NYT June 16 '08

Editorial Observer /LAWRENCE DOWNES

In a Changing World of News, an Elegy for Copy Editors

I went to the Newseum, a shiny new building in Washington that news companies and foundations have erected as a shrine to their industry. Since it's my industry, too, I thought a museum, where sacred relics and texts have been placed safely in the equivalent of a big glass jar, might make me hopeful about the future.

"Where's the section on copy editing?" I asked the guy at the entrance.

He wasn't sure. "Try Internet, TV and Radio, on the third floor."

"For copy editing? Newspaper copy editing?"

He checked with a colleague. "News History, on five," she said.

Ouch. Copy editors are my favorite people in the news business, and many I know are still alive and doing what they do. As it happened, I couldn't find anything about them on the fifth or any other floor. A call later confirmed that the museum has essentially nothing about how newspapers are made today, and thus nothing about the lowly yet exalted copy editor.

I was one for a long time, and I know that obscurity and unpopularity are part of the job. Copy editors work late hours and can get testy. They never sign their work.

As for what they do, here's the short version: After news happens in the chaos and clutter of the real world, it travels through a reporter's mind, a photographer's eye, a notebook and camera lens, into computer files, then through multiple layers of editing. Copy editors handle the final transition to an ink-on-paper object. On the news-factory floor, they do the refining and packaging. They trim words, fix grammar, punctuation and style, write headlines and captions.

But they also do a lot more. Copy editors are the last set of eyes before yours.

> You could call them museum pieces, but they aren't even that.

They are more powerful than proofreaders. They untangle twisted prose. They are surgeons, removing growths of error and irrelevance; they are minimalist chefs, straining fat. Their goal is to make sure that the day's work of a newspaper staff becomes an object of lasting beauty and excellence once it hits the presses.

Yeah. Presses. It has probably already struck you how irrelevant many of these skills may seem in the endlessly shifting, eternal glow of the Web.

The copy editor's job, to the extent possible under deadline, is to slow down, think things through, do the math and ask the irritating question. His or her main creative outlet, writing clever headlines, is problematic online, because allusive wordplay doesn't necessarily generate Google hits. And Google makes everyone an expert, so the aging copy editor's trivia-packed brain and synonym collection seem not to count for as much anymore.

The job hasn't disappeared yet, but it is swiftly evolving, away from an emphasis on style and consistency, from making a physical object perfect the first time. The path to excellence is now through speed, agility and creativity in using multiple expressive outlets for information in all its shapes and sounds.

As newspapers lose money and readers, they have been shedding great swaths of expensive expertise. They have been forced to shrink or eliminate the multiply redundant levels of editing that distinguish their kind of journalism from what you find on TV, radio and much of the Web. Copy editors are being bought out or forced out; they are dying and not being replaced.

Webby doesn't necessarily mean sloppy, of course, and online news operations will shine with all the brilliance that the journalists who create them can bring. But in that world of the perpetual present tense — post it now, fix it later, update constantly — old-time, persnickety editing may be a luxury in which only a few large news operations will indulge. It will be an artisanal product, like monastery honey and wooden yachts.

It would be nice, at least, to thank the copy editors on the way out. But after visiting the Newseum, I know what I have suspected for a few years: if newspaper copy editors vanish from the earth, no one is going to notice.

These thoughts were interrupted by a loud voice from the sidewalk. I looked and saw a man standing at the bus stop with two nicely dressed boys who might have been 6 and 4. "Un!" he shouted, then, "Deux!" followed by "Trois!" and on to: "Dix! That's how you count in French! In French!" The two boys paid unwavering attention, particularly the elder.

"Want to hear how you count in Hungarian?" the father yelled, and without waiting for an answer, began counting in, as far as I could tell, that language. Their

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morning, I heard the swishing brushes of a street-cleaning truck and saw piles of fallen buds. I was thinking "too bad spring colors are leaving" when I jumped at the operator's impatient beep.

The moment I looked around and found the trouble — a white Taurus had yet to yield its curbside spot — my eyes feasted on quite a performance. Behind the cleaning behemoth, three cars, each strategically angled, were simultaneously backing up to the curb. A fourth car was waiting for the machine to pass before it could take its turn.

My focus shifted to the parking sign above. Even with a half-hour to go before the north-side spots would be legal, this was a true show of parking expertise!

Renee L. Klaperman

Dear Diary:

An overcast spring day, not too warm or cool. Street fair on Park Avenue South, which naturally leads me to take in the farmers'

lace are still in place.

Mary-Ellen Banashek

Dear Diary:

On a crowded Q train bound for Manhattan, a woman in gray standing in front of me told a lady in blue next to her that a "roach" was crawling on her shoulder. The lady in blue flicked the bug in panic, and it flew off, landing on the gray lady's chest. The gray lady jumped in anger as she flicked the "roach" onto the next person.

