaments and standing armies of Europe, setting an example of unarmed strength and righteousness. Looking for material to illustrate the tradition, I found in a newspaper report these words of Eliot, which I have not seen quoted by anyone else: “The building of a navy,” he said, “and the presence of a large standing army mean the abandonment of what is characteristically American. . . . The building of a navy and particularly of battleships is English and French policy. It should never be ours.”

How superb that is! Its assurance, its conviction, its Olympian authority—what does it not reveal of the man, the time, the idea? In those words I saw clearly for the first time the nature and quality of the American anti-militarist tradition, of what has been called the American dream—it was a case of detail not merely corroborating but revealing an aspect of history.

“Bald and Unconvincing”

The absence of corroborative detail when one is looking for it can be very irritating. Describing William Howard Taft, Governor General of the Philippines at that time, I did not want merely to write that he was a very large, very fat man, a general statement which could apply to any oversize person. I wanted to be able to write specifically that he was six foot so-many inches tall and weighed 280 or 290—or whatever it was—pounds. Stated in figures a weight becomes visible and besides would give more impact to the story about Taft’s telegram to Etiuh Root after an illness, saying that he had been out

Barbara W. Tuchman, whose “The Guns of August” won the Pulitzer Prize for 1963, is now at work on another historical study, to be called “The Proud Tower.” The mother of three girls, she is a trustee of Radcliffe College. She also wrote “Bible and Sword” and “The Zimmermann Telegram.” This article is adapted from the Stimson Lecture, which Mrs. Tuchman delivered at Goucher last fall.
horseback riding and was feeling fine, to which Root wired back, "How is the horse feeling?" Nowhere, however, in Taft’s biography, a large two-volume work by Henry Pringle, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his life of Theodore Roosevelt, could I find any statement of Taft’s weight. It may appear that I am making a fuss here over nothing but the point is that a weight of over 300 pounds (a figure that I found eventually in a magazine article after a prolonged hunt) is surely a major factor in a man’s life, affecting his character, prospects, health, career, and personal relations. It is a fact which, it seems to me, a reader has a right to know.

Failing to know such details, one can be led astray. In 1890 Congress authorized the building of the first three American battleships, and, two years later, a fourth. Shortly thereafter, in 1895, this country plunged into a major quarrel with Great Britain, known as the Venezuelan crisis, in which there was much shaking of fists and chauvinist shrieking for war. Three years later we were at war with Spain. She was no longer a naval power equal to Britain, of course, but still not negligible. One would like to know what exactly was American naval strength at the time of both these crises. How many, if any, of the battleships authorized in 1890 were actually at sea five years later? When the jingoism were howling for war in 1895, what ships did we have to protect our coasts, much less to take the offensive? It seemed to me this was a piece of information worth knowing.

To my astonishment, on looking for the answer in textbooks on the period, I could not find it. The historians of America’s rise to world power, of the era of expansion, of American foreign policy, or even of the Navy have not concerned themselves with what evidently seems to them an irrelevant detail. It was hardly irrelevant to policy makers of the time who bore the responsibility for decisions of peace or war. Text after text in American history is published every year, each repeating on this question more or less what his predecessor has said before, with no further enlightenment. To find the facts I finally had to write to the Director of Naval History at the Navy Department in Washington.

My point is not how many battleships we had on hand in 1895 and ‘98 (which I now know) but why this hard, physical fact was missing from the professional historians’ treatment. “Bald and unconvincing,” said Pooh-Bah of narrative without fact, a judgment in which I join.

When I come across a generalization or a general statement in history unsupported by illustration I am instantly on guard; my reaction is, “Show me.” If a historian writes that it was raining heavily on the day war was declared, that is a detail corroborating a statement, let us say, that the day was gloomy. But if he writes merely that it was a gloomy day without mentioning the rain, I want to know what is his evidence; what made it gloomy. Or if he writes, “The population was in a belligerent mood,” or, “It was a period of great anxiety,” he is indulging in general statements which carry no conviction to me if they are not illustrated by some evidence. I write for example that fashionable French society in the 1890s imitated the English in manners and habits. Imagining myself to be my own reader—a complicated fugue that goes on all the time at my desk—my reaction is of course, “Show me.” The next sentence does. I write “Le Grand Steeple was held at Auteuil, le Derby at Longchamps, unwanted members were blackboule at the Jockey Club, Charles Swann had ‘Mr’ engraved on his calling cards.”

What the Kaiser Gave His Wife

Even if corroborative detail did not serve a valid historical purpose, its use makes a narrative more graphic and intelligible, more pleasurable to read, in short more readable. It assists communication, and communication is after all the major purpose. History written in abstract terms communicates nothing to me. I cannot comprehend the abstract and, since a writer tends to create the reader in his own image, I assume my reader cannot comprehend it either. No doubt I underestimate him. Certainly many serious thinkers write in the abstract and many people read them with interest and profit and even, I suppose, pleasure. I respect this ability but I am unable to emulate it.

My favorite visible detail in The Guns of August, for some inexplicable reason, is the one about the Grand Duke Nicholas who was so tall (six foot six) that when he established headquarters in a railroad car his aide pinned up a fringe of white paper over the doorway to remind him to duck his head. Why this insignificant item, after several years’ work and out of all the material crammed into a book of 450 pages, should be the particular one to stick most sharply in my mind I cannot explain, but it is. I was so charmed by the white paper fringe that I constructed a whole paragraph describing Russian headquarters at Baranovici in order to slip it in logically.
In another case the process failed. I had read that the Kaiser's birthday gift to his wife was the same every year: twelve hats selected by himself which she was obliged to wear. There you see the value of corroborative detail in revealing personality; this one is worth a whole book about the Kaiser—or even about Germany. It represents, however, a minor tragedy of The Guns, for I never succeeded in working it in at all. I keep my notes on cards and the card about the hats started out with those for the first chapter. Not having been used, it was moved forward to a likely place in Chapter 2, missed again, and continued on down through all the chapters until it emerged to a final resting place in a packet marked “Unused.”

A detail about General Haig, equally revealing of personality or at any rate of contemporary customs and conditions in the British officer corps, did find a place. This was the fact that during the campaign in the Sudan in the 'nineties he had “a camel laden with clarét” in the personal pack train that followed him across the desert. Besides being a vivid bit of social history the phrase itself, “a camel laden with clarét,” is a thing of beauty, a marvel of double and inner alliteration. That, however, brings up another whole subject, the subject of language, which needs an article of its own for adequate discussion.

Betrayed by Words

Having inadvertently reached it, I will only mention that the independent power of words to affect the writing of history is a thing to be watched out for. They have an almost frightening autonomous power to produce in the mind of the reader an image or idea that was not in the mind of the writer. Obviously, they operate this way in all forms of writing but history is particularly sensitive because one has a duty to be accurate, and careless use of words can leave a false impression one had not intended. Fifty percent at least of the critics of The Guns commented on what they said was my exposé of the stupidity of the generals. Nothing of the kind was in my mind when I wrote. What I meant to convey was that the generals were in the trap of the circumstances, training, ideas, and national impulses of their time and their individual countries; that there but for the grace of God go we. I was not trying to convey stupidity but tragedy, fatality. Many reviewers understood this, clearly intelligent perceptive persons (those who understand one always are), but too many kept coming up with that word “stupidity” to my increasing dismay.

This power of words to escape from a writer's control is a fascinating problem which, since it was not what I started out to discuss, I can only hint at here. One more hint before I leave it: for me the problem lies in the fact that the art of writing interests me as much as the art of history (and I hope it is not provocative to say that I think of history as an art, not a science). In writing I am seduced by the sound of words and by the interaction of their sound and sense. Recently, at the start of a paragraph I wrote, “Then occurred the intervention which irrevocably bent the twig of events.” It was intended as a kind of signal to the reader. (Every now and then, in a historical narrative after one has been explaining a rather complicated background, one feels the need of waving a small red flag that says, “Wake up, Reader; something is going to happen.”) Unhappily, after finishing the paragraph, I was forced to admit that the incident in question had not irrevocably bent the twig of events. Yet I hated to give up such a well-made phrase. Should I leave it in because it was good writing or take it out because it was not good history? History governed it and it was lost to posterity (although, you notice, I have rescued it here). Words are seductive and dangerous material, to be used with caution. Am I writer first or am I historian? The old argument starts inside my head. Yet there need not always be dichotomy or dispute. The two functions need not be, in fact should not be, at war. The goal is fusion. In the long run the best writer is the best historian.

In quest of that goal I come back to the ounce. The most effective ounce of visual detail is that which indicates something of character or circumstance in addition to appearance. Careless clothes finished off by drooping white socks corroborate a description of Jean Jaurès as looking like the expected image of a labor leader. To convey both the choleric looks and temper and the cavalry officer’s snobbishness of Sir John French, it helps to write that he affected a cavalryman’s stock in place of collar and tie, which gave him the appearance of being perpetually on the verge of choking.

The best corroborative detail I ever found concerned Lord Shaftesbury, the eminent Victorian social reformer, author of the Factory Act and child-labor laws, who appeared in my first book, Bible and Sword. He was a man, wrote a contemporary, of the purest, palest, stateliest exterior
in Westminster, on whose classic head "every separate dark lock of hair seemed to curl from a sense of duty." For conveying both appearance and character of a man and the aura of his times, all in one, that line is unequaled.

Novelists have the advantage that they can invent corroborative detail. Wishing to portray, let us say, a melancholy introspective character, they make up physical qualities to suit. The historian must make do with what he can find, though he may sometimes point out what he finds by calling on a familiar image in the mental baggage of the reader. To say that General Joffre looked like Santa Claus instantly conveys a picture which struck me as peculiarly apt when I wrote it. I was thinking of Joffre's massive paunch, fleshy face, white moustache, and bland and benevolent appearance, and I forgot that Santa Claus wears a beard, which Joffre, of course, did not. Still, the spirit was right. One must take care to choose a recognizable image for this purpose. In my current book I have a melancholy and introspective character, Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister in 1895, a supreme, if far from typical, product of the British aristocracy, a heavy man with a curly beard and big, bald forehead of whom I wrote that he was called the Hamlet of English politics and looked like Karl Marx. I must say that I was really rather pleased with that phrase but my editor was merely puzzled. It developed that he did not know what Karl Marx looked like, so the comparison conveyed no image. If it failed its first test it would certainly not succeed with the average reader and so, sadly, I cut it out.

Rowboat Under Niagara

Sources of corroborative detail must of course be contemporary with the subject. Besides the usual memoirs, letters, and autobiographies, do not overlook novelists and newspapers. The inspired bit about the ladies rising to their feet for General Mercier comes from Proust as do many other brilliant details; for instance, that during the Affair ladies had "A bas les juifs" printed on their parasols. Proust is invaluable not only because there is so much of him but because it is all confined to a narrow segment of society which he knew personally and intimately; it is like a woman describing her own living room. On the other hand, another novel set in the same period, Jean Barois by Roger Martin du Gard, considered a major work of fiction on the Affair, gave me nothing I could use, perhaps because visual detail—at least the striking and memorable detail—was missing. It was all talk and ideas, interesting, of course, but for source material I want something I can see. When you have read Proust you can see Paris of the 'nineties, horsecaps and lamplight, the clubman making his calls in white gloves stitched in black and a gray top hat lined in green leather.

Perhaps this illustrates the distinction between a major and a less gifted novelist which should hold equally true, I believe, for historians. Ideas alone are not flesh and blood. Too often, scholarly history is written in terms of ideas rather than acts; it tells what people wrote instead of what they performed. To write, say, a history of progressivism in America or of socialism in the era of the Second International by quoting the editorials, books, articles, speeches, and so forth of the leading figures is easy. They were the world's people in history. If, however, one checks what they said and wrote against what actually was happening, a rather different picture emerges. At present I am writing a chapter on the Socialists and I feel like someone in a small rowboat under Niagara. To find and hold onto anything hard and factual under their torrent of words is an epic struggle. I suspect the reason is that people out of power always talk more than those who have power. The historian must be careful to guard against this phenomenon—weight it, as the statisticians say—lest his result be unbalanced.

Returning to novels as source material, I should mention The Edwardians by V. Sackville-West, which gave me precise and authoritative information on matters on which the writers of memoirs remain discreet. Like Proust, this author was writing of a world she knew. At the great house parties, one learns, the hostes took into consideration established liaisons in assigning the bedrooms and each guest had his name on a card slipped into a small brass frame outside his door. The poets too serve. Referring in this chapter on Edwardian England to the central role of the horse in the life of the British aristocracy, and describing the exhilaration of the hunt, I used a line from a sonnet by Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, "My horse a thing of wings, myself a god." Anatole France supplied, through the mouth of a character in M. Bergeret, the words to describe a Frenchman's feeling about the Army at the time of the Affair, that it was "all that is left of our glorious past. It consoles us for the present and gives us hope for the future." Zola expressed the fear of the bourgeoisie for the working class through the manager's wife in Germinal,
HISTORY BY THE OUNCE

watching the march of the striking miners, saw
"the red vision of revolution . . . when on some
somber evening at the end of the century the
people, unbridled at last, would make the blood
of the middle class flow." In The Guns there is a
description of the retreating French Army after
the Battle of the Frontiers with their red
trousers faded to the color of the pale brick, coats
ragged and torn, cavernous eyes sunk in un-
shaven faces, gun carriages with once-new gray
paint now blistered and caked with mud. This
came from Blasco Ibáñez's novel, The Four
Horsemen of the Apocalypse. From H.G. Wells's
Mr. Britling Sees It Through I took the feeling
in England at the outbreak of war that it con-
tained an "enormous hope" of something better
afterward, a chance to end war, a "tremendous
opportunity" to remake the world.

I do not know if the professors would allow the
use of such sources in a graduate dissertation but
I see no reason why a novelist should not supply
as authentic material as a journalist or a general.
To determine what may justifiably be used from
a novel, one applies the same criterion as for any
nonfictional account: if a particular item fits
with what one knows of the time, the place, the
circumstances, and the people it is acceptable;
otherwise not. For myself, I would rather quote
Proust or Sackville-West or Zola than a pro-
fessional colleague as is the academic habit. I
could never see any sense whatever in referring
to one's neighbor in the next university as a
source. To me that is no source at all; I want to
know where a given fact came from originally,
not who used it last. As for referring to an
earlier book of one's own as a source, this seems
to me the ultimate absurdity. I am told that
graduate students are required to cite the sec-
dondary historians in order to show they are familiar
with the literature but if I were granting degrees
I would demand primary familiarity with pri-
mary sources. The secondary histories are neces-
sary when one starts out ignorant of a subject
and I am greatly in their debt for guidance,
suggestion, bibliography, and outline of events,
but once they have put me on the path I like to
go the rest of the way myself. If I were a
teacher I would disqualify anyone who was con-
tent to cite a secondary source as his reference
for a fact. To trace it back oneself to its origin
means to discover all manner of fresh material
from which to make one's own selection instead
of being content to re-use something already
selected by someone else.

Though it is far from novels I would like to
say a special word for Who's Who. For one thing,
it is likely to be accurate because its entries are
written by the subjects themselves. For another,
it shows them as they wish to appear and thus
often reveals character and even something of
the times. H.H. Rogers, a Standard Oil partner
and business tycoon of the 1890s, listed himself
simply and succinctly as "Capitalist," obviously
in his own eyes a proud and desirable thing to be.
The social history of a period is contained in
that self-description. Who would call himself by
that word today?

"Spared Not But Slew"

As to newspapers, I like them for period flavor
perhaps more than for factual information. One
must be wary in using them for facts, because
an event reported one day in a newspaper is usu-
ally modified or denied or turns out to be rumor
on the next. It is absolutely essential to take
nothing from a newspaper without following the
story through for several days or until it disap-
ppears from the news. For period flavor, however,
newspapers are unsurpassed. In the New York
Times for August 10, 1914, I read an account
of the attempt by German officers disguised in
British uniforms to kidnap General Leman at
Liège. The reporter wrote that the General's
staff, "maddened by this dastardly violation of
the rules of civilized warfare, spared not but
slew."

This sentence had a tremendous effect on me.
In it I saw all the difference between the world
before 1914 and the world since. No reporter
could write like that today, could use the word
"dastardly," could take as a matter of course the
concept of "civilized warfare," could write un-
ashamedly, "spared not but slew." Today the
sentence is embarrassing; in 1914 it reflected
how people thought and the values they believed
in. It was this sentence that led me back to do a
book on the world before the war.

Women are a particularly good source for phy-
ysical detail. They seem to notice it more than
men or at any rate to consider it more worth
reporting. The contents of the German soldier's
knapsack in 1914, including thread, needles,
bandages, matches, chocolate, tobacco, I found
in the memoirs of an American woman living in
Germany. The Russian moose who wandered
over the frontier to be shot by the Kaiser at
Rominten came from a book by the English
woman who was governess to the Kaiser's daugh-
ter. Lady Warwick, mistress for a time of the
Prince of Wales until she regrettably espoused
socialism, is indispensable for Edwardian society, less for gossip than for habits and behavior. Princess Daisy of Press prattles endlessly about the endless social rounds of the nobility but every now and then supplies a dazzling nugget of information. One, which I used in The Zimmermann Telegram, was her description of how the Kaiser complained to her at dinner of the ill-treatment he had received over the Daily Telegraph affair and of how, in the excess of his emotion, “a tear fell on his cigar.” In the memoirs of Edith O'Shaughnessy, wife of the First Secretary of the American Embassy in Mexico, is the description of the German Ambassador, Von Hintze, who dressed and behaved in all things like an Englishman except that he wore a large sapphire ring on his little finger which gave him away. No man would have remarked on that.

