

P.S.

Thinking this over, a day later, in the sunlight:

First, I wonder whether I would gain anything, if I would not, indeed, lose by telling this story in first person. For a direct character story of the P. Dutchman it might be better; but it would remove point of view a considerable distance in some cases. Also, the narrative character would need to be old enough to be of keen perception, or his observations would be too superficial.

My main problem is to get a narrative thread. I do not want it to be the story of the way the P. Dutchman lived a simple good life and achieved an adequate success, though he did that. I want it, rather, to be the sum of the stories of these people who touched his life. You might see them come into the store to trade, go out and down the street to the post office, get into their rigs, pick up the lines and cluck to their horses. Drab looking men and women living uneventful lives in or near a colorless little Kansas town. But if you knew, there was plenty of comedy and tragedy, love and hate, triumph and defeat.

There was not much surface splash when things happened. Scott Hodge didn't divorce his wife when he learned she was meeting Sam Marchant down at his creek plow field. They went on living together and how things were at home was anybody's guess. And Nellie Marchant didn't grieve herself to death when she picked up the headless body of her son one morning after a nitro glycerine wagon had exploded on a city street. And Lawrence Good didn't go after his wife Thelma when she packed up and went to California with Windy Peters, leaving Lawrence their seven children to raise. They all just went on living.

Now, how to tie the stories together, to make some sort of nucleus. There have been some precedents. Sherwood Anderson's, "Winesburg, Ohio" of course. And George Milburn's "Catalog" and his "Oklahoma Town". But I would like to do something different. Something not so like the 1920's... American Mercury style. Norman Mailer told a lot of stories about a lot of people, but they were tied together by a war.

The reason I keep thinking of the P. Dutchman is that he was the recipient of many of the stories, sometimes acting as peacemaker or go-between; and always, of course, aware of undercurrents and with a knowledge of people's economic affairs. Much, too, that was humorous happened in connection with the store. The generosity of people came to light, and their penuriousness and honesty and religion and bad habits. Did you ever hear of a nutmeg addict? Well, there was one there. He couldn't do without it.