That set off a chain reaction in which people started hopping, dodging and yelping in the crowded train.

The bug wasn't a cockroach; it was a *gnat*.

Finally, all calmed down and the woman in gray sheepishly said to me:

"Well, I had to tell her. You know, conductors keep saying if you see something, say something, so I said something."

A chorus of laughter swept the train. *Tinmarla Oo*

Ben answered, "The president is going to give his daughter away tomorrow." *Carol Loomis*

Dear Diary:

I was crossing Seventh Avenue from Pennsylvania Station on my way to work last month when I noticed the usual double-decker tour bus filled with tourists with cameras snapping away. I was used to the routine by now: At the corner of 34th and Seventh, these tourists would all stand up, stare at the Empire State Building, and snap away.

But today was different; as the wind picked up speed, an entire pile of that day's newspapers were lifted from the sidewalk and went sailing all over: through the air, down the street, into people's faces.

So instead of the tourists staring at the Empire State Building in awe, they were staring at the flying newspapers and snapping as many photos as they could.

Hayley Kucich

a stake in the arguments, including Ian Marvy, one of the founders and the executive director of Added Value, a community farm on a concrete lot directly across Beard Street from Ikea. "There's real apprehension," he said during an interview at his

Monica Byrne, one of the owners of Tini, a bar on Van Brunt Street, also was generally supportive of the store's presence. "If it was a Wal-Mart, I'd be protesting," she said. "This could be a really good thing."



BESS GREENBERG/ THE NEW YORK TIMES

Looking across Beard Street in Red Hook, from Annabelle's bar and restaurant to Ikea, the Swedish home furnishings store.

students: write down slang of today,
take a look back at it in 5, 10 yrs

Loveland lunch session, Sept. 14 '07:

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 today's session into some thoughts I have about a few of the things that go into various pieces 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.

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 as readers rather than to me as the carpenter of my books. 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.

So, in the beginning is the language. That's what stories are ultimately about, whether they're in the form of a book, or television, or film, or now on computer. We live by stories--our own memories are the stories we tell ourselves--and what's magical about stories is the <u>way</u> they're told, about the language

always trying to excel itself, say something in a new way, say "hey, listen to this!"

Looking back at the diary I kept during the writing of my first book, **This House of Sky**, I find that I was determined to make the language dance. In those diary pages are musings and urgings to myself to always push the language toward unexpected beauty-- as I said to myself at one point, to try to make each sentence of the book have "a trap of poetry" within it. The opening page of **This House of Sky**, not coincidentally, shows this-- and so, here is that FIRST page:

"Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.

The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all.

It starts, early in the mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range of southwestern Montana. The single sound is hidden water--the south fork of Sixteenmile Creek diving down its willow-masked gulch. The

stream flees north through this secret and peopleless land until, under the fir-dark flanks of Hatfield Mountain, a bow of meadow makes the riffled water curl wide to the west. At this interruption, a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully, and atop it, like a sentry box over the frontier between the sly creek and the prodding meadow, perches our single-room herding cabin."

Okay, a few of the things that I hope are going on in those seven sentences:

--In the opening sentence, I am of course drawing on the appalling power of coincidence, of birthday and deathday. That's the kind of arresting fact that brings a gulp to the eyes, and the

side of me that is a professional writer--and was even back then--knew to work with that. But I also wanted the book off to a fast stylistic start--after all, that opening sentence could have been "On my sixth birthday, my mother died" and there is a kind of power to that but it's a cold forensic power--and so I chose a sentence with some beats of rhythm in it and a pair of opposing action-catching verbs: "wheezed," and then "quieted." Extreme labor of breathing, and then lull--the sentence conveying that sequence.

--Which sets the stage for the next sentence, not even a sentence but a snapped-off one, a phrase: "And then stopped."

With the verb there a surprise final emotional jolt on the breathing sequence of the opening sentence, and the verb itself emulating what I'm setting out to convey, when it stops that sentence and that paragraph.

The next pair of sentences I would say are atmospheric, invoking the mood of memory with words such as "remembering," "tellings," "urgings," and again the conclusive word choice emulating what I'm seeking to convey, "the first sudden edge of it all" and then the immediate lead into the next paragraph, the first bit of physical setting, "It starts--early in the

mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range."

--Now we come to the immediate description of the creek, a tighter focus of the physical setting. And there the verbs are out of the ordinary. Way out. "The stream flees... the meadow makes the riffled water curl wide...

And then a little innovation which has won me a lot of admiration and condemnation, the use of a noun as a verb: "A low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up..." As if the mountain terrain itself were a living part of this story, as I wanted to imply.