In the end, of course, the best place to find corroborative detail is on the spot itself, if it can be visited, as Herodotus did in Asia Minor or Parkman on the Oregon Trail. Take the question of German atrocities in 1914. Nothing requires more careful handling because, owing to postwar disillusions, atrocity came to be a word one did not believe in. It was supposed because the Germans had not, after all, cut off the hands of Belgian babies, neither had they shot hostages nor burned Louvain. The results of this disbelief were dangerous because when the Germans became Nazis people were disinclined to believe they were as bad as they seemed and appeasement became the order of the day. (It strikes me that here is a place to put history to use and that a certain wariness might be in order today.) In writing of German terrorism in Belgium in 1914 I was at pains to use only accounts by Germans themselves or in a few cases by Americans, then neutral. The most telling evidence, however, was that which I saw forty-five years later: the rows of gravestones in the churchyard of a little Belgian village on the Meuse, each inscribed with a name and a date and the legend “fusillé par les Allemands.” Or the stone marker on the road outside Senlis, twenty-five miles from Paris, engraved with the date September 2, 1914, and the names of the Mayor and six other civilian hostages shot by the Germans. Somehow the occupations engraved opposite the names—baker’s apprentice, stone mason, garçon de café—carried extra conviction. This is the verisimilitude Pooh-Bah and I too have been trying for.

The desire to find the significant detail plus the readiness to open his mind to it and let it report to him are half the historian’s equipment. The other half, concerned with idea, point of view, the reason for writing, the “Why” of history, has been left out of this discussion although I am not unconscious that it looms in the background. The art of writing is the third half. If that list does not add up, it is because history is human behavior, not arithmetic.

Shiloh: The Bloody Pond
by Thomas Whitbread

At Shiloh, Tennessee, a finite number
Of days after the first day's bloody fighting,
To be exact, thirty-six thousand, nine hundred
And forty-nine, two, three, or four generations
As parents and children go, I mourned the dead
And the unknown seed of those who left no orphans,
And mystically felt, in a time foreshortened
By the triangular presence in that Park
Of a National Cemetery, of covered trenches
For Southern dead, and of Indian burial mounds
From a million days before our Union shivered,
That if I knelt and drank from the Bloody Pond
I would taste the intermingled corpuscles
Of the thirsting Federal and Confederate dead.

Harper's Magazine, July 1965
Nehru: A View from the Embassy

by Catherine A. Galbraith

I first saw Prime Minister Nehru in March 1956, at the residence of the then United States Ambassador to India, John Sherman Cooper. We had been invited to a reception for Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who was in New Delhi on one of his frequent trips. Standing alone in a corner of the garden in the shadow of a giant asoka tree, deep in thought, was a slender man of aristocratic bearing, not much taller than I, in long brown coat, white jodhpurs, and white cap, with an unforgettable face—a face beautifully formed, quiet, strong, a little sad, with dark eyes and a skin remarkably unlined despite the fringe of white hair which showed below his cap. He looked familiar; I realized then that I was looking at someone whose face was familiar to all the world. I could not know that in another five years I would be living in that residence and that we would be friends.

A few days later I saw the Prime Minister again, in quite a different mood. It was in his own garden amidst the throngs who had come to greet him on Holi, the spring festival of colors. He was almost hidden by eager outstretched hands which, in the Hindu custom, were daubing his face, partly bald head and white hair with bright pigments. At the insistence of my Indian friends I too pressed some red powder on his forehead. I remember worrying that he should be so jostled by the crowds, but if he minded he certainly did not show it.

In April 1961, when we returned to India officially, Jawaharlal Nehru was already in his seventies. He was still amidst the crowds. It forever amazed me that one man could do so many things in so many parts of the country and still run the government. He had been doing them ever since he assumed office as independent India’s first Prime Minister. He continued, with little respite, until the day he died.

Nehru normally worked fourteen to eighteen hours a day. In addition to being Prime Minister and head of the Congress party and his own Foreign Secretary, he was Chairman of the Planning Commission and also of the Atomic Energy Commission. These latter posts were of great importance to him, for he shared the intellectual and scientific excitement of the twentieth century and was deeply devoted to bringing India with its age-old customs into the modern world. He was concerned with education, health, village life, better methods of agriculture, and the new industries. He wanted escape from Indian poverty and he wanted it promptly; impatient of inefficiency and apathy, he was always pushing to get things done.

A personal and affectionate report on his unofficial life—including his weaknesses for a good joke, a pretty woman, dashing horsemen, and the British public school tradition.
The Moral of the Story

Make-believe is more than fun and games, Jonathan Gottschall says; it helps us navigate life's complex social problems.

BY DAVID EAGLEMAN

We love a good story. Narrative is stitched intrinsically into the fabric of human psychology. But why? Is it all just fun and games, or does storytelling serve a biological function? These questions animate “The Storytelling Animal,” a jaunty, insightful new book by Jonathan Gottschall, who draws from disparate corners of history and science to celebrate our compulsion to storyify everything around us.

There are several surprises about stories. The first is that we spend a great deal of time in fictional worlds, whether in daydreams, novels, confabulations or life narratives. When all is tallied up, the decades we spend in the realm of fantasy outstrip the time we spend in the real world. As Gottschall puts it, “Neverland is our evolutionary niche, our special habitat.”

A second surprise: The dominant themes of story aren’t what we might assume them to be. Consider the plotlines found in children’s playtime, daydreams and novels. The narratives can’t be explained away as escapism to a more blissful reality. If that were their purpose, they would contain more pleasure. Instead, they’re horoscopes. They bubble with conflict and struggle. The plots are missing all the real-life boring bits, and what remains is an unrealistically dense collection of trouble. Trouble, Gottschall argues, is the universal grammar of stories.

The same applies to our nighttime hallucinations. If you’ve ever wanted your dreams to come true, let’s hope you don’t mean your literal nocturnal dreams. These overflow with discord and violence. When researchers pick apart the hours of dream content, it turns out dreamland is all about fight or flight.

What do these observations reveal about the function of story? First, they give credence to the supposition that story’s job is to simulate potential situations. Neurosciences has long recognized that emulation of the future is one of the main businesses intelligent brains invest in. By learning the rules of the world and simulating outcomes in the service of decision making, brains can play out events without the risk and expense of attempting them physically. As the philosopher Karl Popper wrote, simulation of the future allows “our hypotheses to die in our stead.” Clever animals don’t want to engage in the expensive and potentially fatal game of physically testing every action to discover its consequences. That’s why story is good. The production and scrutiny of counterfactuals (colloquially known as “what ifs”) is an optimal way to test and refine one’s behavior.

But storytelling may run even deeper than that. Remember, in “Star Wars,” when Luke Skywalker precisely aims his proton torpedoes into the vent shaft of the Death Star? Of course you do. It’s memorable because it’s the climax of a grand story about good triumphing over evil. (You’d be less likely to recall a moment in which a protagonist files her nails while discussing her day.) More important, Luke’s scene provides a good analogy: It’s not easy to infect the brain of another person with an idea; it can be accomplished only by hitting the small exposed hole in the system. For the brain, that hole is story-shaped. As anyone who teaches realizes, most information bounces off with little impression and no recollection. Good professors and state-menas know the indispensable potency of story. This is not a new observation, but nowadays we have a better understanding of why it’s true. Changing the brain requires the correct neurotransmitters, and those are especially in attendance when a person is curious, is predicting what will happen next and is emotionally engaged. Hence successful religious texts are not written as nonfiction arguments or bulleted lists of claims. They are stories. Stories about burning bushes, whales, sons, lovers, betrayals and rivalries.

Story not only sticks, it mesmerizes. This is why WWE wrestling thrives on fake but exciting plotslines, why there are so many hours poured into pretfight boxing hype, and why there are stirring back stories included in all the profiles of Olympic athletes. But not all stories are created equal. Gottschall points out that for a story to work, it has to possess a particular morality. To capture and influence, it can’t be plagued with moral repugnance — involving, say, a sexual love story between a mother and her son, or a good guy who becomes crippled and a bad guy who profits handsomely. If the narrative doesn’t contain the suitable kind of virtue, brains don’t absorb it. The story torpedoed the exposed brain vent. (There are exceptions, Gottschall allows, but they only prove the rule.)

This leads to the suggestion that story’s role is “intensely moralistic.” Stories serve the biological function of encouraging pro-social behavior. Across cultures, stories instruct a version of the following: If we are honest and play by the social rules, the reaps the rewards of the protagonist; if we break the rules, we earn the punishment accorded to the bad guy. There is no urge to produce and consume moralistic stories is hard-wired into us, and this helps bind society together. It’s a group-level adaptation. As such, stories are as important as genes. They’re not time wasters; they’re evolutionary innovations.

Gottschall highlights this social-binding property in the stories nations tell about themselves. Full of inaccuracies, these are “mostly fiction, not history,” he writes. They accomplish the same evolutionary function as religion: defining groups, coordinating behavior and suppressing selfishness in favor of cooperation. Our national myths “tell us that not only are we the good guys,” Gottschall writes, “but we are the smartest, boldest, best guys that ever were.”

Unlike W. H. Auden, who worried that “poetry makes nothing happen,” Gottschall, who teaches English at Washington & Jefferson College in Pennsylvania, feels certain that fiction can change the world. Consider the influence of Wagner’s operas on Hitler’s self-vision, or the effect of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” on American opinion and culture. “Research shows that story is constantly nibbling and kneading us,” Gottschall writes. “If the research is correct, fiction is one of the primary sculpting forces of individuals and societies.”

Recent fare like “The Shallows” and “The Dumbest Generation” lament our descent into the end of literature. But not so fast, Gottschall says: storytelling is neither dead nor dying. As for the attention-demanding novel? “Harmers of its demise are exaggerated to the point of absurdity,” he writes. “In the United States alone, a new novel is published every hour. Some extend their cultural reach by being turned into films.” Beyond books, the strong skeleton of story can be discerned clearly in media including video games and scripted “reality” television. This is why libraries aren’t likely to go away, Gottschall suggests. They may change in character; they may even transform into habitats for massively multiplayer online role-playing games. But they won’t disappear.

The medium of story is changing, in other words, but not its essence. Our inborn thirst for narrative means that story — its power, purpose and relevance — will endure as long as the human animal does.
Holy Conglomerate
In Simon Rich’s novel, God is C.E.O. of Heaven Inc.

BY PATRICK CASSELS

Simon Rich’s first novel, the pre-school sendup “Elliot Allagash,” drew comparisons to Evelyn Waugh and P.G. Wodehouse. His new novel, “What in God’s Name,” evokes another titan of English comedy: Douglas Adams. Like Adams in “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,” Rich drags heaven down to Earth. His paradise is a mismanaged corporation, Heaven Inc. — full of departments like Prayer Intake and Geyer Regulation — whose chief executive, God, decides on a whim to retire, destroy Earth, kill all the humans (by fire or ice, he’s still deciding) and fulfill his lifelong dream of opening an Asian-American fusion restaurant.

Given the grim prognosis for the planet, it’s shocking how optimistic “What in God’s Name” is. In satires of religion, wit is typically wielded to criticize anti-intellectual beliefs and the institutions that promote them: think of “The Canterbury Tales”; Christopher Hitchens; or the Flying Spaghetti Monster, the satirical god invented to lampoon creationism. But this gentle, enjoyable parody owes more to “The Simpsons,” and to Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman’s “Good Omens.” Rich isn’t interested in condemning religion — he just wants to have fun with it, using the Bible as an outrageous vehicle with which to present, in his own odd way, questions about faith and human nature. Funny and occasionally touching, “What in God’s Name” is satire that avoids sanctimony.

The book is far from evangelical — to some it will be downright heretical — but it’s not entirely secular, either. Its main characters are Craig and Eliza, two cubicle-dwelling angels from the Department of Miracles, whose main assignment is reuniting Lynnder Skynyr. Thanks to a bargain with God, the angels have the chance to save Earth, if they can get the world’s two slightest humans to fall in love. Craig and Eliza are as flamed as the mortals they seek to help, subject to the same wild emotions, insecurities and jealousies. Their failabilities make them comical but also sympathetic and recognizable.

Patrick Cassels is a writer and performer at CollegeHumor.com.

At one point, Craig grapples with the moral ambiguity of miracles after helping students of a school for the blind win their first wrestling match. “The victory dealt a major psychological blow to their sighted opponents, one of whom had lost to a blind child in front of his parents,” Craig recalls. “Was it still a miracle if someone had to suffer?”

Rich has created a satirical sandbox in which to play with the Bible’s assertions. His imagined situations read like sketches he might have conceived at his old job as a writer for “Saturday Night Live.” (In fact, some of the novel’s gags first appeared in his debut collection, “Ant Farm.”) God, a NASCAR fan, orders an angel to send a car into a fiery crash, clearing the way for his favorite driver. In a post-race interview, the winner thanks God (“I couldn’t have done it without him”), and so the gruesome logistics behind a sports cliché are laid bare. Later, God checks in with a poorly chosen prophet: a lunatic who passes along his Lord’s message by tossing on a tinfoil hat and scrawling (truthfully) “The End Is Near” on a cardboard sign.

The novel’s secular bite is most evident in scenes like these, but Rich knows how to balance the smart with the funny. When “What in God’s Name” bares its teeth, it’s because it’s laughing.

Paradise is a corporation whose chief executive decides to retire and open a fusion restaurant.

New Blood
Carlos Fuentes’s Dracula is house hunting in Mexico City.

BY JEFF VANDERMEER

When Carlos Fuentes died in May at age 83, he left behind an impressive legacy and an eclectic body of work. Novels like the sprawling, Joycean “Te rra Nostra” placed him at the center of the Latin American Boom of the 1970s, alongside such greats as Cortázar and García Márquez. But later books were often just as ambitious, returning to themes like the corruption of ideals.

The short novel “Vlad” (first published in Spanish as part of Fuentes’s 2004 collection “Inquieta Compañía”) provides ample evidence of Fuentes’s powerful abilities. The book documents the “awful adventure” of Vyes Navarro after his wife helps a respected lawyer find a house in Mexico City for a mysterious European refugee, Vladimir Radu, later revealed to be the infamous historical figure turned vampire Vlad the Impaler.

Dark humor dominates the novel’s early pages, with Navarro mystified by the client’s requests for a house that is “remote... easy to defend against intruders... with a ravine out back.” The client also wants blackened windows and an escape tunnel. During Navarro’s initial visit, he notices that “a great number of drains ran along the walls of the ground floor, as though our client was expecting a flood any day now.” Radu wears a ridiculous wig and glue-on mustache, and his manservant’s demeanor owes no small debt to Marty Feldman’s performance in “Young Frankenstein.”

From the disconnect between what the narrator knows (nothing) and what the reader understands (everything), Fuentes nurses both comedy and foreboding. “Tell your wife that I am breathing her scent,” Radu says to Navarro, and the discomfited husband replies: “Yes, I will. How very gallant.”

Fuentes clearly knew that farce can become repetitious, and he layers in perfectly realized glimpses of the relationship between Navarro and his wife, Asuncion. He revels in the details of their boisterous love life and long breakfasts. He also adds emotional impact through an account of the drowning death of the couple’s son. “The sea never returned him,” Navarro says. “And so his absence was doubled. Asuncion and I do not have any memory, as terrible as it would be, of a dead body... I am incapable of hearing... the break of a wave without thinking that a trace of my son, turned to salt and foam, is coming back to us.”

This sense of sadness becomes infused with creepiness and fear when Radu surreptitiously enters the couple’s sanctuary: “From then on, the bedroom was no longer mine. It became a strange room because someone had walked out.” Later, when Asuncion goes missing, along with their daughter, Navarro chooses to interpret his search for them as “the greatest moment of our love.” But all is not as it seems, and the statement so misjudges his relationship with Asuncion that those words encapsulate both the earnestness and absurdity of the novel.

“Vlad” inevitably shifts toward the Grand Guignol and the decadent despite such personal moments. A meal of organs, the glimpsed remains of a “huge, indestructible animal” and a cache of subterranean coffins are all vampire clichés, but somehow Fuentes refreshes tired tropes. The novel is genuinely scary.

The final act is ushered in with a sweeping litany of Vlad’s evil history, followed by truly unexpected horrors — including the gratuitous use of squirrels in a sequence in which “campy” and “surreal” more or less French kiss. When rodents are being shaved down your pants, you know things aren’t going to end well.

Will readers appreciate a novel that pivots between hilarity and fear, insightful characterization and flamboyant fountains of blood? Let’s hope so, because “Vlad” displays the strengths of a great writer’s late oeuvre to excellent effect.
As someone who for the past thirty years has been a full-time writer—one friend always describes me as "self-unemployed"—it's unusual for me to be up here talking about writing instead of planting myself in my chair and making the keyboard say words.

There's also the matter that an uninvited ghost comes with me these days. I've been thinking toward a book which would take place during the Cuban missile crisis, on a military base—where I was, myself, in boot camp training as a young "airman basic." ("Basic" barely said it.) The book seems to want to begin with a scene that is very much in my memory—it's a military base in west Texas; out the window, on what passed for a hill in Texas, a radar dish endlessly pivoted as if slapped back and forth by the wind, and there in the classroom the platoon of us are receiving a first-aid lecture from a dangerous-looking sergeant, who every so often interrupts his instructions on what we are to do if a rattlesnake bites us, to yell at us: "Airmen, do you hear my talkin'?"

In the scene in the book in my head, half of the airmen in the platoon sit up at attention and shout back, "Yes, sir!" If I write that book, it will of course have to be about the two who don't, won't it.

Anyway, the haunting memory of that sergeant makes me determined to let the writing do as much talking, up here, as possible. Toward that end, I'm going to start this session by reading the opening scene of a book I've just done—a novel called Mountain Time, which is being published by Scribner the first of August. It's about ten minutes of hearing not "my talkin'" but my writing, in which I would ask you to listen for certain things that I believe a writer has to try to do at the start of a novel:
--Play God with the characters. Whether it takes you 7 days to create them
or 7 years, they've got to be alive and tantalizing in that new world that
is the opening of a book.

