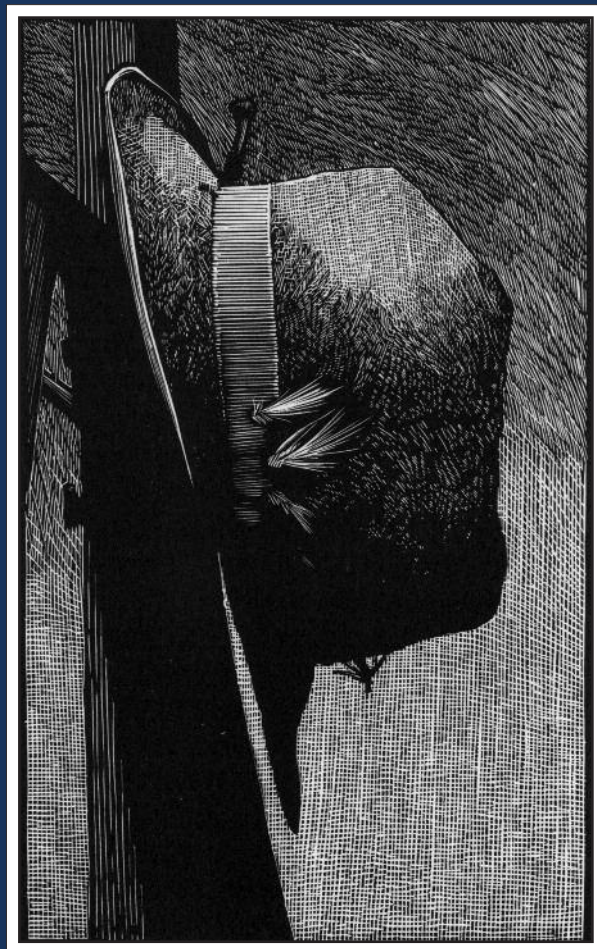


The American
Fly Fisher

Journal of the American Museum of Fly Fishing



SUMMER 2022

VOLUME 48 NUMBER 3

To Read and Watch through It

I RECENTLY TOOK a day to read Norman Maclean's 104-page novella *A River Runs Through It*, immediately after which I spent the evening watching the film adaptation. I thought this exercise might be too much, a bit draining, but here's my recommendation: Do it.

It's been thirty years since the release of "the movie," and the museum will celebrate that milestone at our annual Heritage event. When this plan was hatched, I happened to be working with Henry Hughes on a *River*-themed article. He graciously agreed to postpone publication to be part of a *River*-themed issue, which you now have before you.

I'd read the book more than once, both before and after there was a movie. I'd seen the film two or three times. But as I read and watched again, it became clear that it had been a very long time since I'd done either. The immediate opportunity to observe Robert Redford's choices—what he kept, cut, changed, condensed, expanded—was a welcome indulgence.

It's been two years since Henry Hughes sent me a query letter regarding an essay he'd written about artwork created for *A River Runs Through It*. I jumped at the chance to publish this literary art history, especially as Hughes had both worked directly with John Maclean (Norman's son) and secured artists' permission to reproduce illustrations for the article. Hughes focuses on the three editions referred to among scholars as the "Little Blue Book," the "Picture Book," and the "Pennyroyal" edition. "Images Run through It: Illustrating Maclean's Masterpiece" begins on page 2.

Not only was Hughes willing to wait to be a part of this themed issue, he also led me to Tim Schilling, who had written a piece about the movie. In "Redford's *A River Runs Through It: An Assessment of the Adaptation*" (page 15), Schilling tells the story of Redford's decision to make the film and his getting Maclean to agree to it, then suggests standards by which we might judge its success: the honoring of commitments made, artistic fidelity, how it measures up as a work of art, and its popular appeal and financial success.

And to assist the reader through that often-rocky transition from book to film, we've enlisted the help of our own trustee Rob Oden, who recounts the time he told Paul Newman that Robert Redford could not make *A River Runs Through It* into a movie—that, in fact, no one could (page 14).

George Croonenberghs grew up fishing with Norman and Paul Maclean and learned to tie flies from their father. He and his flies appear in the novella, and his flies served as

models in Barry Moser's Pennyroyal edition. A few years ago, staff discovered a fly box filled with flies tied by Croonenberghs (page 22). He doesn't appear as a character in the movie, but, as Sara Wilcox says, "because of his work as a fishing and a period advisor, his presence is woven into nearly every frame."

Our Winter 2022 issue included Jan Harold Brunvand's "Famous Thoreau Quote Is Pretty Fishy," about variations on "Many go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after." Repeated as it is, there is no evidence that Thoreau ever wrote or said this, and Brunvand, not unkindly, called out a few misquote perpetrators. Among them was Bob DeMott, who says that Brunvand was absolutely correct in doing so and discusses this in his own Notes and Comment piece, "Mea Culpa: More on the Fishy Thoreau Quotation" (page 24). The essence of this idea is everywhere, of course, including on page 42 of the first edition of Maclean's *River*: "[I]t is not fly fishing if you are not looking for answers to questions."