A couple of other things that aren't there by accident: The modifiers, the adjectives in particular, aren't bashful. "...willow-masked gulch..." "fir-dark flanks..." "...the riffled water..." "the sly creek and the prodding meadow..." This is not your stripped-down Hemingway style which was the expected mode in writing about the American West back in the 1970's, when I was putting this book together.

Finally, let me mention a dab of rhythm, there on the page: "The single sound is hidden water..." I can't remember how deliberate that was, but certainly semi-consciously there's a familiar rhythm from poetry: "The single sound is hidden

water...” Hear it? Of a certain generation, we probably all learned something like that rhythm best from Robert Frost: “whose **woods** these **are** I **think** I **know.**”

Or we can go back to the most holy source of all, Shakespeare: “To **be** or **not** to **be**--that **is** the ques**tion”**

It’s iambic, isn’t it--an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable-- as in iambic pentameter, a deliberate poetic beat. I’ve always believed 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. In the World War II novel I’m working on now, a fighter plane squadron commander is

having to deal with a pilot who wants to be transferred because of lack of seniority. The commander could just say something like, "I know it's hard to be way down there on the seniority list." But instead, what gets said is: "It's tough to be low schmoe on the totem pole." Hear it again?--I can't do it in best Shakespearean actor style, but roughly--"It's **tough** to **be** low **schmoe** on the **to**tem **pole."** Doing the sentence that way also gives a couple of chances for that wordplay I mentioned earlier--the interior rhymes of "low" and "schmoe," and the half-rhymes of "**to**tem **pole**."

Anyway, back to that page where "The single sound is hidden water..."--that's one page, out of 314 in **This House of Sky**,

and while I can't say all the rest got worked over identically to that, they all did get worked over.

Starting with that book, I've always tried to attain a language which makes a shimmer behind the story--the appeal, the wonder, of the vernacular of people's lives coming through. Any kind of work has its own vocabulary, its own "poetry under the prose," and people are dauntingly eloquent at it. I found that, time and again, as I went around with my tape recorder when I was doing the research for **This House of Sky**. Pete McCabe, for instance, my dad's favorite bartender, telling me of the dying-off generation of sheepherders and ranch hands who populated his

Stockman bar when I used to come in there as a kid with my dad--they were "just waitin' for the marble farm," Pete put it, and told me about setting them up a free beer now and then-- "You know they'd like to have one and don't have the money for it, and I never lost anything doing it for 'em."

That carried over into my fiction, which now amounts to eight and two-thirds novels--World War II is not done yet, in my head--and I'd like to turn now to my Montana trilogy--**Dancing at the Rascal Fair, English Creek,** and **Ride With Me, Mariah Montana**--to discuss a bit more of the insides of writing.

These three books, which took nearly a decade of my life, are something that I committed deliberately. Sometime in the early 1980s, I made the decision that I would spend the 1980's doing a trio of books which would take place from Montana's entrance into the Union in 1889 to its centennial of statehood--and that I would do so by creating one central family, the McCaskills. They start off on a homestead, go on through forest rangering and ranching, and by 1989, the fourth generation is Mariah, a flame-haired willowy hard-swearing hotshot photographer for a Missoula newspaper. (One of the unexpected consequences of creating Mariah McCaskill is that ever since, single guys sidle up to me at

booksignings and bashfully ask if I have an available daughter named...Mariah.) The Montana trilogy would take up the rest of our day if I took you all the way through the plots and characters, so you're going to get writerly tidbits instead.

--One thing I quite consciously did was to have that vernacular "shimmer" of everyday talk evolve across the century of the triloogy. A quick example, three generations of drinking toasts in barrooms:

--In **Dancing at the Rascal Fair,**the main characters are fairly fresh from Scotland, and so one of them hoists a glass and says, "Broth to the ill, stilts to the lame!"

--Then comes **English Creek,** the 1930's and young Jick McCaskill in his first encounters with alcohol tries out "Here's how!" and at a not particularly appropriate moment, another saloon saying of the time, "Here's lead in your pencil!"

--Now **Ride With Me, Mariah Montana,** more modern times, Jick in old age sits in a pseudo-Old West bar with Mariah and holds up his empty glass to a waitress probably named something like Kimi and says, "We'll have another round of jelly sandwiches."

Part of writing fiction, then, is doing something interesting with the language of your characters. The other part is the writer's language. And something that sounds pretty basic--the order of words in a sentence--actually has to be tinkered with, carefully, right from the first words of a book. A classic 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 it 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."

Accordingly, I tried to take a lot of care with the three opening sentences of the Montana trilogy.

--**Dancing at the Rascal Fair** opens on a dock in Scotland, where beside the emigrant ship Angus McCaskill is about to board they are pulling a cart and horse out of the River Clyde:

"To say the truth, it was not how I expected--stepping off toward America past a drowned horse."