--Justify the book's point of view: its narration strategy. If it's an
omniscient narration, for instance, it has to be able to tell us something
worth hearing that the characters themselves don't know. ("Happy families are
all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.") If it's a
first-person narrator, he has to be more than a motormouth.

--Get the plot into gear, even if it's only low gear, at first.

--Establish the place, the setting.

--And last but not least on the short list here, find the voice. The
style. The tone the book is going to have.

So, if you will bend an ear toward a few questions of this sort in
the material I'll read—who is being presented? how is he making it sound
the way it does? what's being promised?—I'll come back to this list for a
few minutes when I'm done, and try to show you some of the makings I've used,
then we can advance to whatever questions you'd like to ask about the so-called
writing life.
Okay, fairly quickly, some of those makings—the ingredients—I use, in trying to come up with:

Characters:

What do they look like? (I make it a rule not to use my friends. All other faces are fair game; people I see on the street, or even in audiences...) I keep files of faces. Find 'em in old photo albums in archives, old magazines or history books maybe. I brought a couple of examples today as a dab of show-and-tell, and we'll circulate them here so you can have a look. The photograph, of the boy in bib overalls—this is a face I instantly fell for. I grafted it onto my narrator's best friend in my novel English Creek, in this passage: (p. 172, EC)

I will point out that I didn't just accidentally find that face. I was specifically looking through the Depression-era photos done by Dorothea Lange, because I knew she was great with faces. Here, though, is a facial feature I did come across in a history book: notice the long upper lip on this famous Scotchman, Thomas Carlyle, which I gave to Lexa's ancestors and her.

How do they speak, these characters? By the various ventriloquisms the writer hones for them. You heard a bit of back-and-forth between Lexa and Mitch, people who have been into relationships before and now before they start living together they want to know who's going to do the laundry, who's going to do Sunday breakfasts—Baby Boomer generation speak. (By the way, I did swipe from a pair of friends that deal that one of them would do the laundry for a year, then the other one would do it for a year. Their relationship did not flourish.)

And it does matter, I'm utterly convinced, how characters speak on the page, even minor characters. Later in this book Mitch, who is an environmental reporter, fifty years old, has to share his cubicle at the newspaper with a
just-out-of-college young woman of a certain type, who is the new video reviewer—she won't review anything shot in black-and-white, history for her begins with Technicolor. For various reasons Mitch is having an awful time getting his assigned story and comes the moment—as a reader you can kind of see it coming, I intended it that way—when she's going to ask if he has writer's block. But that can be asked any number of different ways, can't it. I can hear it done by one of the voices I talk to at publishing houses—"So what are you, blocked?" Or in a western voice of people I grew up around in the Rockies: "Are you standing there in your tracks telling me you can't so much as write a single word—you're blocked?" But in Shyanne's generational and regional case, she has to say it in the pattern that my research—also known as shameless eavesdropping—indicates she would have, in 1996, in Seattle: "Are you like blocked?" (write it on board instead of saying)

The next point I had mentioned, early on, the narrational point of view. I'll be glad to talk more about this during the questions if you'd like, but for now I'll just point out what I see as the essential differences—an omniscient narration can be everywhere and know everything, while a first-person narrator, while more limited in scope, can give more immediacy to the story, with the use of I. (I've written in each.)

Getting the plot going...You heard, tucked away on the second page of the scene I read, the phrase "when she and Mitch Rozier swallowed away what they had done to Travis." That isn't in there by accident. I hope you also were able to pick up a hint of the sisterly situation in the plot—one McCaskill sister, glamorous Mariah, out globe-trotting as a photographer, has it made, one to go.
--Establishing the setting, the place where the story happens. I happen to
think this is crucial to what's called the literature of the American West.
All of us in this room live in the West—we know that out here you cannot hide
from the geography or the weather. To me it's simply a necessary part of the
characters' lives that they deal with the land around them when they can, try
to endure when they cannot. (M.H. Holberr)

--Finally, the voice. The style of language used for the book. This has
to do with word choice and sentence patterns. You should be able to tell from
the voice something about the attitude, the personality, the era in which the
book is set—where the writer and the book are coming from. Think of the style,
say, of Henry James, those 19th century, endlessly calibrated sentences—
it's been said of his prose that it chews more than it can bite off—compared
to the whipcrack sentences of Annie Proulx: "Here is an account of a few years
in the life of Coyle, born in Brooklyn and raised in a shuffle of dreary
upstate towns." (wonderful use of shuffle (can't playing of shuffling along)

Let me close, on this note, by pointing out that the voice of a piece
is truly worth working at, working over, reworking until you get
what you want it. When Charles Dickens wrote his first draft of "A
Carol," he had Scrooge grumble "Humbug" when he was wished a merry
The voice we remember in that story came when Dickens went back
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from Reading, Writing, and the Study of Literature

ELEMENTS OF LITERATURE (PP. 27-41)

1. **Character.**
   "Traditionally, character has been regarded as the most important component of literature." How does the writer go about developing the characters? When are they introduced? How do they speak? What do they look like? (I make it a rule not to use my friends. All other faces are fair game; people I see on the street, or even in audiences...)

2. **Plot.** Plot generally involves both what happens and why. The term causation is often used.
   Seldom is the plot the most significant component of a story. However, the art of storytelling involves the creation of an entire world, and significant events are evidence of a world in motion. Events may cause people to change, and most literature is about change.

3. **Point of view.**
   (Narration)
   Who is speaking? What can they know? What do they choose to reveal? What do their speech patterns tell about them?

   As already noted, a third person, omniscient narrator can be everywhere and know everything.

   A first-person narrator is more limited in scope, but gives immediacy to the story, with the use of I.

4. **Setting.** Where the story happens. The background against which the action of the narrative occurs. Setting is crucial to what we are calling the literature of the American West. People cannot hide from the geography or the weather; they must deal with it when they can, try to endure when they cannot.

5. **Style.**
   Sometimes called voice, this has to do with word choice and sentence patterns. You should be able to tell from the voice something about the attitude, the personality, the level of education, the era in which it is set.

6. **Symbolism.** A symbol is a figure of speech that combines a literal, concrete quality with a suggestive abstract dimension. e.g., snow as a symbol of death, spring as a symbol of rebirth.
   Some authors self-consciously use symbolism. Others, such as Ivan Doig, will testify to not using symbolism.

7. **Theme.** What the story ultimately means. This is not simple, and we shouldn't feel forced to find themes, any more than we are obliged to find symbolism. But themes emerge in most high-quality literature, and when we finish each book we may be able to make some broad conclusions.

   So let's concentrate on the first five, and if the others emerge, so be it.
Craft class:

I've been a full-time writer for most of my life now--one annoying friend keeps describing me as self-unemployed--so it's unusual for me to be up here talking about writing instead of planting myself alone in my desk chair and making the keyboard say some words. But let's divide this session into some thoughts I have about a few of the things that might help out with a piece of writing, and then your questions about anything related to the so-called writing life--could be we'll learn something from the questions, whether or not anybody gets anything out of my answers.
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It seems to me there are a couple of reasonable ways I could try to lay out some aspects of the writing process for you, and I’m probably not going to do either. One would be to go through element-by-element the seven pillars of literature—character, plot, point of view, setting, style, symbolism, and theme—but I’d rather approach any of those through your questions, if you’d like, so that we can try to get to the specifics of those that matter to you rather than to me. The other way to go about it would be to try to poke around in my head, on that question I get asked at almost every bookstore appearance or reading, “Where do you get your ideas?” But that particular question always reminds me of the
answer the great jazzman, Duke Ellington, would give when he was asked something like that: he’d say, “That question has no future.” If you have some specific angle of inquiry on something I’ve done in writing--when you want to know, “Where the hell did you get that?”--sure, I’ll try to dig around in myself and tell you as best I know. But I find that a surprising amount of ideas come out the ends of my fingers, from sitting there working at the writing.

So, what I’d like to do instead of either of those more classroomy approaches is to talk a little about the insides of language--some of the properties or linguistic elements available
to the writer. Wordplay, it could be called. If you want to do any writing that counts for anything, you need to be in love with words, crazy about the language, and willing to let it drive you a little crazy. It’s a lot like a romance. But I hope a bit more straightforward in its makings.

One of the insides of language that’s available to everybody, it’s right around you every day, is the slang of the group you hang out with. [Kids: I suspect an example is no farther away than your cell phone.] These private modes of communication, I suppose you could call them, are the language trying to enliven itself, or
excel itself, within a like-minded group. Every group with some kind of common interest or age-level or occupation does this.

--Students: [on board] Ace-Bullet-Hook (C)-Death-Flag

--A couple of eternal topics that produce student slang, money and music. Not many years ago my wife’s community college students would have said, “You’ve got to have felony snaps to get the cuts.” [“You’ve got to have a lot of money to buy the music.”] And one I get a kick out of: “Buxtehude” [on board] was a 17th-century composer, and a couple of generations ago, the music students at Juilliard fastened onto his name as a slang for cash--“You got any Buxtehude?” [Tuesday class: they
even conjured up what kind of car he drove back there in the 1600s--a Buxtehudebaker.]

Computer geeks, cowboys, soldiers, jazz musicians, you name it, they’ve got their own slang--inside the main written or spoken language, these sayings, these private twists of the tongue. Well, so what? So there’s a source of dialogue for you to plug into, as a writer. Whether it’s for a piece of fiction, or it could even be poetry, [kids: or a feature article for your school newspaper or Website], or your own journal or diary or Web-log, one of the things you can do to capture the truth of the moment in time is to record, in your writing, exactly how people talk. Besides giving
you a way to push the boundaries of your own vocabulary as a writer, attention to these ‘inside lingos’ can help you sketch in your characters there on the page. A couple of examples:

--In the book I’ve just written, one of the characters is a ranch worker in the 1920s who happens to have a terrific singing voice but hasn’t had any training at all. When the woman who is trying to give him voice lessons tells him, all right, he’s advanced to the point where she can start to play piano accompaniment for him, he tells her: [on board] “I haven’t ever sang with a piana.” Notice, not “I haven’t ever sang with a piano”--guys in the bunkhouses of Montana ranches of the 1920’s called that
instrument a piana, I know because I was around those old guys when I was growing up on ranches there, my dad was one of that bunkhouse gang. And so throughout the book it’s a mark of this character--where he came from, how his language was shaped back there on the ranch--that he always says “piana.” He’s still saying it when he makes it to Carnegie Hall.

Or, let’s take the writing problem I faced with this book. [The Sea Runners] Characters of the 19th century... [plot summary] How do they talk?

--Well, for one thing they would probably be accustomed to proverbs; they’d be country people, in that era of history when
most people were, and their talk would be full of rural flavor, sayings drawn from nature. ["Make hay while the sun shines."]

So I consciously flavored their dialogue a bit with occasional proverbs... "Sick as a dog on grass"... [read March 10 '81 journal entry]

--And you can give a kind of signature to the way each individual character talks. As with all of this, you don't want to overdo, you don't want to pour it all over every character all the time, but you can sometimes do a dab of it to help a character come alive in the reader's mind.

--Wennberg's double contractions [p. 45 & p. 252]
--Ninian’s “Ay” and Lucas’s “ay?”

So, part of writing is doing something good with the language of your characters. The other part is the writer’s language.

The writer’s job is to make sounds on paper. Could be the computer screen, rather than paper, these days, but either way, to make sounds that meet the eye. Let me show you a few examples of details on the page that help makes the sounds of the story, as the reader hears it.

--[Blake poem on board: kids, think of it as rap. Use poem blue sheet]
Sea Runners, p. 147--Wennberg, “much”...

The tools of poetry, or music, shouldn’t be forgotten by a writer, even if you’re not writing poems. Here’s a little example from this same book:

--p. 70--Palong! Palong! (not Bong! Bong!--I went to Sitka, I heard those chimes at midnight...)

Run those last words through your head again:

“who sneak about the street at night”... Hear it?

“whose woods these are I think I know”...

“To be or not to be--that is the question”
It’s iambic, isn’t it--an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable-- as in iambic pentameter, a deliberate poetic beat. There’s no reason you can’t use a little poetry under the prose, sometimes, if it’ll give you a sentence that registers better in the reader’s mind.

The order of words in a sentence is another thing you can tinker with, carefully. An opening sentence that I think works really well, that starts us right into the situation of the story and the voice in which it’s being told, is the start of William Faulkner’s novella, The Bear:

“There was a man and a dog too this time.”
You can see some of the things that saying it just that way do:

--it immediately implies, "What about the other times? Didn’t have a dog, the other times he was out after that bear? Wow, what’s this dog going to do, how’s he going to make the difference in the bear hunt?"

--and it puts a kind of urgency, an immediate sense of determination, a terseness of purpose, into the narrative voice--

"By god, a man and dog too, this time--we’ll show that bear."

You can’t quite get the same effect by arranging the words of that sentence any differently:

"This time there was a dog with the man."
"The man had a dog with him this time."

"A dog accompanied the man this time."

None of those have quite the acceleration and the kick there in the tail of the sentence, of "There was a man and a dog too this time."

Besides the words within a sentence, sometimes the way you arrange the length of sentences on the page helps tell the reader--maybe unconsciously but subliminally, something is going on there--the mood of that part of the piece of writing, the effect you want to have there.
-- English Creek, p. 199: Jick’s mounting exasperation, half a Christmas tree...

-- English Creek, p. 190: spaced-apart words to mimic how the inept rodeo announcer sounds...

[If time allows: The Commitments, mimicking music by how the words are placed on the page...]

Let me just fairly quickly mention a couple of other ways the insides of language can be used to put across the mood or effect you want...

-- English Creek, p. 226: Wisdom Johnson soaking himself sober...
This is alliteration, two or more words having the same initial sound...

For some reason book reviewers hate this. They tend to jump on a writer for it unmercifully--I think because it’s an easy target, “Oh, look there, the guy is playing around with alliteration”—but as far as I can tell, readers like it just fine. And real grown-up writers do use it—”Stumbling upon the blood dark track”: that’s from a poem by Yeats, alliterating tooth and nail. I think alliteration is a natural human tendency, playing around with similar sounds--it’s the same impulse as behind puns, I suppose--
and you can sometimes get an interesting set of words to slip into your writing --for, say, emphasis--from it.

And something I work with a lot, the rhythm of sentences. One quick example, how the rhythm of a sentence can echo the action being written about...

--Heart Earth, p, 8

I think you can hear how that long sentence about “pinballing down through the West” moves kind of like a pinball itself, back and forth, pausing a little, and finally rolls to a halt as we ourselves did in that Ford coupe.
This is probably as good a spot as any to turn to what’s on your minds--your questions about the so-called writing life.
Put on board:

A  piana

B

C

D

F

Buxtehude

Bring me my bow of burning gold!

Bring me my arrows of desire!

Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!

Bring me my chariot of fire!
-Besides them flinging around proverbs, I was pretty sure these guys wouldn’t have had clean mouths. Profanity, obscenity, swearing, cussing--call it what you will, but their bunkhouse there at one of the armpits of the world would not have been full of polite language. But it was a hundred and fifty years ago--what did they say, in those days? I’m not going to give you examples I came up with--we don’t need the wrath of the school board on our heads here--but I do want to point out part of my job as a writer was to try to find out how Swedes and Russians of 1853 might have cussed--and among other things, there was a scholarly journal I could resort to: Maledicta, the Journal of Verbal Abuse.
A number of years ago I was in Australia, and the terrific Aus'n fiction writer Tim Winton told me, "Ivan, old cobber, I've found the greatest thing to write with." Tim is probably half my age and has already written about as many books as I have, including a tremendous novel with enormous two big families as main characters and thing devastating language thru the whole novel. "What's this magical instrument then, Tim" I asked, expecting to hear about some software that would leave me farther in the dust. "A fountain pen. I can write as fast with it as I can move my hand." When you think about it, that's fast, so whatever it takes.
The ‘Ulysses’ of Mississippi

The greatest Southern novel was written more than 75 years ago — yet it remains the most serious attempt by any writer to deal with the madness of race in America.

By JOHN JEREMIAH SULLIVAN

A poll of well over a hundred writers and critics, taken a few years back by Oxford American magazine, named William Faulkner’s “Absalom, Absalom!” the “greatest Southern novel ever written,” by a decisive margin — and the poll was conducted while looking back on a century in which a disproportionate number of the best American books were Southern — so to say that this novel requires no introduction is just to speak plainly.

Of course, it’s the kind of book a person would put first in a poll like that. You can feel reasonably confident, in voting for it, that nobody quite fathoms it enough to question its achievement. Self-consciously ambitious and structurally complex (unintelligible, a subset of not unsophisticated readers has always maintained), “Absalom, Absalom!” partakes of what the critic Irving Howe called “a fearful impressiveness,” the sort that “comes when a writer has driven his vision to an extreme.” It may represent the closest American literature came to producing an analog for “Ulysses,” which influenced it deeply — each in its way is a provincial Modernist novel about a young man trying to awaken from history — and like “Ulysses,” it lives as a book more praised than read, or more esteemed than enjoyed.

But good writers don’t look for impressedness in their readers — it’s at best another layer of distortion — and “greatness” can leave a book isolated in much the way it can a human being. (Surely a reason so many have turned away from “Ulysses” over the last near-hundred years is that they can’t read it without a suffocating sense of each word’s cultural importance and their duty to respond, a shame in that case, given how often Joyce was trying to be amusing.)

A good writer wants from us — or has no right to ask more than — intelligence, good faith and time. A legitimate question to ask is, What happens with “Absalom, Absalom!” if we set aside its laurels and apply those things instead? What has Faulkner left us?