Finally, an editorial note. The *American Fly Fisher* relies heavily on the *Chicago Manual of Style*, published by the University of Chicago Press—the very folk who first brought us *A River Runs Through It*. CMS title style is to lowercase all prepositions (except the last word), which makes it *A River Runs through It*. But since its publication, this title has been the reluctant exception to *Chicago's* own rule. In the FAQs on the CMS website, it is noted that "a problem was encountered many years ago with our own publication of the novel *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean. According to our rules, 'through,' a preposition, would not get a capital 't' in titles. Somebody here objected to this (on the grounds of emphasis and prominence), so we capitalized it on the cover and in promotional materials." In fact, the covers of UCP editions of the books present the title in all caps, successfully avoiding the issue; indeed, UCP stuck to its guns on the contents page and the running head. (I was editorially thrilled when one of my own authors noted that *through* should be lowercase in this title.) CMS goes on: "Nonetheless, those who write about Maclean's book—or cite it—should submit to their editors. We'd write *A River Runs through It*."

This editor, in this case, has decided to submit to embracing *through's* emphasis and prominence. In this issue, a river—but nothing else—will run *Through* it.

KATHLEEN ACHOR
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ON THE COVER: Paul's Fishing Hat, wood engraving on paper by Barry Moser for the Pennyroyal edition of A River Runs Through It (1989), page 5. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

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Images Run through It: Illustrating Maclean's Masterpiece

by Henry Hughes



The three editions of *A River Runs Through It* referred to among scholars as, from left, the “Little Blue Book” (1976), the “Picture Book” (1983), and the “Pennyroyal” edition (1989).

THE LONG ANGLO-AMERICAN tradition of finely illustrated fly-fishing books reaches back to the fifteenth century's *A Treatyse of Fysshynge wyth an Angle* and its reverential woodcut of a successful angler, continuing with many lavishly bound and illustrated editions of Izaak Walton's seventeenth-century classic, *The Compleat Angler*, and flourishing with hundreds of contemporary image-rich books devoted to the sport, craft, and experience of fly fishing.

No work of fly-fishing literature has enjoyed more popular, critical, and commercial success than Norman Maclean's novella, *A River Runs Through It* (1976), and the accompanying illustrations in the first edition and two subsequent art editions tell us a great deal about how readers and artists responded to the story.¹ These three distinct editions are commonly known among scholars as the “Little Blue Book” (1976), the first edition designed and illustrated by Robert Williams; the “Picture Book” (1983), with photographs by Joel Snyder; and the “Pennyroyal” edition (1989), designed and illustrated by Barry Moser.² The art of Snyder and Moser, in particular, steered the semi-autobiographical novella toward more realistic, nonfiction representations and, as the treatment of portraits will show, Norman Maclean himself became the celebrated subject of the text.

The most well-known visual adaptation and interpretation of the novella is the 1992 film version directed by Robert Redford. Maclean died before filming began, but most believe Redford was true to the author's vision. “I think he would have been pleased,” Redford told a reviewer from *Smithsonian* magazine shortly after completing the film.³

Design and illustration can do several things for a text: entice readers and maintain, clarify, and even tell a slightly different story than the words alone suggest. Most importantly, visual features in a book, like the musical score in a movie, help create tone, atmosphere, and mood. Maclean's heavily voiced narrative is supported by nearly all of the graphic representations in various editions of *A River Runs Through It*. Some tones are modulated, and the author, story, and historical contexts are brought closer together by the illustrations, making the book less fictional and more—as Maclean wished—a memoir. Still, in the book's acknowledgments, Maclean thanks the University of Chicago press for publishing “its first book of fiction,” reiterating, “It's primarily fiction all right.”⁴ In later interviews and conversations, however, he frequently spoke of the stories in close relation to his actual life. “The title story . . . was the big tragedy of our family, my brother's character and death,” he told an

interviewer in 1986. “I slowly came to feel it would never end for me unless I wrote it.”⁵ The illustrations often ignored the fictionality of the novella and heightened the biographical. Most people are eager to embrace the human history of something based on a true story, and the strong persona of Norman Maclean, both as narrator and person, made it easier.