--In **English Creek,** Jick McCaskill as a rancher in the dry, dry l930's looks with satisfaction on the recent rains that have greened up the land:

"That month of June swam into the Two Medicine country."

--And **Ride With Me, Mariah Montana**, featuring that hotshot photographer Mariah, begins at the camera lens:

"Click. From where I was sitting on the bumper of the Winnebago I was doing my utmost to outstare that camera of hers, but as usual, no such luck."

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.

--For instance, in **English Creek**, (p'back p. 193), there's a little scene where Jick is asking the old one-time forest ranger, Staanley Meixell: "Stanley, why was it you quit rangering?" That produces this line-by-line dialogue, going down the page:

"Me?"

"Uh huh, you."

"No special reason."

"Run it by me anyway."

"Naw, you'd be bored fast."

"Whyn't you let me judge of that?"

"You got better use for your ears."

"Jesus, Stanley--"

On the page, the typography of that is like half a Christmas tree, with each line going out a little farther, conveying Jick's mounting exasperation.

Now, to wrap this up, I want to show you just a dab of character creation--just a glimpse of one of my favorite characters

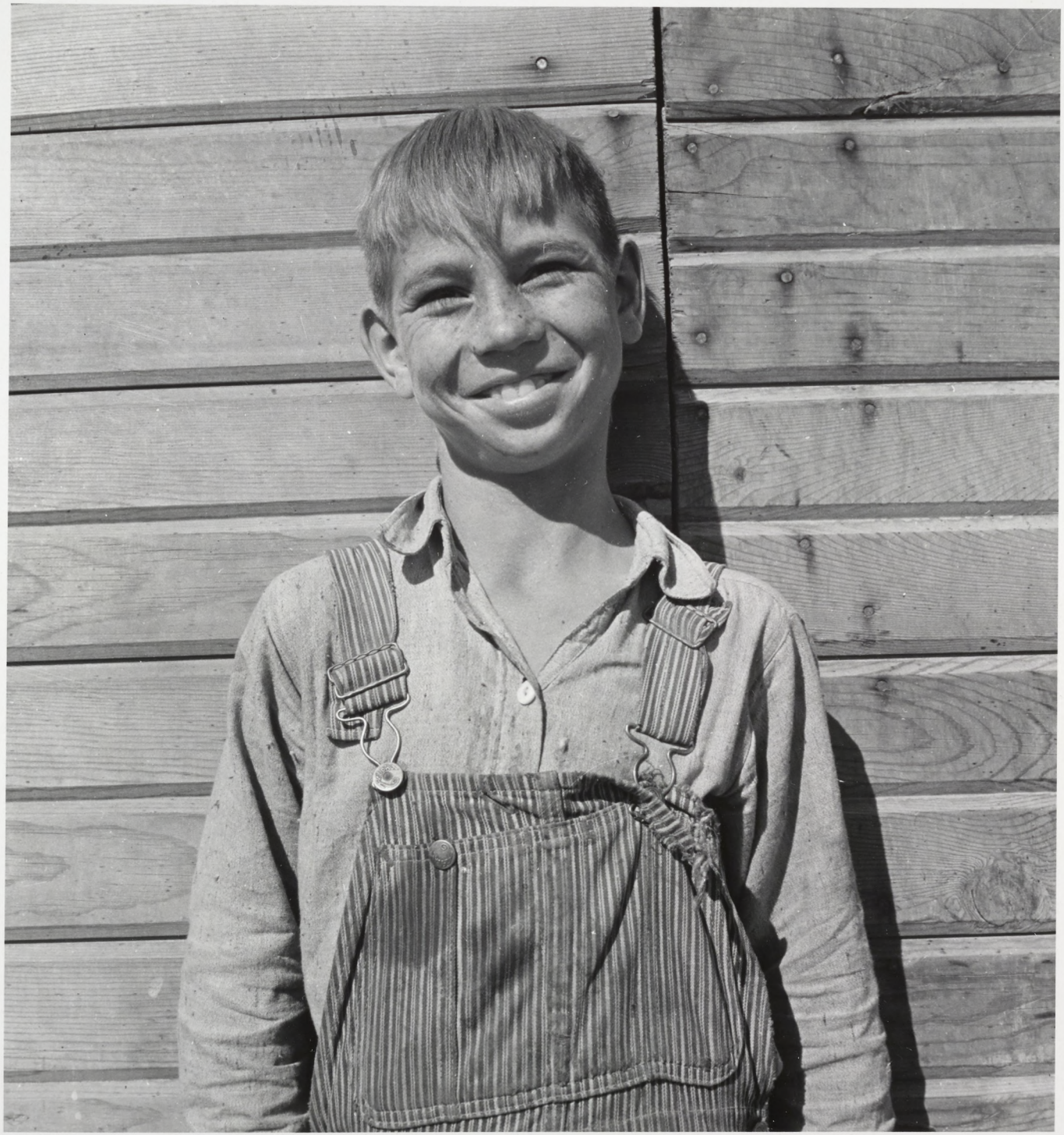
in the Montana trilogy. I sometimes dig around in old photos in dustiest parts of libraries, and on this occasion I hit gold, in a set of photos Dorothea Lange took during the Depression, when she was documenting the lives of migrant workers and other poor folk for the Farm Security Agency. Her eastern Oregon series was not as famous as some of her iconic photographs taken in the American South, but it's potent stuff. I was instantly taken with this kid (show pic)--identified only as "Boy of the Cleaver family, Malheur County, October l939)--if any of you would like a closer look, I'll have this during the conversation and book-signing afterward.