A prose of exceptional vividness, for one thing. The same few passages, in the very first pages, remind me of this — they’re markings on an entryway — sudden bursts of briskly adjective clusters. The September afternoon on which the book opens in a “dim hot airless” room is described as “long still hot weary dead.” If you’ve ever taken a creative-writing workshop, you’ve been warned never to do novel’s maze, is that Faulkner has given nothing away, not of the things he most values. He’s not concerned with holding us in suspense over the unearthing of events but in keeping us transfixed, as he goes about excavating the soil beneath them, and tracing their post-mortem effects (embodied, perhaps, by the worm that comes to light in a shovelful of dirt, “doubtless alive when the clog was thrown up though by afternoon it was frozen again”). The nightmare of the Southern past exists — an accomplished thing. To delve into the nature of the tragedy is the novel’s drama.

For the same reason, we can gloss the book’s narrative without fear of spoiling anything. In 1909 a boy from the South named Quentin goes north to Harvard. A brooding, melancholy boy — if we had been following Faulkner’s work in 1936, when “Absalom, Absalom!” appeared, we would know that Quentin is preparing to kill himself (the act occurs in “The Sound and the Fury,” published several years before), and so he is, in a certain respect, already dead, a ghost narrator. But for now he remains somewhat ambiguously alive. (And who knows, the universe of imaginative fiction functions differently: in this incarnation, he may survive.)

He has a Canadian roommate named Shreve — not an American Yankee, to whom the South might seem offensive (or worse, romantic), but a true foreigner, for whom it is appropriately bizarre. All of America is a South to Shreve. He is like us: he needs to have things explained. “What is it?” he asks Quentin about the South, “something you live and breathe in like air?” In a series of halting exchanges,

This essay is adapted from the foreword to the new Modern Library edition of “Absalom, Absalom!” to be published by Random House in July.
Quentin tries to answer, about the South and what it does to people. "I am older at 20 than a lot of people who have died," he deadpans.

Quentin tells Shreve a story from his hometown in Mississippi, about a visit he paid earlier that year to an old woman he knows as Miss Rosa. She in turn had told him — indeed, had summoned him in order to entrust him with — another story, one from long ago, before the Civil War. The shape of the novel, then: a shifting frame (Quentin's disintegrating mind) inside of which plays out a historical novel, with narrators of varying reliabilities, and some chronological jumping around, never violent.

Quentin has gleaned parts of this tale from his father and grandfather, from letters and in-town gossip. This is what Quentin is, we start to see, and what Southerners are or used to be: walking concatenations of stories, drawn or more often inherited from the chaos of the past, and invested here with a special, doom-laden meaning, the nostalgia that borders on nausea — the quality that most truly sets the South apart from other regions, its sheer investment in the meaning of itself. In Quentin this condition has reached the level of pathology.

No book that tries to dissect the South's psyche can overlook its founding neurosis: miscegenation. On the basis of pure social abstraction, Sutpen has spurned his own child, his first son. He remarries in Mississippi, with Miss Rosa's older sister. They have two children, a boy and a girl. Now Sutpen has land, a mansion and progeny. He is almost there, almost a baron. We're not absurd to think of Gatsby here; one of the most perceptive recent statements on "Absalom, Absalom!" was made by the scholar Fred C. Hobson in 2003, a simple-seeming statement and somehow one of the strangest.

Miss Rosa's story, which she has gnawed on most of her life — "grim haggard amazed" — concerns a man named Thomas Sutpen, a shack-born Virginian who appeared in their county in 1833, peremptorily bought an enormous tract of land and set about trying to create a plantation dynasty. You can find readings of "Absalom, Absalom!" that identify Sutpen as the novel's main character, but it's not really even correct to call him a character. Quentin is a character: he's conflicted. It's what he can make of Sutpen that will come to absorb us. Sutpen himself inhabits the novel like a figure in an Egyptian frieze. His beard possesses greater reality than his mind and heart. He has no motives, or rather, he has only the uncomplicated motive of ambition. The novel speaks of his "innocence," meaning in this case not that he is free from sin but that he knows only the sins of children, of wanting more and to be first. The sort of innocence that wreaks destruction.

Faulkner makes a set of choices, in reconstructing Sutpen's past, that ought to draw our attention. He tells us that Sutpen's Ur-ancestor probably landed in Jamestown on a prisoner-transport ship, and that he grew up in a cabin in the backcountry (in what would become West Virginia), and that he spent time in Haiti. These details point back to the earliest South: the English coastal colonies, as an extension of the West Indian world (many of the first Virginians and Carolinians were born not in the Old World but on the islands). Sutpen arrives with a band of "wild" African slaves, most of whom are unfamiliar with any European tongue: they speak in an island Creole. In buying his land, which he calls "Sutpen's Hundred" — the name itself a straining toward colonial affectation — he treats not with a white man but with a local Indian chief, a Chickasaw.

What Faulkner gains from this bundle of references is a suggestion of cycles, of something ongoing. As the Southern frontier murders its way west over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries — a phase absent to the point of amnesia from our national memory, but which re-emerges here like a wriggling worm — the region keeps generating Sutpens, repeating its themes: Indian removal, class resentment and land hunger, as well as a stubborn race hatred that coexists with intense racial intimacy.

Faulkner needed Sutpen's story to be not just authentically but intrinsically Southern this way, less a symbol than an instance of the Southern principle. Only then does it make an adequate object for Quentin to fixate upon and go mad contemplating.

No book that tries to dissect the South's psyche like that can overlook its founding obsession: miscegenation. There we reach the novel's deepest concern, the fixed point around which the storm of its language revolves. After Sutpen ran off to Haiti as a young man — it emerges that a humiliating boyhood experience of hearing a black slave tell him to use the back door of a big house (he wasn't good enough for the front), had produced a shock that propelled him to flee — he married a girl there and fathered a son with her. Soon, however, he discovered that she had black blood, and that his son was therefore mixed, so he renounced them both. He sailed back to the South to become a planter. A plausible thing for a white Southern male to have done in the early 19th century. But what Faulkner doesn't forget, and doesn't want us to, is the radical amorality of things a person could say about the book, that it is "a novel about the American dream."

As in any good book of that type, the past hunts Sutpen and finds him: His son, Henry, goes off to the fledgling University of Mississippi, where he befriends another man, Charles Bon. On a holiday visit to Sutpen's Hundred, Bon meets Henry's sister, Judith, and falls in love with her — or makes up his mind to possess her. What Henry and Judith don't know is that Bon is Sutpen's abandoned Haitian son, come to Mississippi via New Orleans, evidently in a sort of half-conscious, all but sleepwalking quest to find his father. Charles Bon is thus both half-black and Judith's half-brother.

Henry inevitably realizes the truth, and that he cannot allow Bon to marry his sister. At the same time, he loves Bon — they have a blood bond in more than one sense. When the war breaks out, they sign up together to fight against the North, suffering alongside each other. But the whole time they're gone to war, Bon is thinking of Judith, and when the two young men at last ride back to Mississippi, Henry knows he must act.
There follows what is arguably the climax of the novel, although by the time we get there, we’ve rehearsed its import more than once. Quentin recounts it to Shreve in a trance, there at Harvard, almost a half-century later, the two of them becoming through a form of transubstantiation not themselves but Henry and Bon. “Happen is never once,” Faulkner says.

“You shall not,” Henry tells Bon, meaning, you shall not marry my sister.

—Who will stop me, Henry?

Now it is Bon who watches Henry; he can see the whites of Henry’s eyes again as he sits looking at Henry with that expression which might be called smiling. His hand vanishes beneath the blanket and reappears, holding his pistol by the barrel, the butt extended toward Henry.

—Then do it now, he says.

Henry looks at the pistol; now he is not only panting, he is trembling [. . .]

—You are my brother.
—No I’m not. I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister. Unless you stop me, Henry.

This is a novel that uses the word “nigger” many times. An unfortunate subject, but to talk or assert superiority — except perhaps now and then in the context of an especially close humor. Even if we were to justify Faulkner’s overindulgence of the word on the grounds of historical context, I would find it unfortunate purely as a matter of style. It may be crass for a white reader to claim that as significant, but a writer with Faulkner’s sensitivity to verbal shading might have been better tuned to the ugliness of the word, and not a truth-revealing ugliness, but something more like gratuitousness, with an attending queasy sense of rhetorical power misused. I count it a weakness, to be placed alongside Faulkner’s occasional showiness and his incessant “not” constructions, which come often several to a page: “and not this, nor that, nor even the other thing, but a fourth thing — adjective adjective adjective — made him lift the hoe” (where half the time those things would not have occurred to you in your natural life, but old Pappy takes his time chopping them down anyway).

The defense to be mounted is not of Faulkner’s use of the word but of the novel in spite of it, or rather, in the face of it. “Absalom, Absalom!” has been well described as the most lines. Granted Bon would still be marrying his half-sister, but that doesn’t bother Henry very much (the book tells us so), and life is rarely perfect. There is nothing to keep Henry from saying it, to keep him from reaching out his hand to his black brother, nothing except the weight of the past, the fear of ridicule, his own weakness. Instead of his hand, Henry brings forth the pistol. The scene is one of the last things Quentin and Shreve speak of before the end, that is before Quentin tells us his final story — about the day his own destiny collided with that of the Sutpens. I haven’t really told you everything up front, you see — and neither does Faulkner.

Even when he does tell you everything, you can’t entirely trust it. No surer sign exists of the book’s greatness than how it seems to reconfigure itself and assume a new dimension, once we feel we know it, and these shifting walls of ambiguity were designed by Faulkner himself. They allow the text a curious liquid quality, so that it can seem alive, as if it might be modified by recent history too. I found it fascinating to read the book with a president sitting in the White House who comes from a mixed-race marriage, and with the statistic about it in 2012 and not mention the fact hints at some kind of repression. Especially when you consider that the particular example I’ve quoted is atypically soft: Bon, the person saying it, is part black, and being mordantly ironic. Most of the time, it’s a white character using the word — or, most conspicuously, the novel itself, in its voice — with an uglier edge. The third page features the phrase “wild niggers”; elsewhere it’s “monkey nigger.”

Faulkner wasn’t unique or even uncommon in using the word this way. Hemingway, Dos Passos, Gertrude Stein — all did so unapologetically. They were reflecting their country’s speech. They were also, if we are being frank, exploiting the word’s particular taboo charge, one only intensified when the writer is a white Southerner. Faulkner says “Negroes” in plenty of places here, also “blacks,” but when he wants a stronger effect, he says “niggers.” It isn’t a case, in short, of That’s just how they talked back then. The term was understood by the mid-’30s (well before, in fact) to be nasty. A white person wouldn’t use it around a black person unless meaning to offend serious attempt by any white writer to confront the problem of race in America. There is bravery in Faulkner’s decision to dig into this wound. He knew that the effort would involve the exposure of his own mind, dark as it often was. You could make a case that to have written this book and left out that most awful of Southernisms would have constituted an act of falsity.

Certainly we would not want to take the word away from Bon, in that scene in the woods, one of the most extraordinary moments in Southern literature. A white man and a black man look at each other and call each other brother. One does, anyway. Suddenly, thrillingly, the whole social edifice on which the novel is erected starts to teeter. All Henry has to do is repeat himself. Say it again, the reader thinks. Say, “No, you are my brother.” And all would be well, or could be well, the gothic farce of Sutpen’s dream redeemed with those words, remade into a hopeful or at least not-hope-denying human story. Charles Bon would live, and Judith would be his wife, and Sutpen would have descendants, and together they might begin rebuilding the South along new having just been announced that for the first time in U.S. history, nonwhite births have surpassed white ones. Some of the myths out of which the novel weaves its upsetting dreams appear quite different, like walking by a familiar painting and finding that someone has altered it. This is a strange time to be alive in America, in that regard. Close one eye, and we can seem to be moving toward a one-race society: close the other and we seem as racially conflicted and stratified as ever. Racism is still our madness. The longer that remains the case, the more vital this book grows, for Faulkner is one of the great explorers of that madness.

The novel is about even more than that in the end. It attempts something that had never been tried before in the art of fiction, and as far as I know has never been since, not in so pure a form — to dramatize historical consciousness itself, not just human lives but the forest of time in which the whole notion of human life must find its only meaning. Not to have failed completely at such a task is indistinguishable from triumph. The South escaped itself in this book and became universal.
YANKEE DOODLE DANDIES

By Dan Schoenholz / Edited by Will Shortz

ACROSS
1 Plays a siren
7 Gold Coast, today
12 Meander
16 It's a plus in a bank acct.
19 Noted landing site
20 Player of the younger Cunningham on "Happy Days"
21 Mach3 predecessor
22 "Yes, I'm a Witch" singer, 1992
23 Bay, 1898 battle site
24 Deliver
26 They push things
27 File folder, e.g.
28 President who was 65-Across (1872)
30 Heads up
33 Capital of Denmark?
34 Come to naught
35 Fermented honey drink
36 Where kips are cash
37 Observe, in the Bible
39 Presidential daughter who was 65-Across (1998)
41 First National Leaguer with 500 home runs
42 Act out
43 Staff
44 Some slippers
101 Attire usually worn with slippers
102 "Unfaithful" co-star, 2002
103 The final Mrs. Chaplin
104 Economic stat.
105 Initially
107 Literary critic who was 65-Across (1905)
111 Michigan college
112 When sung five times, an Abba hit
113 Electrical impulse conductor in the body
114 Riffraff
117 D.C. player
118 Knighthood?
119 Maytag acquisition of 2001
120 And others, in a footnote
121 Most of a figure eight
122 Coolers
123 Water balloon sound
124 Out

DOWN
1 Tufted topper
2 Chapter
3 Some large tubs
4 They might be inflated
5 Part of Tennyo's "crooked hands"
6 Pinch-hits (for)
7 Former inductees
8 Wannabe surfers
9 Cove, e.g.
10 Sucker-like
11 Years at the Vatican
12 Wily sort
13 10th-century Holy Roman emperor
14 Iris part
15 Clayey deposit
16 Complete negotiations successfully
17 Chess closing
18 Impersonated
25 Bundles of joy, so to speak
29 Infuse
30 "Home __"
31 Lord of the Flies
32 Convery component
33 Wide shoe spec
34 Narrow-mouth
40 Every, in an Rx
42 Lens used for close-ups
43 New World monkeys
46 Frequent
47 Singer Lovett
48 City on the slopes of Mount Carmel
49 What a thermomter measures
50 Garden chemical brand
51 One of the Estevez brothers
55 French game
56 Dish that may be smoked
57 Adjective
59 Premix
60 Range rover
62 Certain belly button
64 Magic lamp figure
65 Seabiscuit, for one
66 Crowd shout
67 Ticket datum
68 Den ___, Nederland
69 Eastern royal
70 What a thermometer may measure
71 Get off at a station
72 Like adversity, for one
73 Mint products
74 Sausage topper
75 Ancient Greek anatomist
76 Seventh chapter
77 "I'll send an __ to the world" (Police lyric)
78 Bird's org.
79 Kind of test
80 Interstate sign
81 "Good night, and good luck," e.g.
82 Six Nations tribe
83 Became established
85 Like some mutual funds
86 West of Nashville
87 Registers
88 Air show maneuver
100 Actress Ryder
101 Kettledrum
104 Opposite of break apart
105 High-heels alternatives
107 Anarchist
109 Meadowlands
110 Punkie
115 "The dog ate my homework, probably"
116 Literary inits.

FOR ANSWERS, call 1-900-289-CLUE (289-2583), $1.49 a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-914-5550.

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Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 5×5 grid will use the digits 1–5. A 7×7 grid will use 1–7.

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Answers to Previous Puzzles

THE VARIETY PUZZLE IS ON PAGE 48; IT CAN ALSO BE FOUND ONLINE EVERY WEEK AT NYTIMES.COM/PUZZLES.
ACROSTIC

By EMILY COX
and HENRY RATHVON

Guess the words defined below and write them over their numbered dashes. Then transfer each letter to the correspondingly numbered square in the pattern. Black squares indicate word endings. The filled pattern will contain a quotation reading from left to right. The first letters of the guessed words will form an acrostic giving the author’s name and the title of the work.

A. Slashed picture of 2008? (2 wds.)
69 47 20 122 148 57 162 93 71

B. Total on a cash register (2 wds.)
151 55 16 33 162 87

C. __ Awards, prizes for crime fiction
103 138 61 118 46 76 154

D. Of or resembling snow
144 110 161 79 49 128 22

E. Hang around offering unwanted advice
23 139 36 9 125 102

F. Seem to defy a natural law
91 150 33 130 26 119 107 63

G. Creature named for its changing shape
50 104 99 156 178 11

H. One with long stories to tell
174 129 97 95 66 175 170

I. Minneapolis theater for the performing arts
137 83 44 149 64 24 108

J. Wiped out, erased, expelled
172 74 131 21 98 142 77

K. University in Bethlehem, Pa.
85 45 62 160 99 132

L. Land with a tree on its flag
41 28 153 14 82 58 101

M. One skilled in methodical examination
38 71 84 12 105 129 54

N. Microscopic kind of algae with a cell wall of silica
121 55 70 94 146 15

O. Gaudily cheap; a bit displeasurable
173 143 25 58 6 133 88

P. Cyclopean, in a certain respect (hyph.)
90 7 158 67 119 39 92

Q. Successor to Rolls-Royce’s Silver Ghost
4 78 96 153 35 59 116

R. Reptile proliferating in the Everglades
165 122 77 77 171 73

S. Darth Vader’s dominion, for example
45 31 158 76 109 16

T. Film character who says “I never drink wine”
159 29 128 13 42 73 98

U. Recently created, as a style or art
120 65 156 134 148 106 51

V. Pursuit of a toxophobe
133 3 87 34 152 60 117

W. Unlucky accident
167 32 106 123 80 10

X. Greek Muse of music who’s often portrayed with a flute
140 3 48 165 59 172 72

Y. Cowled villain in the “Masters of the Universe” TV series and film
86 140 171 174 37 19 58 3
Geography Lesson

What a village in Africa and a small town in Maine turned out to have in common.