HEADWATERS

In late July 1975, Robert Williams, an illustrator and book designer for the University of Chicago Press, wrote Norman Maclean about his ideas for *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*, slated for publication the following spring. Williams penned his letters in a crisp and uniform italic cursive, and he warmly thanked Maclean for a book by K. D. Swan, anticipating more photographs from the U.S. Forest Service for reference, and admitting he was a “city boy who never made it past tenderfoot in the Boy Scouts!”⁶

Williams planned “several vignettes or spot drawings sprinkled throughout the text,” but he worried that “too many would distract . . . the reader stopping to try to figure out how the drawing relates to the text rather than taking them in as part of the total design.” It is a crucial concern in all forms of book illustration,

and the title novella worried the artist most of all—“this is a tough one.” Williams played it safe: “I don’t think we should show any of the characters . . . So no people. I have your flies and pictures of trout. Again, I think geographic photos & some fishing tackle would do.”⁷

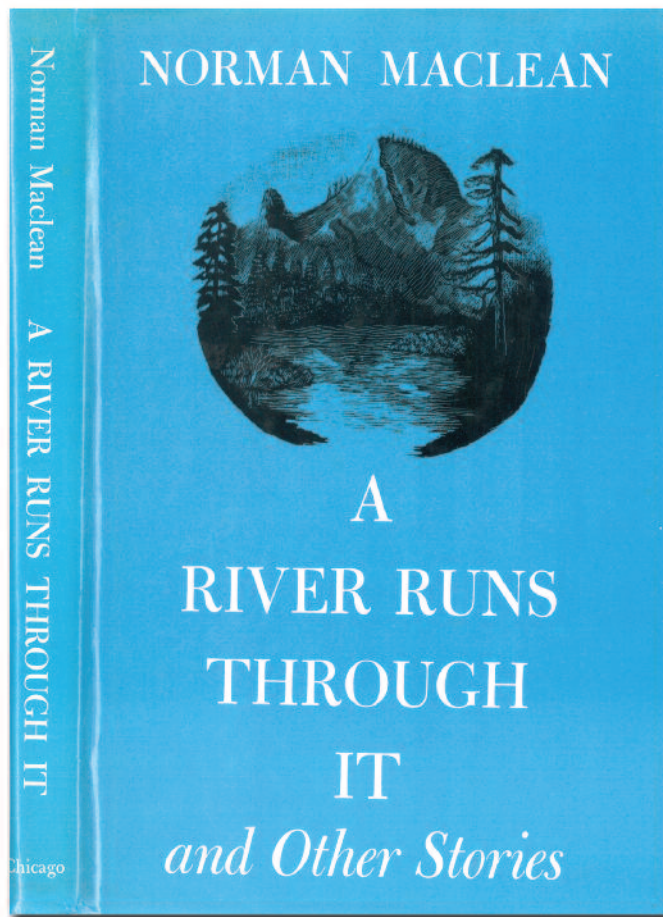
Maclean soon after received a mock-up of the book’s design with a few sketches, including one of a rather bloated antique trout that Maclean told a few friends “looked like a damned gefilte fish!”⁸ The author was not pleased. Williams replied calmly on August 11, making no apologies, but simply stating, “They were by no means intended as final artwork or even subject matter but only a rough attempt to show how the overall design would appear.”⁹ On the received envelope, Maclean scrawled, “From Bob Williams in answer to a long letter I wrote him critical of his designs.” In the upper left corner, Maclean scribbled another note (dated October 28): “Wrote Bob and asked politely when the hell I am going to see his illustrations.”¹⁰

The first edition of *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* was published in April 1976. On the copyright page, R. Williams is thanked by Maclean and the publisher for the book’s illustrations, which in the end must have satisfied the seventy-four-year-old debut author, and credit is given to the U.S. Forest Service and the Montana Fish and Game Commission for providing photographs “on which some of the illustrations are based.”¹¹ The light blue cover wonderfully reflects the novella’s river themes and the “big blue,” a deep hole where, Maclean tells us, “fish spend most of their time.”¹²

Notably absent are any images of fish. Williams chose the color, but he explains that “the blue ink used was fugitive and the jackets on most copies faded. If I were to do it again, I would choose a more permanent color, perhaps a blue-green.”¹³ According to the author’s son, John N. Maclean, his father loved the first edition, referring to it “by a fond nickname, ‘The Little Blue Book.’”¹⁴ The typeface for the title and author stand firm in white Bulmer with Williams’s opening vignette prominent under the author’s name.¹⁵ The back jacket features a black-and-white photograph of the unsmiling, well-dressed, and fedora-clad author taken by Joel Snyder, Maclean’s son-in-law and a professor of art history at the University of Chicago.¹⁶

Williams created the illustrations using scratchboard.¹⁷ “I wanted *A River Runs Through It* to have the feel of a book illustrated with wood engravings,” Williams said in a recent interview. “But scratchboard was faster and easier for our purposes at the press.”¹⁸ His cover tondo, which also appears on the first page of the novella, depicts Montana’s mountains, trees, and waters as a world unto itself. The spherical containment of the untamed canyon and forest also acknowledges the shaping powers of artistic form.