The wonderful mug of this boy, I borrowed to put on Ray Heaney, the best friend of my teen-age narrator Jick in **English Creek**. Ray Heaney is a mid-range minor character in that book, but Jick found him unforgettable from the moment he saw him, and here he comes:

"He was a haunting kid to look at. His eyes were within long deep-set arcs, as if always squinched the way you do to thread a needle. And curved over with eyebrows which wouldn't need to have been much thicker to make a couple of respectable blond mustaches. And then a flattish nose which, wide as it was, barely accomodated all the freckles assigned to it. When Ray really

grinned--I didn't see that this first day, although I was to see it thousands of times in the years ahead--deep slice-lines cut his cheeks, out opposite the corners of his mouth. Like a big set of parentheses around the grin. His lower lip was so full that it too had a slice-line under it. This kid looked more as if he'd been carved out of a pumpkin than born."

And with that bit of character-carving, let's throw this open to your questions.



return to "R Fair notes for bk club talk"

Book Club - Rascal Fair

homestead (· American land pantry)
- 1900-1920 influx to Montana; great migration

research in Scotland:
- St. Andrews, emigrants' letters home (David McNeil - Coll)
- Edinburgh, jobs bks & newspapers of · time
  - census reports for Breadin/Nethermuir
- Glasgow, for blueprints of emigrant ships & investigve reports
  - · dock @ Greenock

characters & who they come from:
- · wheelwright shop
- Lucas Barclay (details of landless man, after Sky)
- Ninian Duff, paired w/ Lucas as parentheses
- Toussaint Rennie: Metis descendants ernd Dupuyer
- McCaskills & Stevenson et horse (start, turn & tell)

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- Toussaint Rennie; Metis descendants and Dupuyer
- McCaskills & Stevenson et house (start, pause & tell)

Clifford Geertz, Cultural Anthropologist, Is Dead at 80

By ANDREW L. YARROW

Clifford Geertz, the eminent cultural anthropologist whose work focused on interpreting the symbols he believed give meaning and order to people's lives, died on Monday in Philadelphia. He was 80 and lived in Princeton, N.J.

The cause was complications after heart surgery, according to an announcement by the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where he had been on the faculty since 1970.

Best known for his theories of culture and cultural interpretation, Mr. Geertz was considered a founder of interpretive, or symbolic, anthropology. But his influence extended far beyond anthropology to many of the social sciences, and his writing had a literary flair that distinguished him from most theorists and ethnographers.

He won a National Book Critics Circle Award for "Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author" (1988), which examined four of his discipline's forebears: Bronislaw Malinowski, Ruth Benedict, E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Claude Lévi-Strauss.

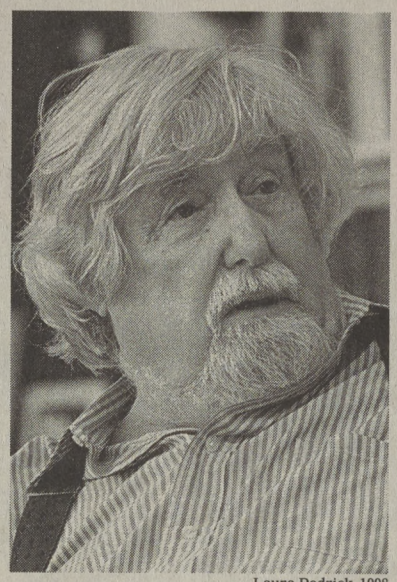
Drawing on history, psychology, philosophy and literary criticism, Mr. Geertz analyzed and decoded the meanings of rituals, art, belief systems, institutions and other "symbols," as he defined them.

"Believing with Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning," he wrote in his 1973 book, "The Interpretation of Cultures" (Basic Books). The Times Literary Supplement called the book one of the 100 most important since World War II.

Mr. Geertz also wrote voluminously on his fieldwork in Indonesia and Morocco. In one of his most widely cited essays, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," included in "The Interpretation of Cultures," he analyzed the kinship and social ties that are constructed, emphasized and maintained in this form of ritual "deep play" as if they were "an assemblage of texts."