By MONICA WOOD

In fourth grade, my best friend and I made a papier-mâché map of Africa for Sister Ernestine. Our bumpy, still-wet continent was so unwieldy that we had to carry it to school like a plank of Sheetrock, one of us at each end. The map assignment, messy and time-consuming, bolstered our teacher’s campaign to turn us into travelers: Be brave, children! The world is an amazement!

Sister meant to aim our gaze beyond Mexico, Me., where we lived in the shadow of a hard-breathing paper mill on the riverbank. The shoe factories, too, with their round-the-clock shifts, contributed to our sense of residing at the heart of creation. Denise and I muscled our map into the schoolyard, thrilled with the weight of the thing we made, while above our heads rose clouds of steam so thick you couldn’t tell where mill left off and sky began.

Decades later, the two of us—friends now for nearly 50 years—stepped into the evening chaos outside the Cotonou airport in the Republic of Benin, an African country about the size of Maine. Denise had long been following her sister’s go-forth advice, but to me this place was blindingly new: brilliant colors in the madding crowd; swoony odors of cooking meats, mysterious flora, human sweat. Brilliant, too, was the assault of sound: loud, urgent French; choked traffic; creatures keening in the darkness.

A childlike resistance overtook me. Where on Sister Ernestine’s globe had I landed?

Denise’s job was to evaluate a malaria-prevention-and-treatment project; I’d come along as her unofficial assistant. Heading north at sunrise, we traveled a bone-jangling road lined with skinny people selling fat tomatoes and big, dusty yams. Through the starburst cracks of our car window I took in brief, bright images: an ancient man in floral green lounging on a truck tire with a hound dog in his arms. A gleeful boy stomping through a puddle of red mud. A woman in yellow emerging from a shelter of sticks, looking like a freshly plucked orchid. I squeezed my eyes shut and opened them again, to reset my flooded systems, trying to fully absorb this strange, heart-wrecking, utterly foreign place.

We arrived at a sunburned village and sat beneath a lean-to and listened to tales of lives lost and saved. The villagers offered what they had, fetching the “good” benches for us to sit on. We perceived hardship in their physical hollows, but their full communion showed, too. A baby clutched the breast of his mother, whose shoulder rested against her husband, who in turn absentely tapped the wrist of his friend. Denise and I listened for hours, smitten by their French, which is distinctive and sometimes mocked, like the Québécois French of our childhood. Their frequent laughter freshened the motionless air, and we laughed, too.

As the days disappeared, my impressions began to gather around a baffling sensation I could not name except to say it was not the dislocation I expected. We passed a flock of girls sewing outdoors on treadle machines, moving their vivid cloth in matching paces. Around them goats and toddlers galloped among spindly huts and steaming pots. When I waved, the girls stopped and vigorously waved back. All at once, a second vision: a circle of little girls in Mexico, Me., hand-stitching shoes in round robin, helping our neighbor with piecework brought home from the factory.

Despite the words I wrote every night here—like nothing I’ve ever seen, like nowhere I’ve ever been—the knot of resistance I felt dissolved in this double vision of girls gracefully stitched to their spot on earth. Home is the word I’d been looking for. I felt at home.

Travelers often passed through the town of my youth, handkerchiefs pressed to their noses. They gawked at our malodorous paper mill, our shabby triple-deckers, our filthy river. I once heard a woman cry out from a moving car, “Who could stand to live here?”

Us, was the answer. As children, Denise and I knew. And the children here, who have never heard a mill whistle, they know, too. They live where their people live, the people who love them. Which is to say they reside at the heart of creation, just as we did a lifetime ago, two friends rushing into a schoolyard, holding a continent between us.

Monica Wood is the author of “When We Were the Kennedys: A Memoir From Mexico, Maine,” due out this month from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

ILLUSTRATION BY HOLLY WALES

E-MAIL submissions for Lives to lives@nytimes.com. Because of the volume of e-mail, the magazine cannot respond to every submission. Share comments on this essay at nytimes.com/magazine.
Man-Made Epidemics

From Page 1

Agency for Natural Development. Experts are trying to figure out, based on the available information, how to counteract the spread of the disease when the next epidemic is likely to appear, and where it's likely to start. They're also trying to understand why the disease spread so quickly over such a large geographic area.

The problem is exacerbated by how fast livestock can spread across countries, even in the absence of wild animals. A study released recently indicated that the spread of the disease could be accelerated by climate change.

To forecast the next pandemic, experts are studying wildlife.

This month the International Livestock Union (ILU) released a report that more than a million people could die from a disease that originated in animals. The disease, known as African swine fever, has spread rapidly throughout the continent.

The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) said that the disease may spread to other countries if it's not contained.

ILU added that the disease could spread to other countries if wild animals are not controlled. The disease is caused by a virus that infects domestic pigs and wild boars.

Hot Spots for Emerging Diseases

West Nile virus

Birds are a major reservoir, and humans become infected when they bite off West Nile virus from the blood of infected birds. It spreads to other birds, and then to humans. West Nile virus was first detected in the United States in 1999, and it has since spread to Europe and Asia.

The disease is currently found in Europe, Asia, and Africa. It is also found in South America and the Caribbean.

H1N1 influenza

The H1N1 virus, which caused the 2009 swine flu pandemic, was first detected in Mexico. The virus is spread by person-to-person contact, and can be spread by touching surfaces that are contaminated with the virus.

The virus causes a severe flu-like illness, and is more likely to affect young people than older people.

How to Get Our Citizens Actually United

Here are the main points:

1. Encourage government officials to work together and share information.
2. Increase public awareness about potential threats.
3. Provide resources and support to affected communities.
4. Encourage people to take personal responsibility for their own health.

The news is full of stories about potential threats to our health and safety. How can we be sure that our government officials are working together to address these issues?

The key is for government officials to work together and share information. This will help them to anticipate potential threats and develop effective strategies to address them.
My Life’s Sentences

By college, I used to utter these sentences that struck me, that people, on line, look up from the computer, to vent the pain from their own lives by being able to express it to the world. I had a lot of my own mental issues and I was not very talented in managing them. To escape from a place, a person, a situation, to express in a different dimension. To express my own thoughts in a different form, as a way to test myself and poke holes in my own thinking. I remember reading a story by Philip K. Dick called “Stability.” It appears toward the beginning: "The old man sitting and we played till our bodies dissolved." I never forgot it. This seems to me, as perfect a moment in literature, as a perfect sentence can be. It is a perfect sentence because it is perfect. To express, to express, is a perfect mood. It radiates with meaning and yet its simplicity is stirring.

When I am experiencing a sense of power to express, the broader planes, and also details, tend to fall away. Everything, in the moment, certain sentences are what comes as a standard. You have voiced before, they may when I recognize them. We encounter beings at different times, in different ways, in different places, but their language is common.

Continued on Page 7

More on Reading
And Writing:

NEWS ANALYSIS
Choosing the form.

+ STORIES
Stories light up
the brain.

NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

Where Pimps Peddle Their Goods

I WENT to a walk in Manhattan the other day with a young woman who had to work those streets, and she was just 17. She pointed out a building where she used to walk and see the girls inside, and a building where she had supposedly been asked to sleep there. It was a place.

She had been a young woman who used to slip into a slave-like state of being, of doing the work without earning anything that could be called profit. She and I were both thinking about Backpage.com, a classified advertisement Web site that is used to sell used cars, furniture, boats and girls. Almost 90 percent of people who posted on Backpage.com said it was back to back with the other. They couldn’t be found at Wal-Mart, because they could not find us on Backpage.com, a classified advertising Web site that is

Backpage.com and similar sites help find buyers for enslaved young girls.

Backpage accounts for about 50 per-
cent of prostitution advertising among

the Web sites that carry such ads in the

United States, according to a report by

52 million annual. This prostitution

advertising, according to a report by

the National Association of Attorney

General. And it’s not a fly-by

Continued on Page 11
Sunday Dialogue: How to Rate Teachers

Readers react to an editor's idea for fairer evaluations.

THE LETTER

TO THE EDITOR:

I've heard about your plan that states have approved to rate teachers. I think it is a good idea for teachers to be evaluated and see how they are doing.

Best,

[Name]

THE LETTER

TO THE EDITOR:

I agree with your plan to rate teachers. It will help us know which teachers are doing a good job and which ones need improvement.

[Name]

The use of data-driven evaluations for teachers has been a controversial topic in recent years. While some argue that it provides a fair and objective way to assess teacher performance, others believe it can lead to biased and inaccurate assessments. This debate is ongoing, and the use of such evaluations varies widely across different states and school districts. It is important to consider the perspectives of both sides and find a balanced approach that works for all students. This discussion is an important step in that direction.
As Black as We Wish to Be

Mixed-race Americans with African ancestry have an ethical obligation to identify as black.

Brucie Obama with his grandparents, grandparents, and brother, every day, in 1962.

War Is Brain-Damaging

If you’re a veteran of combat in Afghanistan or Iraq, you may experience persistent sleep disturbances, attention problems, and difficulty concentrating. These symptoms can lead to long-term brain damage and decrease your quality of life. It is important to seek treatment if you are experiencing these symptoms. If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, please speak with a healthcare professional.

A soldier in Afghanistan who was repeatedly exposed to blasts from improvised explosive devices.
The Way We Read Now

The field of electronic books has been much discussed, especially by many people, includ-
ing Nicholas Negroponte in his recent book "Breakout". In recent years, the New York Times has been discussing the advantages and disadvantages of e-books. The Times has noted that e-books offer a number of advantages, including 24-hour access, instant availability, and the ability to search and annotate text. However, it has also pointed out some potential drawbacks, such as the lack of physical interaction with the book and the potential for eye strain.

What's best on which device? A critic's guide.

[Continued discussion about the pros and cons of different devices for reading, including tablets and e-readers.]

Bottom: "I must to the huswif, for I am marvelou newes about the cert he rest.

Your Brain on Fiction

ADDED TO the array of new gadgets and new mediums for reading are cell phones and e-readers. The duos are emerging as significant players in the reading market, and the rise of e-readers in particular is changing the way people read and consume literature.

Brain science is revealing what happens in our heads when we read fiction. Researchers are beginning to understand how our brains activate when we read, and how this activity can be used to improve reading comprehension and literacy skills.

Reading fiction engages different areas of the brain than reading non-fiction. When we read fiction, the brain regions involved in visual processing and language comprehension are activated, allowing us to better understand the narrative and empathize with the characters.

In a 2006 study published in the Journal of Neuroscienc-
e, researchers found that when healthy adults read a story, a range of brain areas were activated. Interestingly, the activity in these areas was not just limited to the areas involved in language and comprehension, but also included areas involved in emotional processing.

In the future, as technology continues to advance, it is likely that we will see even more innovative ways of engaging with fiction. Perhaps we will see developments in virtual reality or augmented reality that allow us to fully immerse ourselves in the worlds we read about.

Metaphors like "He hadleth hands" rouse the sensory cortex.

[Discussion of how metaphors and literary devices can engage different parts of the brain and how they can be used to enhance reading comprehension and emotional engagement.]

[Continued discussion about the role of technology in reading and how it can be used to enhance the reading experience.]

[Conclusion about the current state of e-books and cell phones as reading devices, and the potential for future developments in this area.]
My Life's Sentences

Page 1

In the absence of any text, the image contains a page with the words "My Life's Sentences." However, there is no visible content within the page to transcribe.
EDUCATION JOBS

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
MANHATTAN CENTER

DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMS
The Adelphi University School of Social Work offers a doctoral program in social work and associate and advanced certificate programs in urban environments.

Reporting to the Associate Dean, the Director of Social Work Programs will provide leadership and supervision for a full-time faculty, and coordinate and direct graduate social work education programs. The Director will be responsible for maintaining a high-quality academic program that meets all national and regional accreditation standards. The position will be responsible for developing and implementing innovative strategies to enhance the education and training of students. The Director will also be responsible for developing and implementing innovative strategies to enhance the education and training of students. The Director will also be responsible for developing and implementing innovative strategies to enhance the education and training of students.

Applicants are encouraged to submit their resumes and letters of interest to Dr. Karen Gross, Associate Dean. The position will remain open until filled. Applicants are encouraged to submit their resumes and letters of interest to Dr. Karen Gross, Associate Dean. The position will remain open until filled.

Please apply at: www.adelphi.edu/positions

WESTPORT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Westport, Connecticut

PRINCIPAL
The Westport Public Schools in Westport, Connecticut with 3,700 students, has an immediate opening for a principal to lead one of its schools.

The successful candidate will have a minimum of 5 years of experience in a public school setting, with at least 3 years in a leadership role. A Master's degree in Education or related field is required. A principal certification is preferred.

Applications should be submitted to: Mr. Michael Morrisey, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, The Westport Public Schools, 343 Post Road East, Westport, CT 06880. Phone: 203-228-2000. Fax: 203-228-2038.

Applicants are encouraged to apply immediately. Interviews will be conducted as applications are received. Closing date for applications is July 1, 2012.

HICKSVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Nassau County, Long Island, New York

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- MATH INSTRUCTION
- ESOL COORDINATOR
- MATH COORDINATOR
- ESOL TEACHER
- MATH TEACHER
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Graduate degree in subject area of teaching required. Salary range is $42,000-$66,000. Apply to: Babies-R-Us, Inc., 1101 Woodruff Avenue, Hicksville, NY 11801. Tel: (516) 432-0140.

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On-line application: www.hicpubschool.com/employment

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
Two positions available for the 2012-2013 school year.

- THE FEMALE PUBLIC SCHOOL
- THE MALE PUBLIC SCHOOL

Salary Range: $108,000-$128,000, depending on experience. Excellent benefits package. Salary range is subject to approval by the Board of Education. The deadline for applications is April 30, 2012.

Applications must be postmarked by April 30, 2012. All applications should be sent to: Bethpage School District, 122 Shinnecock Road, Bethpage, NY 11714. Email: hr@bethpageschools.org

HEALTHCARE JOBS

BAYHILL, A Healthcare Services Agency

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HEALTHCARE JOBS & monster

nytimes.com

The Doctor of Dread

Though he was a priest of the mythical Shinto religion, the author of "Kuragabe Kuragabe" was no擅长 Kuriagabe Kuriagbe expert. His 1929 novel was the first in a series of eight that dealt with the supernatural and the occult. And that experience included considerable supernatural research. "Kuriagabe Kuriagabe" was a cult favorite and his more successful novel, "The Spirit of Darkness," was also a bestseller. However, the author died in 1939 and his work has been out of print for several years.

A 2012 reissue of "Kuriagabe Kuriagabe" was released in Japan. The novel is now available in English as a digital book and is expected to be published in print shortly.

In the age of big pharma, we have, of course, come to think of such things as "rational thought"—not to mention that just about every other drug and pill. When the 1929 novel was first published, it was a sensation, with readers flocking to buy copies and rave reviews. While it is now out of print, the novel has a cult following and is still popular today. However, the author died in 1939 and his work has been out of print for several years.

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ON THE PHONE

Was Eslois an Mormon?

T

echnically, any Mormon to whom
the latest set of the calendar
fits. And that includes the
President of the United States,
the man who is supposed to
represent America.

For Friday, the Wall Street Journal ran a story
about the Mormon Church and its efforts
to update its stance on gay marriage.

The story focused on the Church's
new policy on gay marriage, which
was announced in a letter from
President Russell M. Nelson.

The letter stated that the Church
would no longer actively oppose
same-sex marriage, but it would
continue to work to influence other
countries and communities to
change their laws on the issue.

The Journal reported that
Mormon leaders had been
considering a change in policy
for years, and that the decision
was made in response to
increasingly liberal views on
the issue.

It’s a metaphor, really, replacing
the term "prospective" with "not
actively opposing." But it means
that same-sex couples can now
get marriage licenses in states
where the Church has changed
its position.

Our, pipli

Whether we want to

Of course, physically and morally
informed, this new policy doesn’t
mean that the Church now
supports gay marriage. But it
daemonstration that the Church
is moving in a more inclusive
direction.

On May 16, 2019, the

Where Pipis Pledge Their Goods

From Page 1

right operation. Backpage is now
owned by a group called "The
Entertainment Publishing Group,"
which is based in Los Angeles.

The new owners have
promised to make changes to
Backpage, particularly when it
comes to human trafficking.

In a statement, the new owners
said they would work to prevent
human trafficking and support
victims of the crime.

"We are committed to
creating a safer and healthier
environment for everyone," the
statement said. "We will work
closely with law enforcement
agencies and community
organizations to develop
strategies to combat human
trafficking."
Forget the Money, Follow the Sacredness

In the film rendition of "Tell the President," a reporter playing the journalist Bob Woodward interviews nuclear war expert Dr. Andrew Marshall to assess whether the US is ready for nuclear war. Marshall's answer is clear: "We're not ready." This scene highlights the critical need for understanding the behavior of nuclear weapons, as the critical infrastructure that sustains our society and economy.

Find your voice. Be heard. Protect the sacredness of life.

The intersection of politics, policy, and the pursuit of nuclear arms control is crucial for the future of our planet. It is up to us to demand action and hold leaders accountable for the safety of our constituents.

We evolved to be tribal, and politics is a competition among coalitions of tribes. A failure to understand the sacredness of nuclear arms can have dire consequences for the safety of our society.

Gray Matter

Why Bilinguals Are Smarter

STUDIES on language usage have revealed that bilinguals, or individuals who speak two or more languages, exhibit better cognitive abilities. This is due to the fact that the brain is constantly adapting and changing to accommodate different languages. Bilingualism has been linked to improved decision-making skills, enhanced empathy, and better overall cognitive function. Studies have shown that bilinguals have a larger brain volume in areas associated with memory, attention, and executive function. This suggests that being bilingual can have positive effects on cognitive development, even in older adults.

In addition to these benefits, bilinguals have been found to have better problem-solving skills and are better able to handle stress. Even in children, bilingualism has been linked to improved language development and better academic performance. The ability to switch between languages can also be a sign of cognitive flexibility, which is important for everyday tasks.

Reading to children in multiple languages can also help them develop a stronger understanding of the world around them and foster empathy and creativity. It is important to support and encourage children's language development to help them reach their full potential.

Campaign Closing

1066
THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, MARCH 14, 2023

Campaign logo: "Tell the President," a reporter playing the journalist Bob Woodward interviews nuclear war expert Dr. Andrew Marshall to assess whether the US is ready for nuclear war. Marshall's answer is clear: "We're not ready." This scene highlights the critical need for understanding the behavior of nuclear weapons, as the critical infrastructure that sustains our society and economy.
To Use and Use Not

New Edition of 'A Farewell to Arms' Includes Alternate Endings

By JULIE BROWNE

In an interview in The Paris Review in 1971, Ernest Hemingway stated that he had not been entirely pleased with the final page of his 1929 novel "A Farewell to Arms," which was published in 1929.

The final page of "A Farewell to Arms" contained the lines "She knew she was in love, but she had never been published. She wrote to her husband, "I love you," and then turned the page, leading to the conclusion of the novel, "I love you." However, in the new edition, which was published in 1971, the page was rewritten to read "She knew she was in love, but she had never been published. She wrote to her husband, "I love you," and then turned the page, leading to the conclusion of the novel, "I love you." The new addition is the result of an agreement between Hemingway's family and the publisher.


Music Festivals Make a Move Into New York

By JANET MARGOLIN

If you think there’s a new crop of music festivals moving eastward to New York this summer, you’re not imagining things. For years, the conventional wisdom among concert promoters was that New York, with its long winters and high rent, could not support festivals. But this summer, several major music festivals have announced plans to move into New York City.

With tickets sales declining, festivals of all sizes have become big business. And as the music industry continues to evolve, so does the way music festivals are marketed and consumed. This summer, the number of large-scale music festivals in the city has tripled.

"Festivals are becoming more diverse and inclusive," said John B. McIlvaine, a consultant for New York-based concert promoters. "They’re tapping into the local music scene, and bringing in people from all over the world."
Writing a Werewolf Myth, and Making It His Own

By JOHN WILLIAMS

Glen Duncan's novel "The Last Werewolf" was inspired by a 16th-century werewolf trial that Duncan heard about in the course of his research. He was so fascinated by the story that he decided to write a novel about it. The result, "The Last Werewolf," is a contemporary retelling of the myth of the werewolf, with a modern twist.

The novel follows the story of a 16th-century wolf-hunter who has been transformed into a werewolf by a curse. As he battles against the forces of darkness, he must also confront his own past and the consequences of his actions.

Duncan's novel is a work of fiction, but it is also a commentary on the human condition. In the novel, the werewolf is a symbol of the darker side of humanity, and the story explores the themes of guilt, redemption, and the struggle between good and evil.

Overall, "The Last Werewolf" is a compelling and engrossing read, and it is sure to appeal to fans of the werewolf genre as well as anyone interested in the history and mythology of the creature.
Shakespeare in Slang and Many Other Tongues at a London Festival

An endurance event Along the Games.

The show's success has seen it travel around the world, with more than 400 performances in 20 countries. It has been hailed as a "landmark event" and a "breakthrough" in the world of Shakespeare. The performers have been praised for their "unbelievable energy" and "unwavering determination." The show has been described as "a true work of art" and "an incredible achievement." It has inspired people of all ages and backgrounds to come together and celebrate the power of language and the human spirit.
A Pop Sweetie With Edge: Following Katy Perry on Tour

Katy Perry: Part of Me chronicles the star’s 2012 concert tour. The礎enlifies the personas that contemporary commercial music encompasses.

Music Festivals Seek Success as They Move Into New York City

The Governors Ball music festival brought fans to Randall’s Island for two days in June.

As albums sales decline, five shows are more important.

The new edition, with more than 300,000 visitors, made a significant impact on the local and national music scene.

Music festivals have become a major part of the music industry, attracting millions of fans and generating millions of dollars for artists and venues alike.
Arc of a Writer

A blog for writers. Word of the week. Writing prompts. Interviews with professional writers, editors, and agents.

Stories have arcs. Characters have arcs. Writers have arcs. We write, we get better at our craft. We read, we get better at our craft. We interact with other writers, we get better at our craft. The Arc of a Writer is an interactive blog about writing. Visit regularly for thoughts, ideas, and information about writing. Submit your own material, use the weekly prompts. Whether you are a professional writer or just starting out, hobby or career. We are all in this together. Welcome.

Contact: Elena Hartwell - piaaryte@gmail.com http://www.elenasartwell.com

Writers Should... Write every day...

Use prompts to get yourself writing. Don't edit. Give yourself a set amount of time. 5-15 minutes is fine! Write from your own voice or write from a character. Learn something new about what you are currently working on. Use it in your work or just get yourself writing.

Like what you wrote? Email a maximum of 500 words to me. I will post submissions.

Learn New Words... Check for the word of the week

Loss: A Play
About a Violin
Premieres with Driftwood Players
January 10 - 13, 2013
Check back for details

A Busy November

Stories About Dead People
Because sometimes collaboration happens... storiesaboutdeadpeople.blogspot.com

Scripts Available Through...
Indie Theater Now

In Our Name

Spotlight on Ivan Doig

As you may know from my previous posts, I am currently adapting Ivan Doig's novel Prairie Nocturne for Book-It Repertory Theatre's production, opening Feb 7 and running through March 4th.

In addition to getting to work with the exquisite language of Ivan Doig, I've also had the privilege of meeting Ivan and his wife Carol. And two finer people I can't imagine. Luckily for us, Ivan agreed to an interview to coincide with the production. You'll find below Part I of the interview. Part II will be posted Feb 15th.

Renowned author of numerous novels such as The Whistling Season and Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Ivan has also published works of non-fiction. Born in Montana, and raised in the rarefied air of the Rocky Mountain Front, Doig brings his gift for language to his stories. Like a modern-day Shakespeare, Doig's literary fiction blends poetry with action and puts words together, that once heard, you realize could be said no other way.

Many of his characters, though universal in their trials and travails, are also uniquely western in their speech and indomitable spirits. Descriptions of the wide open spaces and sparseness of man and forestry, brings into the imagination of any reader, the vast inimitable beauty of the far western reaches of the United States.

Doig also locates novels in his current home, that of the Pacific Northwest, and those of us here are pleased to claim him as our own.

He is the self described "red-headed only child, son of ranch hand Charlie Doig and ranch cook Berneta Ringer Doig ... who in his junior year of high school ... made up his mind to be a writer of some kind."

*See his website at www.ivandoig.com

Pages

Home
Final Words of Wisdom
Past Interviews
Stories, Cont.
Past Words/Prompts
Special Features
Elena Recommends

Next Month's Spotlight On...
Check back for the March Spotlight

Prompt for the Week:
January 29
After my death, I'd like to be remembered for...

Word(s) for the Week:
January 29
Catafalque: A decorated platform which a coffin rests on during a funeral.

In the Roman Catholic Church, a coffin shaped structure, draped with a pall, used to represent the corpse at a requiem Mass after the burial.

Pall: A drape for a coffin, usually in black, purple or white velvet.
Ivan Doig Part I

Describe your writing process.
When I’m asked, at book signings and readings, what my working habits are, I tend to say something like “pathological diligence,” the patience of one of the odd patron saints of our trade, the late Flannery O’Connor, has always guided me in the long devotion of the writer’s backside to the seat of the chair where he or she sits and works. Flannery O’Connor was ill, most of her short writing life, but her collection of letters shows her to have been a dedicated sardonic professional, as when she gave this unbeatable version of the experience of looking over one’s own writing: “I have just corrected the page proofs and I spent a lot of time getting ‘seems’ and ‘as if’ constructions out of it. It was like getting ticks off a dog.”

This is what she had to say about a writer’s necessary state of patience: “I’m a full-time believer in writing habits, pedestrian as it all may sound. You may be able to do without them if you have genius but most of us only have talent and this is simply something that has to be assisted all the time by physical and mental habits or it dries up and blows away… of course you have to make your habits in this conform to what you can do. I write only about two hours every day because that’s all the energy I have, but I don’t let anything interfere with those two hours, at the same time and the same place. This doesn’t mean I produce much out of the two hours. Sometimes I work for months and have to throw everything away, but I don’t think any of that was time wasted.”

And then her conclusion, which I believe is at the heart of being a professional writer: “The fact is that if you don’t sit there every day, the day it would come well, you won’t be sitting there.”

Ultimately, Flannery O’Connor’s advice does add up, I believe. In my case, I began as a journalist, and so from the start did not believe in that malady called “writer’s block” -- I never did meet a newspaper or magazine editor who would say, “Oh, that’s all right, we’ll just run a blank space there where you can’t think of anything to say.” The point always is to get something down on paper: describe the character, make up dialogue, dig something out of your pocket notebook or laptop.

Thus I get up early -- still on the lifelong ranch clock where the chores start at daybreak -- and by 6:30 or so am beginning the morning’s work. With time out for a two-mile walk around our neighborhood with my wife Carol, I keep at the words until lunch, and if I don’t have my quota in that maximum productive four or so hours which seems to be the creative limit in most of us, I go back to the first drafting in the afternoon; if I already have the words I’ll do research or edit myself in that half of the day.
In any case, I write a given number of words a day on a manuscript, a given number of days a week, a given number of weeks a year. This varies from book to book, so that the job isn’t a permanent assembly line--on novels such as The Whistling Season, The Eleventh Man, Work Song and the forthcoming The Bartender’s Tale it’s been four hundred words a day. That’s two triple-spaced typed pages—it may not sound like much, but trust me, it’s a day’s work.

What’s it like having your work re-imagined by (playwright/production)
It’s intriguing to have my cast of characters become an actual theatrical one. Over the years I’ve been asked countless times who should play so-and-so in my books, something I’ve only whimsically indulged in once myself. When the movie rights to my first novel, The Sea Runners, were bought (although we’re still waiting for the movie after a couple of decades), I was asked who should play the four men who escape by canoe from Russian servitude in Alaska in 1853, and I chose Robert Duvall, for all four roles.

More recently, the associated Press reviewer of Work Song wrote that he could absolutely see Johnny Depp as Morrie and Nicole Kidman as Grace. Don’t I wish.

But now I am in the fortunate position of leaning back in a Book-It seat and watching the population of my imagination in Prairie Nocturne come to life onstage, and I couldn’t be more pleased to make their acquaintance.

Your work is informed by the landscape of Montana/West, what about that region captures your artistic eye?
Throughout my teenage years in Montana, the Rocky Mountain Front was practically a neighbor, although an upscale one, to the buffalo-grass benchlands where my family worked on sheep ranches. Just over the craggy horizon lay “The Bob,” the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area that is the million-acre heart of the northern Rockies. But out of reach to the likes of us, fading remnants of the lariat proletariat; hired hands do not go on hikes nor pricey pack trips.

Yet that monumental geography seemed to me a natural setting for the trilogy I set out to write in the 1980’s. -- English Creek, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, and Ride With Me, Mariah Montana -- my fictional Two Medicine country, as I have made of it, has become the home country of my characters in several other books, as I suppose it is for my imagination.

Put simply, those unforgettable mountains and plains give me rich metaphoric possibilities — and it should be noted that the very different Northwest Coast has done the same in two other of my books, The Sea Runners and Winter Brothers. I am always mindful of trying to write not regionally, but about that larger country -- life -- by putting my imagination to work as poetically and stylistically as I can on the face of
the earth as well as the features of my characters.

Check in February 15 for Part II...
Ivan Doig Part II

For Part I - see post below

How has your approach to your material/process changed over the years and novels?
The wordmaking process really hasn’t changed much over the years and the soon-to-be fourteen books. I still rely on file cards that preserve turns of phrase, dossier details of my characters, and touches for imagined scenes, as well as a pocket notebook to always, always get down an idea or good phrase as soon as I think of it—memory and good intentions are not our friends in that instance, folks—but of course the computer has come into it. For me it’s still a mixed blessing—an aid in revising, you bet, but also a soul-draining screen to stare at and that invention of the devil, the mouse, to torment my hand and wrist, unlike the honest both-handed ten-fingered workmanship of the typewriter, which I still do use for much of my rough drafting.

What do you feel most impacted your writing process or career?
The acceptance of This House of Sky, way back in 1978, and its subsequent success—reviews that were a writer’s dream, acclaim which carried it into the finals for the National Book Award where it lost by a single vote—set me up to write the books after that. If there’s any one lesson in Sky’s record, maybe it’s to be found in the diary I kept during the writing of it, where I set down that I was determined to make the language dance, to try to make each sentence of the book have “a trap of poetry” within it. I estimate that I rewrote the opening page, starting with its much-cited first sentences —“Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother’s breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.”—some seventy-five times to get it right.

What are you working on now?
I’m at the fortunate point of having a next book and then the next next one I’m working on.

First, published this fall, will be The Bartender’s Tale, the novel about a father and son left on their own in a shifting world—a tale in itself as old as kinship, but ever new in the way “the bachelor saloonkeeper with a streak of frost in his black pompadour and the inquisitive 12-year-old boy who had been an accident between the sheets” go about life in a small western town in 1960.

Meanwhile, I’m writing a sequel to the well-received Work Song--more Morrie! More Butte! Yes. Morris Morgan, the “Walking encyclopedia”
from the one-room school in The Whistling Season and the subsequent Butte novel now returns--arm in arm with his bride, Grace--at the start of the Twenties to open another front in the perpetual war against the oligopolistic Anaconda Copper Mining Company, also known as "the snakes." This one will likely reach print late next year or early '13, the writer says with crossed fingers.

Final Words of wisdom
Keep a journal or diary to strengthen the habit of writing regularly. And write in it on bad days as well as good ones; the words don't know the difference.

Ivan Doig Part I

Describe your writing process.
When I'm asked, at book signings and readings, what my working habits are, I tend to say something like "pathological diligence," the patience of one of the odd patron saints of our trade, the late Flannery O'Connor, has always guided me in the long devotion of the writer's backside to the seat of the chair where he or she sits and works. Flannery O'Connor was ill, most of her short writing life, but her collection of letters show her to have been a dedicated sardonic professional, as when she gave this unbeatable version of the experience of looking over one's own writing: "I have just corrected the page proofs and I spent a lot of time getting 'seems' and 'as if' constructions out of it. It was like getting ticks off a dog."

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Russell Hoban, ‘Frances’ Author, Dies at 86

By BRUCE WEBER

Russell Hoban, a prolific author who created Frances, a girl who appeared in the guise of a badge, a Warning, seven books for children, and Riddley Walker, the eponymous narrator of a widely praised post-apocalyptic novel for adults, died on Tuesday in London. He was 86.

His death was confirmed by his daughter Phoebe, who said that she was unsure of the exact cause but that her father had recently received a diagnosis of congestive heart failure.

Mr. Hoban had a brilliant and distinctive career. Trained as an illustrator, he wrote copy for advertising agencies and produced paintings for books and magazines, including several for Sports Illustrated and the original Marvel comic magazine. His illustrations included a portrait of Holden Caulfield, the fictional protagonist of J. D. Salinger’s “Catcher in the Rye,” and cover portraits of Joan Baez and Jackie Gleason that the subjects, Mr. Hoban said, did not like.

He began writing children’s books in the late 1960s. His first, “What Does It Do and How Does It Work?”, featured Mr. Hoban’s own drawings of dump trucks, steam shovels and other heavy machinery. But he didn’t care for illustrating his own books, and his second title, “Bedtime for Frances”, a gentle tale about the delaying tactics of a child being sent off to bed, was illustrated by Garth Williams, with Frances as a furry little badger.

In the six Frances books that followed, including “A Baby Sister for Frances,” “A Birthday for Frances” and a poetry collection, “Egg Thrones” and “Other Frances Songs,” the illustrator was Mr. Hoban’s wife, Lillian.

All told Mr. Hoban wrote more than 50 books for children of various ages, from tots to adolescents—inspiring such titles as “The Story of a Mouse Who Became a Writer,” “What Happened When Jack and Daisy Tried to Feel the Tooth Fairies” and “The Mouse and His Child”—most of them before he turned his attention to writing adult fiction in the 1970s.

He proved to be a novelist with an expansive, eccentric imagination for language, for settings and for plot, a free molder of realism, psychological astuteness, historical research and science fiction. The Independent in London once referred to him as "the strangest writer in Britain."

His “Turtle Diary” (1975) was about a man who lures lonely middle-aged people obsessed with freeing sea turtles from the zoo and returning them to the ocean. It was made into a 1985 movie with a screenplay by Harold Pinter, starring Brenda Jackson and Ben Kingsley.

In “Fülgemann” (1983), set during the 18th-century, middle-aged people believe in a pilgrimage to Jerusalem by a castrated German Jew. In “The Medusa Frequency” (1987), set in contemporary Lon-
don, he wrote of a blocked novelist who becomes obsessed with the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice by way of his encounter with a severed head that keeps resurfacing as various familiar objects—a cabbage, a football, a grapefruit.

By most critical accounts, Mr. Hoban’s greatest triumph was "Riddley Walker" (1980), which he set some 2,000 years in the future, in Canterbury, England. A nuclear holocaust has long ago decimated human civilization, and a mostly slave population labors in the thral of an unseemly band of rulers who are determined to unear the long-buried detritus of their ancestors, hoping to find clues to the great secrets of the past — airplanes, for instance, or "boats in the ayr," as they are called.