In his writings, Mr. Geertz drew a careful distinction between culture and social structure, differentiating himself from functionalists like Lévi-Strauss, who believed that rituals, institutions and other aspects of a culture could be best understood by the purposes they serve.

Whereas social structure embraces economic, political and social life and its institutional forms, Mr. Geertz said, culture is "a system of meanings embodied in symbols" that provide people with a frame of reference to understand reality and animate their behavior. Culture, he argued, fills the gap between those things that are biological givens for our species and those we need to function in a complex, interdependent and changing world.



Laura Pedrick, 1998

Clifford Geertz

In short, in the Geertz formulation, the question to ask about cultural phenomena is not what they do, but what they mean. Mr. Geertz also argued against the idea that one could define the essence of humanity across all cultures.

"The notion that the essence of what it means to be human is most clearly revealed in those features of human culture that are universal rather than in those that are distinctive to this people or that is a prejudice that we are not obliged to share," he wrote in 1966. "It may be in the cultural particularities of people — in their oddities — that some of the most instructive revelations of what it is to be generically human are to be found."

Mr. Geertz was also deeply concerned about the anthropologist's role and the discipline's methodology. Recognizing the colonialist and Western heritage of anthropology, he believed that it was difficult for anyone from one culture to represent another accurately and meaningfully. He noted that anthropologists were hardly passive, objective observers, but rather individual creators of narratives, with their own voice.

Arguing that ethnographic reality does not exist apart from anthropologists' written versions of it, he said that cultures and peoples should speak for themselves, with anthropologists learning to "converse with them" and interpret them.

In his book "Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology" (Basic Books, 1983), Mr. Geertz also addressed the question of whether someone from one culture can objectively understand another.

For him, the anthropologist's task is to use what he called thick description to interpret symbols by observing them in use. Therefore the anthropologist must be both empirically rigorous and a savvy interpreter, akin to a psychoanalyst. In 1972 he wrote that "cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses."

Mr. Geertz's elaborate theorizing and his later doubts about the limits of anthropological knowledge left some scholars nonplussed. As Jonathan Benthall, writing in The New Statesman in 1995, said: "He disappoints some colleagues because he comes up with no overarching theories."

Clifford Geertz was born on Aug. 23, 1926, in San Francisco, the son of Clifford and Lois Geertz. During World War II, he served in the Navy.

He received a bachelor's degree in philosophy in 1950 from Antioch College, where a professor urged him to pursue his interests in values by studying anthropology. He went on to the social relations department at Harvard, where he studied with the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and the sociologist Talcott Parsons, receiving his Ph.D. in 1956.

Around this time, he did the first of a half dozen fieldwork stints in Indonesia, spending 1952 to 1954 in the central Javanese village of Pare. His early work on Indonesia combined aspects of more conventional ethnography and history with concerns about economic and political development in the wake of decolonization.

> ***Not an experimental science but 'an interpretive one in search of meaning.'***

"The Religion of Java" (1960), his first major work, is an ethnographic description of Javanese religion. "Agricultural Involution" (1963) takes a big-picture view of modernization and economic development in the wake of Indonesian independence, while "Peddlers and Princes" (1963) focuses on development from the more microscopic level of the towns of Modjokuto in Java and Tabanan in Bali. A century of social development in Modjokuto is the subject of "The Social History of an Indonesian Town" (1965).

"Kinship in Bali" (1975), written with his first wife, the anthropologist Hildred Storey, posited "an underlying order in Balinese kinship practices" in the cultural realm of symbols, patterns and ideas, despite differences in practices, or social structure, in different parts of the island.

"Negara: The Theater State in 19th Century Bali" (1981) examined the nature of royal families in tiny pre-colonial south Balinese kingdoms, while challenging the "power-centered tradition of political theory from Machiavelli and Hobbes to Marx.

Mr. Geertz's marriage to Ms. Storey, who accompanied him on some of his early fieldwork, ended in divorce in 1982. She is a professor emeritus in the department of anthropology at Princeton. He is survived by his wife, Karen Blu, an anthropologist whom he married in 1987; his children from his first marriage, Erika Reading of Princeton, and Benjamin, of Kirkland, Wash.; and two grandchildren.

After beginning his academic career as a research associate and instructor at Harvard, Mr. Geertz spent two years in California. From 1958 to 1959, he was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto; he was later an assistant professor of anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. From 1960 until 1970, Mr. Geertz taught at the University of Chicago, becoming a full professor in 1964. He joined the Institute for Advanced Study in 1970 as its first Professor of the Social Sciences and from 1978 to '79 taught at Oxford University.

Because of political turmoil in Indonesia, Mr. Geertz later turned his attention to Morocco, where he began doing fieldwork in the ancient village of Sefrou in 1963, returning five more times over the course of his career.

Profoundly influenced by his fieldwork there, he honed his comparative and historical approach in "Islam Observed" (1968), which the anthropologist Edmund Leach praised as "a highly insightful comparison between Islam as interpreted by Indonesians and Islam interpreted by Moroccans."

By the end of his career, Mr. Geertz had grown discouraged about the ability of social science to generalize or develop sweeping theories, concluding that circumstances are too different among cultures, across time, and within societies. At the same time, he was heartened by the what he called the deprovincialization of anthropology, as the profession came to embrace ever more Asian, Middle Eastern and other non-Western scholars.

In his 1995 memoir, "After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist," Mr. Geertz eloquently meditated on his field work and academic career, concluding that anthropology is "an excellent way, interesting, dismaying, useful and amusing, to expend a life."

Payroll™



ect Day

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.

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.

IT STARTS IN SCHOOL—

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

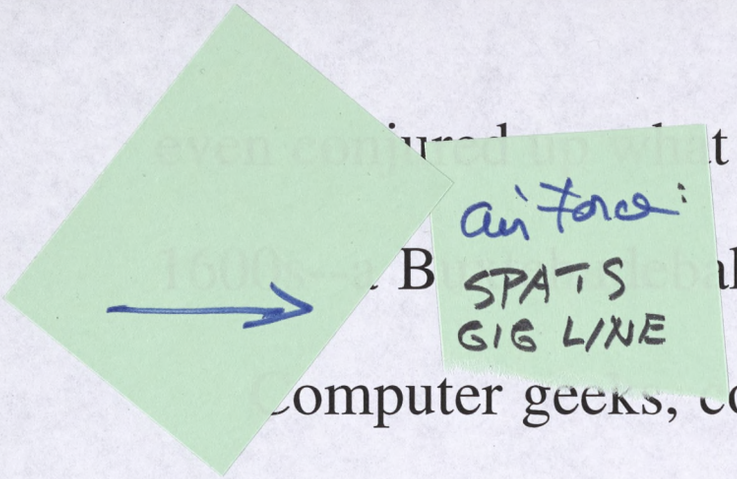
--A couple of eternal topics that produce student slang, money and music. Not many years ago my wife's community college students would have said, "You've got to have felony snaps to get the cuts." ["You've got to have a lot of money to buy the music.] And I get a kick out of: "Buxtehude" **[on board]** 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

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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

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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]

Blue

10 March '81--The month's name is apt so far; the past 7 writing days, I've marched on schedule, averaging 5 pp./day as intended. Most of it is choppy, written by the graf, sometimes just a sentence lifted from the file cards; it's the effort to get a critical mass accumulated, so I can get the revising and adding-to underway.

Today during the walk up to Sh'line (~~and maybe the sauna there~~), occurred to me to add the couple of proverbial bits--paper is the schoolman's forest, etc.--to the Rosenberg scene, and to say something here about the effort I'm making ~~with~~ to put a proverbial sound into this ms. The aim is to tap into the interest proverbs hold for us; they're nuggets of idea and language, and we all respond to their gleam. Thus, the proverbial tang of M's dialogue; and I'm considering whether to put biblical flavor into W's interior monologues. Have ransacked a number of books of seamen's slang and the like, to pattern M's talk on. Also, I trust that my proverbs aren't diluted too much by the fact that a number of them, I've made up.

--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 make the sounds of the story, as the reader hears it.

--[Blake poem **on board**: kids, think of it as rap. Use poem blue sheet]

This was a famous, famous poem, with a couple of verses we've all encountered:

"And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?

...

I will not cease from Mental Fight
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
in England's green and pleasant Land."

--Wm Blake, Milton, preface

Between those two verses are this, which I think is an astounding little piece of writing:

--To a certain generation of us, it's also known as the "Chariots of Fire" movie theme music.

--See how it intensifies, how the items get bigger--bow... arrows... spear ~~chariot of fire~~. But see what it does right here (at clouds, unfold"); the words on the page, the sounds on the paper, stop for a moment. As if those clouds are unfolding. And then here it comes, through the opening in those clouds, "Bring me my chariot of fire!"

--the carrying power of words: Blake died in 1827
--"Tiger, tiger, burning bright/in the forests of the night"
--where he put "unfold," he had other choices: bold, cold, old...

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** a**bout** the **street** at **night**"... Hear it?

"whose **woods** these **are** I **think** I **know**"...

"To **be** or **not** to **be**--that **is** the ques**tion**"

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~~ IT 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."

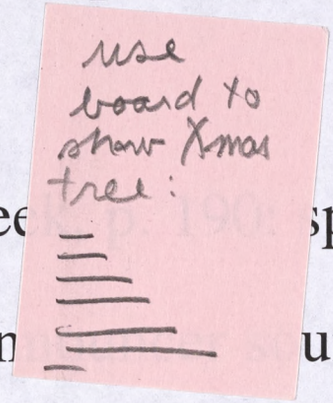
"The man had a dog with him this time."