The narrator, Riddley, is a young renegade in flight from his enslavement. What many reviewers cited as the novel’s signal achievement, or at least its most apparent, was the invention of a language — a "worn-down, broken-apart kind of English," Mr. Hoban called it — that reflected both the withered remains of a tongue no longer in use and the liveliness and creativity of the human need to name things. The government, for instance, might be referred to as "the Pry Mincer;" "plombery" is diplomacy; "Arshad of Cambro" is the Archbishop of Canterbury; and, more vividly, atomic energy becomes "Litt Shynin Man the Addum." "Where we wan standing you cud hear the sea beyond us in the dark," Riddley says in a passage in which he describes rules of a power plant. "Breaving and sying breaving and sying it wort like them machines wer breaving and sying in their sleep."

Most reviewers were dazzled by Mr. Hoban’s facility with sounds and spellings, his narrative command, his visual clarity and his sophisticated, ecstatic sensibility.

"Set in a remote future and composed in an English nobody ever spoke or wrote, this short, swiftly paced tale juxtaposes pre-literate fable and Beckettian wit, Boschian monstrosities and a hero with Huck Finn’s heart and charm, lighting by El Greco and jokes by Punch and Judy," Benjamin DeMott wrote on the front page of The New York Times Book Review. "It is a wrenching- ly vivid report on the texture of life after Doomsday.

Russell Connell Hoban was born in Lansdale, Pa., west of Trenton, N.J., and north of Philadelphia, on Feb. 4, 1925. His parents were Ukrainian immigrants who owned a newstand in Philadelphia. His father, who died when Russell was 12, also worked as an advertising manager for The Jewish Daily Forward.

After high school he attended art school in Philadelphia and served in the Army Europe during World War II, earning a Bronze Star. At his death he was awaiting publication of a new book, "Snoochid," due early next year.

"Writing was my father’s life," Phoebe Hoban said Wednesday, "and when he died he had done what he needed to do." Mr. Hoban had lived in London since 1969. His first marriage ended in divorce. He is survived by his wife, the former Gindula Abl, their three sons, Jake, Ben and Wieland; four children from his first marriage to Lillian Aberman: three daughters, Phoebe, Ersne and Julia, and a son, Bron; and 13 grandchildren.

In "The Moment Under the Moment," a 1992 collection of his writings, Mr. Hoban discussed his literary motivation.

"The most that a writer can do and this is only rarely achieved — is to write in such a way that the reader finds himself in a place where the unwordable happens off the page," he wrote. "Most of the time it doesn’t happen but trying for it is part of being the hunting-and-finding animal one is. This process is what I care about."
Russian City Embraces the Soul of Hockey

“While we can sign players from other teams from all over Russia, but they are not ours, and will not soon become so,” said Dmitri Lyukov, another local fan, who plays in an amateur league with Fedotov. “Much was done in the last 20 years. An average team was made into one of the best. This is now destroyed and it will take a lot of time to rebuild.”

In the emotional crush that followed the plane crash in September, the team’s executives were faced with a difficult choice. Some, including K.H.L. officials, wanted Lokomotiv to push ahead with the current season, using borrowed players from other clubs. There was no shortage of volunteers, but Lokomotiv officials said they thought such an option would be unacceptable to their fans and a blow to the memory of the lost team.

The club pulled out of this year’s K.H.L. season and made all the right, riskily but necessarily decision. The new team, it decided, would be built around the players of the Lokomotiv junior squad, a team of 18- to 22-year-olds who were short on experience but much loved in Yaroslavl, where the junior team is affectionately known as Loko.

The job of molding them into a professional team was handled to Pyotr Vorobyov, a veteran coach known for his ability to develop young talent. Vorobyov coached the Yaroslavl professional team to its first Russian league championship in 1997, when the club was still known by its Soviet-era name, Torpedo.

“The president and other leaders of our club approached this intelligently and perhaps nobly and honestly, and I honestly made the correct decision in my opinion,” Vorobyov said. “They considered the issue and decided not to build the team on the graves of people who were just killed. They decided not to rush, to allow for the bodies to cool in their graves and rebuild the team gradually on the basis of the youth team.

The club will have less than a year to do so. Loko played its first game of the season on Oct. 6 at the new arena. Emotions were still strained. The team lost to the Chelyabinsk Polar Bears, 3-2.

“Since then, the team’s fortunes have improved. It rose to the top of the Volga Conference in the Youth Hockey League, or M.H.L. And this week it moved up to the Higher Hockey League, or V.H.L., a professional league that is a Russian equivalent to the American Hockey League. The team was clearly ready.”

A Roster’s Rebirth

This is the first article in a series that will examine the effort to rebuild Yaroslavlo Lokomotiv, the elite Russian hockey team whose players, coaches and support staff were killed in a plane crash in September.

ONLINE: More coverage and photographs:
nytimes.com/lokomotiv

Loko, though, has been forced to consider recruiting players from other teams to fill out its ranks. Vorobyov, the coach, said he was looking to bolster the team with second-tier players from other clubs, who he says can be more easily molded to fit Loko’s needs. Ultimately, as the team heads into the K.H.L. next season, it will begin to do what the other highly competitive teams in the league do: draft foreigners, a process that fans are watching with some trepidation. Vorobyov said such choices were unavoidable, and not a betrayal of the plan to keep the team as closely linked to Yaroslavl as possible.

But most satisfying to Vorobyov is the hope that the best of current team — as many as 10 players — could eventually form the core of a reconstituted Lokomotiv roster.

Among them is the team’s captain, Malcolm Zaytsev, a 20-year-old forward.

Almetyevsk, 5'-11"

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Almetyevsk, 5'-11"
Elena—
music - Teresa director;
plays many instruments
Mrs. Eus

#1 - Desc. writing process

#2 - What life to have work re-imagined
by playwright/actor etc.?

#3 - What act region captures my virgin & artistic heart?

#4 - How has approach & process jointly changed over yrs.?

#5 - What impacted career? (lot polish)

#6 - What working on now

#7 - Final words / wisdom
  - sentence or 2 to aspiring writers
Answers for Elena’s blog:

1. When I’m asked, at book signings and readings, what my working habits are, I tend to say something like “pathological diligence.” The patience of one of the odd patron saints of our trade, the late Flannery O’Connor, has always guided me in the long devotion of the writer’s backside to the seat of the chair where he or she sits and works. Flannery O’Connor was ill, most of her short writing life, but her collection of letters show her to have been a dedicated sardonic professional, as when she gave this unbeatable version of the experience of looking over one’s own writing: “I have just corrected the page proofs and I spent a lot of time getting ‘seems’ and ‘as if’ constructions out of it. It was like getting ticks off a dog.”

This is what she had to say about a writer’s necessary state of patience:

“I’m a full-time believer in writing habits, pedestrian as it all may sound. You may be able to do without them if you have genius but most of us only have talent and this is simply something that has to be assisted all the time by physical and mental habits or it dries up and blows away... Of course you have to make your habits in this conform to what you can do. I write only about two hours every day because that’s all the energy I have, but I don’t let anything interfere with those two hours, at the same time and the same place. This doesn’t mean I produce much out of the two hours. Sometimes I work for months and have to throw everything away, but I don’t think any of that was time wasted....”

And then her conclusion which I believe is at the heart of being a professional writer:

“The fact is that if you don’t sit there every day, the day it would come well, you won’t be sitting there.”

Ultimately, Flannery O’Connor’s advice does add up, I believe. In my case, I began as a journalist, and so from the start did not believe in that malady called “writer’s block”—I never did meet a newspaper or magazine editor who would say, “Oh, that’s all right, we’ll just run a blank space there where you can’t think of anything to say.” The point always is to get something down on paper: describe a character, make up dialogue, dig something out of your pocket notebook or laptop. Thus I get up early—still on the lifelong ranch clock where the chores start at daybreak—and by 6:30 or so am beginning the morning’s work. With time out for a two-mile walk around our neighborhood with my wife Carol, I keep at the words until lunch, and if I don’t have my quota in that maximum productive four or so hours which seems to be the creative limit in most of us, I go back to the first-drafting in the afternoon; if I already have the words, I’ll do research or edit myself in that half of the day. In any case, I write a given number of words a day on a manuscript, a given number of days a week, a given number of weeks a year. This varies from book to book, so that the job isn’t a permanent assembly line—on novels such as The Whistling Season, The Eleventh Man, Work Song and the forthcoming The Bartender’s Tale it’s been four hundred words a day. That’s two triple-spaced typed pages—it may not sound like much, but trust me, it’s a day’s work.

2. It’s intriguing to have my cast of characters become an actual theatrical one. Over the years I’ve been asked countless times who should play so-and-so in my books, something I’ve only whimsically indulged in once myself. When the movie rights to my first novel, The Sea Runners, were bought (although we’re still waiting for the movie after a couple of decades), I was asked who should play the
four men who escape by canoe from Russian servitude in Alaska in 1853, and I chose Robert Duvall, for all four roles.

More recently, the Associated Press reviewer of *Work Song* wrote that he could absolutely see Johnny Depp as Morrie and Nicole Kidman as Grace. Don’t I wish.

But now I am in the fortunate position of leaning back in a Book-It seat and watching the population of my imagination in *Prairie Nocturne* come to life onstage, and I couldn’t be more pleased to make their acquaintance.

3. Throughout my teenage years in Montana, the Rocky Mountain Front was practically a neighbor, although an upscale one, to the buffalo-grass benchlands where my family worked on sheep ranches. Just over the craggy horizon lay “The Bob,” the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area that is the million-acre heart of the northern Rockies. But out of reach to the likes of us, fading remnants of the lariat proletariat; hired hands do not go on hikes nor pricey pack trips. Yet that monumental geography seemed to me a natural setting for the trilogy I set out to write in the 1980’s--*English Creek*, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, and *Ride With Me, Mariah Montana*--my fictional Two Medicine country, as I have made of it, has become the home country of my characters in several other books, as I suppose it is for my imagination. Put simply, those unforgettable mountains and plains give me rich metaphoric possibilities--and it should be noted that the very different Northwest Coast has done the same in two other of my books, *The Sea Runners* and *Winter Brothers*. I am always mindful of trying to write not regionally, but about that larger country--life--by putting my imagination to work as poetically and stylistically as I can on the face of the earth as well as the features of my characters.

4. The wordmaking process really hasn’t changed much over the years and the soon-to-be fourteen books. I still rely on file cards that preserve turns of phrase, dossier details of my characters, and touches for imagined scenes, as well as a pocket notebook to always, always get down an idea or good phrase as soon as I think of it--memory and good intentions are not our friends in that instance, folks--but of course the computer has come into it. For me it’s still a mixed blessing--an aid in revising, you bet, but also a soul-draining screen to stare at and that invention of the devil, the mouse, to torment my hand and wrist, unlike the honest both-handed ten-fingered workmanship of the typewriter, which I still do use for much of my rough drafting.

5. The acceptance of *This House of Sky*, way back in 1978, and its subsequent success--reviews that were a writer’s dream, acclaim which carried it into the finals for the National Book Award where it lost by a single vote--set me up to write the books after that. If there’s any one lesson in *Sky*’s record, maybe it’s to be found in the diary I kept during the writing of it, where I set down that I was determined to make the language dance, to try to make each sentence of the book have “a trap of poetry” within it. I estimate that I rewrote the opening page, starting with its much-cited first sentences--“Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother’s breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.”--some seventy-five times to get it right.

6. I’m at the fortunate point of having a next book and then the *next* next one I’m working on.

First, published this fall, will be *The Bartender’s Tale*, the novel about a father and son left on their own in a shifting world--a tale in itself as old as kinship, but ever new in the way “the bachelor saloonkeeper with a streak of frost
in his black pompadour and the inquisitive 12-year-old boy who had been an accident between the sheets” go about life in a small western town in 1960.

Meanwhile I’m writing a sequel to the well-received Work Song—more Morrie! more Butte! Yes, Morris Morgan, the “walking encyclopedia” from the one-room school in The Whistling Season and the subsequent Butte novel now returns—arm in arm with his bride, Grace—at the start of the Twenties to open another front in the perpetual war against the oligopolistic Anaconda Copper Mining Company, also known as “the snakes.” This one will likely reach print late next year or early ’13, the writer says with crossed fingers.

7. Keep a journal or diary to strengthen the habit of writing regularly. And write in it on bad days as well as good ones; the words don’t know the difference.

###
Put on board, Wednesday:

A                piano
B                spats
C
D
F

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!
In the beginning is the language. That's what stories ultimately about, whether they're in the form of a book, or tv, or film, or computer. We live by stories--our own memories are the stories we tell ourselves--and what's magical about stories is the way they're told, about the language always trying to excel itself, say something in a new way, say "hey, listen to this!"

Every group has its own lingo. Student slang...

Ace
Bullet
C--hook
Death
Flag

OK, in the Sea Runners...characters of the 19th century:
how do they talk?

--Proverbs: (read 10 March '81 jnl entry)
--cussing: rough guys (Journal of Verbal Abuse) (bad language)
--signatures of each character's talk: Wennberg's double contractions
  p. 15--shouldn't've
  p. 252--I'd've

So, part of writing is the character's language; the other part is the writer's language. The writer's job is to make sounds on paper. You may hear them with your eye rather than your ear, but let me show you a few examples of details on the page that help make the sounds of the story, as the reader hears it.

p. 70--Palong! Palong! (not Bang! Bang! I went to Sitka, I heard those chimes at midnight...)

p. 117--Wennerg. Here in the first 80 yds..., much.

The look of the pages can tell some of the story, make a subliminal sound, in the same way. If you page slowly thru the last 25 pp. of Sea Runners, you won't find any page with more than 1 break--white space--between scenes; that's the portion of the book where these guys are confined. The look of the pages is slow, old-fangled; it's all print, no jump-cuts, no MTV, right? On p. 35, the pages begin to look different as there are these bursts of activity getting ready for the escape; 3 white spaces between scenes...quicker scenes, quicker paragraphs. The look of the pages themselves change the pace of the book. By pp. 171 & 173, paragraphs are shorter and more numerous, to match the many days of the escape downcoast, the rhythm of those sixty-some days coming, going.

(if time: Proxy-Tom Harry dialogue--

"Shannon, what the bejesus is going on over there, Latin lessons? You're supposed to be out on the floor--"

"He's a little riled up, Tom. I'll--"

"--dancing, not gassing the sonofabitch--"

"--make up the difference on the dance take and--"

"--right away with some yayhoo crying in his--"

"Tom, I have to!" (small caps)

Two last things on this kind of craft of language, both having to do with Karlsson. Notice that as the situation of the last 2 Sea Runners gets more desperate, Karlsson's interior thoughts get more ragged. Again, it's right there on the page because I put it on the page that way. P. 267 examples--just phrases.

My final point is from maybe the most obvious of the sounds on the page in the book, on p. 68 where Karlsson sings in a pretend-drunk way and the capitals and doubling up of letters render how he sings it. That kind of technique--any of these uses of craft, once you learn them--can be carried over into any other kind of writing. An example here in a book that could scarcely be more different from the Sea Runners (The Commitments, pp. 50-51)---about a gang of Irish dom-and-outter would-be musicians who decide to play soul rock-and-roll, James Brown, Otis Redding, Stevie Wonder type of music. Joey the Lips is an old trumpet player who supposedly has been a background man to all these singers, and here he starts to take the Commitments thru What Becomes of the Broken Hearted, by Jimmy Ruffin.)
Put on board, Tuesday:

A  piana
B  spots
C
D
F

Buxtehude

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!
Call me Ishmael. Wonderful in itself, but even better if you know the Bible verse...

Faulkner, The Bear: "There was a man and a dog too this time." What makes it work is "this time"—saying implicitly, what about the other times?

Book of Genesis, 16:12—"his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of his brethren."
Young Writers:

1. If you’re going to be a writer, you have to write. Regularly. It doesn’t count if you make up the best story in the world but you don’t get it down on paper or into the computer and it just whistles off and is lost forever. A couple of ways you can form the habit of writing regularly:

--A diary. If you can write and think, you’re never too young to have a diary, to put down anything interesting that happened to you that day. (Susie? “stinkbug’) Read: Julia diary.

--a notebook, to write down something you’ve thought of. (Donny, my 11-year-old: Why can we snap our fingers and not our toes?)

2. You have to be interested in other people--your stories can’t be just all about yourself. So, you have to pay attention to what other people look like, how they talk, who they are, names, noises, and noses.

Whistling Season: a one-room school a hundred years ago. Pass around schoolhouse pic; show my folks’ pics.

--Names change. (Paul? Damon? Tobias?) Say you’re going to write a story about someone who is going to invent the car, a hundred years ago, but it’s going to fly as well as go along the road. That person can’t be named (girl’s name) or (boy’s name), those simply were not used back then. (Mildred, Dewey)

--How does a person sound--what noises does she or he make, in talking, or laughing, or whatever? (Oliver)

--Noses--I mean by that the facial description of a character. The nose is often the most prominent feature, so does the person you’re writing about have a big nose, a ski-jump nose, a nose like an anteater... You have to let your reader see the person--Ray Heaney pic. (have Isaac hold while I read description)

3: The third and last thing I’d say about being a writer, you have to exercise your imagination. “What if”...Dog Bus plot.

show off Columns?
A writer has to be fickle—indeed, be a literary bigamist. 

Whatever book he is working on at the moment has to be the love of his life.
Ace
Bullet
H. C. (hook)
Death
Flag

PAGANINI (violinist who came on stage
RARE NINE "wrapped in blue flame"

BRKLYR
CARP
MESSR
REPR

EIN FANATIKER DES DETAILS (DAS HAUS DES HIMMELS)

you've got to have felony smoke to get the cuts.