"A dog accompanied the man this time."

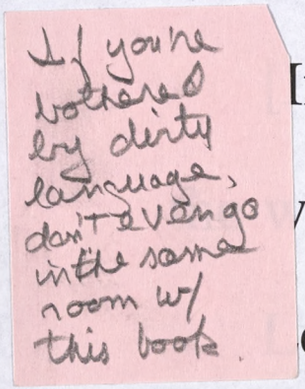
None of those have quite the acceleration and the kick there in the tail of the sentence, of "There was a man and a dog too this time."

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.

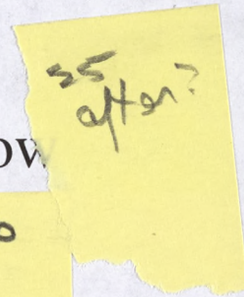
--English Creek, p. 199: Jick's mounting exasperation, half a Christmas tree...



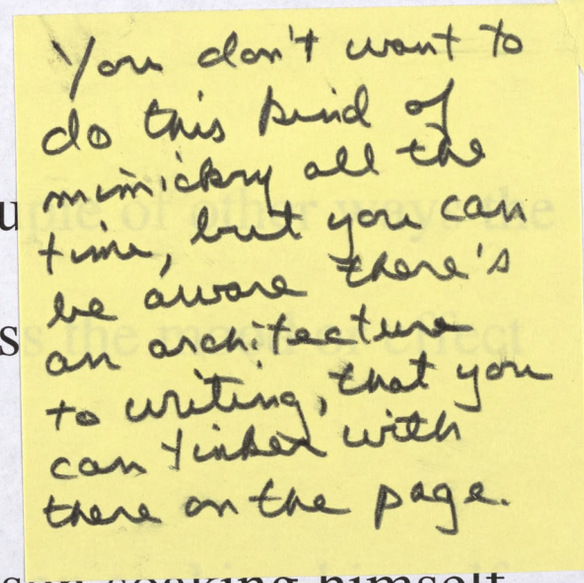
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[If time allows: The Commitments, mimicking music by how words are placed on the page...]



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-- English Creek, p. 226: Wisdom Johnson soaking himself sober...

--English Creek, p. 199: Jick's mounting exasperation, half a Christmas tree...

-- English Creek, p. 190: spaced-apart words to mimick 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.

intended here, and that's the way it did happen. Off up the South Fork our fathers rode to eyeball a stand of timber which interested Ed for buckrake teeth he could sell at his lumber yard, and Ray and I were left to entertain one another.

Living out there at English Creek I always was stumped about what of my existence would interest any other boy in the world. There was the knoll with the view all the way to the Sweetgrass Hills, but somehow I felt that might not hold the fascination for others that it did for me. Ordinarily horses would have been on hand to ride, the best solution to the situation, but the day before, Isidor Pronovost and some CCC guys had taken all the spare ones in a big packstring to set up a spike camp for a tree-planting crew. Alec was nowhere in the picture as a possible ally; this was haying time and he was driving the scatter rake for Pete Reese. The ranger station itself was no refuge; the sun was out and my mother would never let us get away with lolling around inside, even if I could think up a reasonable loll. Matters were not at all improved by the fact that, since I still was going to the South Fork grade school and Ray went in Gros Ventre, we only knew each other by sight.

He was a haunting kid to look at. His eyes were within long deep-set arcs, as if always squinched the way you do to thread a needle. And curved over with eyebrows which wouldn't need to have been much thicker to make a couple of respectable blond mustaches. And then a flattish nose which, wide as it was, barely accommodated all the freckles assigned to it. When Ray really grinned—I didn't see that this first day, although I was to see it thousands of times in the years ahead—deep slice-lines cut his cheeks, out opposite the corners of his mouth. Like a big set of parentheses around the grin. ~~His lower lip was so full that it too had a slice-line under it.~~ This kid looked more as if he'd been carved out of a pumpkin than born. Also, even more so than a lot of us at that age, his front teeth were far ahead of the rest of him in size. In any schoolyard there always were a lot of traded jibes of "Beaver tooth!" but Ray's frontals really did seem as if they'd been made for toppling willows.

As I say, haunting. I have seen grown men, guys who ordinarily wouldn't so much as spend a glance at a boy on the street, stop and study that face of Ray's. And here he was, thank you a whole hell of a lot, my guest for this day at English Creek.

So we were afoot with one another and not knowing what to do about it, and ended up wandering the creek bank north of the ranger

-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.

put on board: All that summer long she was out in the bougainvillea,

Ace
Bullet
C hook kissing collge boys.
Death
Flag

Chariots



CARLYLE IN 1846