CAPT. MacWhim
Dowagiac students:

--WBros, Doig boys; horse-race, girls.
--11th Man covers: Photoshop

--Ace-Bullet (ABCDF wd have been 1-room grades)
--diary: my high school one (not the way to do it)/Ellen Creek

--intersperse: period of their qns, then I talk

--Despite ourselves, we do have something in common: I'm a former teenager, and hard as it is to believe at the moment, you're future gray geezers like me.

- show-script markings
10:35 @ C's office, or go to 14:10

--"Slushai" example (also possible: the Jane---historical laws of gravity)

--show and tell: Peter Doig papers (my letter; his nat'zn papers; map of h'stead)

--sheep shears (demonstrate; read section)

Systems: file cds; pocket notebook; desk calendar

--writing 800 wds/day; hashmarks; write nonconsecutively, make it pile up.

Don't be hesitant abt your own skills; see it as process of improvement.
It doesn't come out right the 1st time: don't be afraid of drafts: retyping, getting in in
Easier to write a portion every day than whole thing at once; the fingers
also furthers the organic process of writing, your cont'd thinking abt it.

How begin: get s'thing down on paper("I had a farm in Africa"; Sky lead?)
-find device, question or quotation or incident; maybe cut it later
Resume by beginning in middle of sentence. Or: I try think ahead to next day, make notes.

Timelines: you can't get everything done; put aside what doesn't really count; use
spare time etc. as reward to yourself, bribe yourself.

"The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the
largest amount of feathers with the least amount of hissing."
(Colbert, fin'ce min'r to Louis 14)
That's pretty much what a writer does, nag at his language to sit up straight and stop sharing its corn flakes with the dog...
Craft:

--difference, journalism to fiction: you must invest emotion in characters (heart on sleeve in my P-I piece), across years, where you don’t—and probably don’t dare—short-span, in news stories.

--free to make things up in fiction (not in non-fiction; I detest the phrase “creative nonfiction”). Sins: composite characters, approximations of conversations, interior thoughts of characters.

--resources: journals, diaries—habit of regular serious writing.
--notebooks, filecards (lingo); dossier on my main characters, maybe pics
--Spy Jansen 1st entry
--insides of language: slang, barroom toasts
--Maledicta, the Journal of Verbal Abuse

--rhythms:

--word order: Faulkner, “There was a man and a dog too this time.”

- work routine: must be able to stand yourself alone, for long periods
  - make words add up, day by day
  - don’t write consecutively (long day in newspaper)
  - regular: Flannery O’Connor

Bougainville
1943

1

Never much of a town for showing off, Gros Ventre waited around one last bend in the road, suppertime lights coming on here and there beneath its roof of trees. As the bus headed up the quiet main street toward the hotel, where the lobby served as bus depot, Ben Reinking saw the single lighted storefront on the block with the bank and the beauty shop. Of course. Thursday night. His father putting the newspaper to bed after this week’s press run.

“Here will do,” he called to the driver.

The bus driver jammed on the brakes and heaved himself around to take a better look at this final passenger. Using all the breath he could summon, the man let out slowly: “I’ll be goddamned. You’re him. Awful sorry, Lieutenant, I didn’t—”

“I’ll live.” Most civilians could not read the obscure shoulder patch on his flight jacket, and any camouflage he could get anytime suited Ben.

Right there in the middle of the street, the driver laboriously dragged out the duffel bag from the luggage bay and presented it to him. The man looked tempted to salute. Ben murmured his thanks and turned away toward the premises of the *Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner*. Well, he told himself as he swung along under the burden of his duffel, now to see whether his father had picked up any news about the repeal of the law of averages, as it apparently had been.
Career:

ranch hands: lariat proletariat

journalism school at Northwestern

--jobs not taken or that did not take me:

--Montana draft board: Reston letter; Dave Botter dying, I need job...

--Decatur, Lindsay-Schaub: Nov. 22 ’63, 7 editorial writers having lunch

--Wall St. Journal picked up one of my editorials--invited to apply

--Magazine, slower pace: The Rotarian, circulation 900,000; budget,

        Kilpatrick, Sydney Harris, sainted Murray Morgan, Dolly C?

The west, to UW grad school, notion of becoming j’lism prof

--Dick Hainey, Sunday mag byline, Hearst’s Chicago American

UW history seminars: but freelancing, and began writing poetry

--turned down job halfway up the tenure track at Indiana U.; C’s job

--U. of New Mexico, Hillerman letter (pattern: self-unemployable)

Ten years of freelancing: eventually too financially preposterous

--Meanwhile at work on Sky; if there’s any arc to career, it’s toward longer
rhythms of writing and thinking to work in. I left freelancing when Sky
came out in ’78, and since then have done ten books, each of which took 2-
3 years to write. (John Marshall has a key on his computer...”prolific”--
Stephen King! Joyce Carol Oates!--but I simply see it as steady.)
Ben kept a reporter's habitual count, day by day, as he inhabited the wire room during this. His own taste of shipboard war clung in him as the reports of sunk ships rattled in on the teletypes. The carrier Princeton, gone down; someone he knew back in the distant days of pilot school was a liaison air officer aboard there. One Japanese battleship sunk, another put out of action. The destroyers Johnston, Roberts, and Hoel perished. Two more Japanese battleships and a cruiser destroyed. The escort carrier Gambier Bay, gone down; Ben himself had been on that one less than six months ago, a hop in the journey to Australia. Old visions of the gray mass of ships around him and Animal when they talked and joked at Eniwetok gripped him while he endlessly bummed coffee from the communications section clerks and sifted the constant combat reports. The five bells of a wire machine would go off again, and there were two fewer Japanese cruisers on the ocean surface. More clatter of the teletype keys and another chapter of smoke-veiled military engagement came in.

Throughout, he felt the hot breathing presence of history's proposition for a reporter, any true chronicler. The question is brought by Mnemosyne, goddess of memory, high priestess of knowledge, as she steps from the tall grove on Olympus with her closed hands held forth to you. In one is the grant of a long uninflected life, peace without pause to be looked back on. In the other lies the chance, issued only once per lifetime, to witness Waterloo from a spot within range of the guns. And in your most honest self, which would you choose? The oncoming shadow of the sea battle, not to mention the less than divine hand of Tepee Weepy, had done the choosing for him this time, in the shutdown of air traffic to the Philippines. Which hand of fate he would have chosen for himself, he was not perfectly sure. He prowled among the chatter of the teletypes vitally aware of having been spared one more time and conscientiously restless with not being out there when history pivoted on an obscure archipelago. In his reporter's vigil there was not even
Miraculous SEMINAR:

1. Turning time into printed words. Slow process - 1937's book - but the time and turn into something anyway... (read opening scene)
   - Dec. book a hit! Red uncle, pile, (moodlier, but significant)
   - how to get there - an ambition novel in stories by Labor Day of '??
   - from here:

   (dialogue is not total)

   Work habits: regular as hell at it, but... (Flannery O'Connor)
   - I don't write consecutively (read movies, etc.)
   - I've cards, files, photos
   - stories, a character (Mrs. Tideman)
   - but we must present itself: Telekans map, Gedenk's

   Voice, language: how: words sound on paper
   - shaman of language heard: story (Shyam Sundar)
   - more "meant to be heard"; Shakespeare
   - not much of a minimalist; Cheever pp.

   Sustaining: work by whacking yourself against a problem or life:
   - making form & content match; challenge of each line
   - sky, giving memory itself a voice in italic sections
   - Words, diary about a dream
   - Runners, mixing day by day tension, w/ cosmic voice
   - Trilogy, deliberate 10-yo gamble to me. West's own poetry of vernacular
   - Heart Earth, a technique I call "deliberate dream"

   20-25 after: Crocodile factor: hand out Whippet pic(s)
   - explain Darwin & Javaalas
   (collision of faith, religion, communism & engineering)
sentence structure sometimes helps the meaning of the words:
Faulkner's "The Bear": "There was a man and a dog too this time."
"bougainvillea"
blurts of rodeo announcer
road rhythm, Mariah p. 215

(Immediately implied: what about other times?)

"All that summer long she was out in the bougainvillea, kissing college boys."
kinetic prose: RG Vildt in Scorpio Rising, p. 45:

"Over near the curb, perched on a candy wrapper, a monarch butterfly rocked back and forth, its orange-and-black wings, veined like a church window, slowly opening, opening and closing, opening and closing like breathing. In the fall those things migrate clear to Mexico."

--"opening and closing" is like the breathing, also is like the butterfly's wings, larger words on either side of the small "and" body. Sentence would be even better by nicking out "slowly". Next sentence, "In the fall...", takes off from the precision of the previous describing one, is as general and slightly loose as the butterfly's flight, as migration, is.
No longer resentful, I felt sad, pained that I had worked for so many years willfully pursuing what must now be cast aside. My sorrow welled up. I thought of those who had died, whom I had disappointed. Think of the sorrow I had caused Craig Wylie. My God, had I hastened his death?

As I thought of John's strong recommendation that the last chapter be shortened (maybe by half), I recalled the countless months I had searched for diaries and letters that described the previously unpublished story of thousands leaving San Francisco, sailing in scores of ships to Panama City, struggling through the fevered jungle to Chagres, sailing back to East Coast ports, and finally returning to their families. What a dénouement.

Now I must cut, ruthlessly, that major achievement? I felt a sense of despair. But I knew he was right, that the last chapter dragged on too long, causing the reader to feel impatient. I had suspected as much, as that chapter developed as a testament to my scholarly skills, as evidence of my admirable perseverance.

To accept John's advice would require months of work. How many? What could I say this time to Houghton Mifflin? What if, at long last (and in the face of what would surely seem like disloyalty), Houghton Mifflin told me they had had enough of my "fiddling," enough of my broken promises?

Through August I avoided trying to answer those questions. I worked as never before, not telling Ruth Hapgood anything about my new thinking, my new sense of purpose. I rented a small room in a third-rate building in downtown San Francisco. A single window opened into an air well, embellished with a dead pigeon. I labored in that room, slept there many a night, ate there...[and] made wonderful progress.

research, Swain's diary had become burdened with all I wanted my reader to learn from what I had discovered about the California gold rush. In contrast, John constantly reminded me: "Let the reader identify with William Swain, he's the reader's alter ego." That advice required eliminating years of work. A painful process, like amputation. I wondered if Houghton Mifflin would ever make such a diagnosis.

September passed, and I could not forecast a completion date. At night I worried and felt more fearful. And then more fearful when I decided to be deceitful. I would not tell Houghton Mifflin the truth, that I was working under the guidance of a new editor. But I would tell them the other truth, that I did not know when, if ever, I would finish—which led me to the hope that they would allow me to escape not only my 1950 contract and its 1970 renewal-revision but even more. I wanted release from my moral commitment to Houghton Mifflin. Could I make such a request knowing I had no right to expect their agreement?

My nights of worry finally brought me to the morning of October 3, 1979, when I wrote to Ruth Hapgood. That fateful letter is scattered with misspellings, words crossed out—reflections of my anguish.

Ruth, I must face reality. I no longer want to not will accept the feeling of guilt and my ever deepening sense of failure to meet yet another promised deadline. I cannot go on like this. Therefore, I write to you to tell you that I must be free to reassess this ancient project which has been central to my life yet has failed for endless years to give me the confidence and satisfaction that comes with completion. Now I find it is essential for me to look at A Pocketful of Rocks and decide for myself—not for HMC—what I want to do with it.

And so I have concluded that I must withdraw from my involvement with HMC. I suspect that your reaction will be a sense of the inevitable coming true.

I am enclosing my check for $3,000 to repay HMC for the money advanced to me so many years ago. I request cancellation of my contract.

I regret, deeply, that after all these years we have only this disappointment to share. Thank you Ruth and Dick McDaid and others before you, for your encouragement and for so many years of patience.

Respectfully and regrettefully...

With the patent dignity so characteristic of Houghton Mifflin (of Craig Wylie!), Ruth responded on October 12, 1979:

I can't tell you how disappointed we all are to have this beautiful manuscript 99 44/100hds percent finished and then have you withdraw it. And after all these years, it's making a terrible break with tradition. However, you know your own problems best, and so we regretfully accept the $3,000 which repays your advances and cancel the contract for Pocketful of Rocks originally signed by you in November 1950...I can certainly see how you wish to get this book off your neck...If you ever take it up again with a view to commercial publication, I do hope you agree with us that our twenty-nine years of enthusiastic support of this project have earned us a new chance at publishing it...All good luck to you in your next career and do keep in touch with your friends at HMC.

More ashamed and guilt-ridden than relieved, I was now free to continue with my revisions and surgery, for months, for years if need be. But would I be able to satisfy John Dodd's requirements? Did I have the confidence to carry on? Or would I, finally, give up, escape? The habit of the book had become so deeply centered in my life that I knew the answer. Some day, some final moment, my work would be finished.

In late November, John Dodd telephoned from New York. To my amazement he reported that he had taken the revised chapters for the purpose of proposing that Simon & Schuster publish my book. Would I come, immediately, to meet him? Why? He would say no more.

We met at Bemelman's Bar. Before I could order a drink, John told me—with dramatic details—that he had presented his proposal that very morning to the editorial board. The vote was unanimous—to publish my book. In response, I began to cry. I retreated to the men's...
So, part of writing is the character's language; the other part is the writer's language. The writer's job is to make sounds on paper. You maybe hear them with your eye rather than your ear, but let me show you a few examples of details on the page that help make the sounds of the story, as the reader hears it.

p. 70--Palong! Palong! (not Bong! Bong!--I went to Sitka, I heard those chimes at midnight...)

p. 1147--Wenberg: Here's in the first 80 yds..., much.
my writing was going, my stiff reciprocal questions about his latest fishing luck, his hunting plans for that autumn.
Old bandits gone civil. When dumptrucks and graders at last paused, he would declare, "Okay, she's a go" and flag me on through to the fresh-fixed patch of blacktop.
And I can only believe this was how the dying Wally saw his mending action of willing the letters to me, a betterment.

But before any of this, before the gnarl in our family history that brought me back and back to that wintry cemetery, he was a sailor on the Ault.

I am feeling pretty good, much better than anytime so far since I've been down here. Charlie is the one that isn't well.

A few of the letters in the packet duffeled home from the Pacific are blurry from water stains, but this first one by my mother to her sailor brother makes all too clear that we have traded predicament in Montana for predicament in Arizona.

My parents and my father's sister Anna and her husband Joe and the five-year-old dirtmover that was me had thrown what we had into a Ford coupe and a pinballled our way down through the West a thousand and fifty miles, ration books straining from gas station to gas station along U.S. 89, me most of the time intrepidly shelved crosswise in the coupe's rear window, until we rolled to a halt in Phoenix the night before Thanksgiving of 1944.
The next Monday my father and Joe latched on as Aluminum Company of America factory hands and our great sunward swerve settled into Alzona Park orbit.

Unit 119B, where the five of us crammed in, consisted of a few cubicles of brown composition board, bare floors and windows howlingly curtainless until my mother could stand it no longer and hung some dimestore chintz; along with fifty-five hundred other Alzonans, we were war-loyally putting up with packing crate living conditions. But pulling in money hand over fist: my father and Joe drawing fat hourly wages at the aluminum plant—hourly, for guys who counted themselves lucky to make any money by the month in Montana ranchwork. Surely this, the state of Arizona humming and buzzing with defense plants and military bases installed for the war, this must be the craved new world, the shores of Social Security and the sugar trees of overtime. True, the product of defense work wasn't as indubitable as a sheep or cow. Aluminum screeched through the cutting area where Dad and Joe worked and a half-mile of factory later was shunted out as bomber wings, but all in between was secret. For the 119B batch of us to try to figure out the alchemy, my father smuggled out down his pant leg a whatzit from the wing plant. I remember the thing as about the size of the business end of a branding iron, the approximate shape of a flying V, pale as ice and almost weightless, so light to hold it was a little spooky. "I'll bet ye can't tell me what this is," Dad challenged as he plunked down the contraband piece of metal to wow my mother and Anna and me and for that matter his brother-in-law Joe. Actually he had no more idea than any of the rest of us what the mystifying gizmo was, but it must have done something supportive in the wing of a bombing plane.

Like light, time is both particle and wave. Even as that far winter of our lives traced itself as a single Arizona
Writing is like a life-long hunch. I can never entirely explain it, tell how it happens or just where I want it to go...
What I want to get at, for the next several minutes before we reach the main part of this—your questions—is the craft that goes into the words on the page. "The poetry under the prose," as I once heard Norman Maclean phrase it. Every prose writer who is at all interested in style will try for this in her or his own way, but I know that, in my own case, when I was working on my first book, This House of Sky, I wrote a reminder to myself in one of my notebooks: "Each sentence should have a trap of poetry."

I since have backed off a little from "each sentence" needing that, but I still write as if plenty of them need it. The book I'm going to yank examples out of is my novel "The Sea Runners." (3 incarnations since published in '62; read first line of back cover as description of plot.)

I wanted the book to have a 19th Centuryish hint of style, to match the time of the story, 1853. So, in my mind I did the narrational voice in

So, I deliberately did it in an old-fangled narrative way, as if the story always had existed and just was waiting to be told by some mid-air voice. (p. 202, graf "Out of their winter rust..."

But I also wanted the characters—who are the heart of any book—to be people of their time. In all 8 of my books, soon to be nine, I've worked on what I call "a poetry of the vernacular" in my characters, in how they talk. These four indentured Swedes in Russian America (Alaska) in the mid-19th century—what did I know about how they would talk?

—They would swear a lot. They would cuss their lot, and their employers, as working men people always have. They were rough guys, and not to dwell on the splendors of their cussing, but I will point out that you can do research, even of the scholarly sort, on something like this. (The Journal of Verbal Abuse)