And yet the white space leads us freely into the wild river and takes us up and away into the dissolving sky, suggesting that a story set firmly in western Montana can express universal themes. The novella’s concluding passage expresses nature’s eternity as both annihilating and transcendently creative: “Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it.”¹⁹



Cover for the first edition of *A River Runs Through It* (1976), designed by Robert Williams. *The Little Blue Book*, as Norman Maclean affectionately called it, reflects the novella’s river themes and the “big blue,” a deep hole where, the author tells us, “fish spend most of their time.” Courtesy of the University of Chicago Press.



Robert Williams created interior illustrations using scratchboard. This tondo, used on both the cover and the first page of the title story, suggests that a fly-fishing story set in western Montana can express universal themes. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

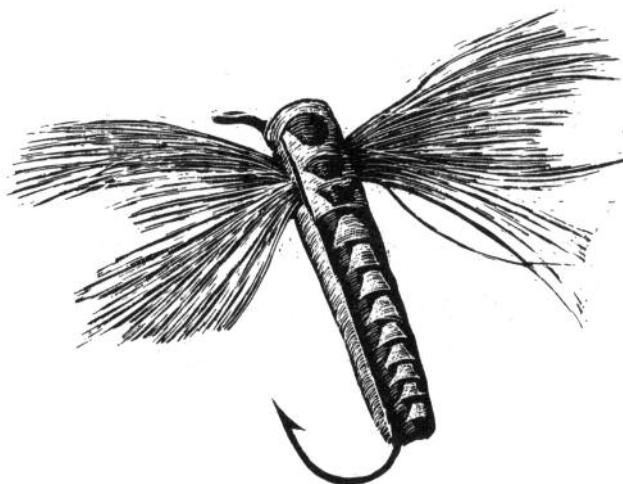
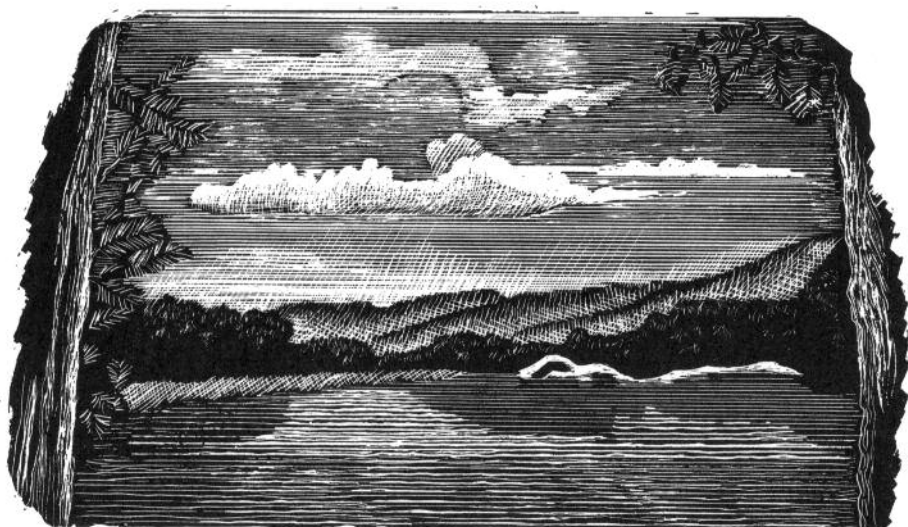
The second scratchboard image (page 62) is a rectangular vignette of clouds, mountains, and water framed by tree trunks, giving the impression of a theatrical stage. Here again, the rural West becomes the setting for human drama.

The book's third, more specifically informational illustration (page 86) depicts the now-famous trout fly, the Bunyan Bug:

... by a fly tyer in Missoula named Norman Means, who ties a line of big flashy flies all called Bunyan Bugs. They are tied on big hooks, No. 2's and No. 4's, have cork bodies with stiff horse-hair tied crosswise so they ride high in the water like dragonflies on their backs. The cork bodies are painted different colors and then are shellacked. Probably the biggest and flashiest of the hundred flies my brother made fun of was the Bunyan Bug No. 2 Yellow Stone Fly.²⁰

This pairing of detailed description and illustration creates a meta-artistic comment on the craft of fly tying and the virtues of a diverse portfolio. Here, late in the story, a prodigious stone-fly hatch gives Norman an advantage over his brother, Paul, the reputed "master of an art."²¹ Paul is a brilliant angler who carries only a few essential patterns and "didn't carry any such special as a Bunyan Bug No. 2 Yellow Stone Fly."²² With trout keying on stone flies, Paul can't raise a fish, while Norman catches a half dozen large trout, "feeling more perfect with every Rainbow,"²³ until Paul can't bear it and tosses rocks into the hole. The artist is outfished by a work of art.

The final and most angling-specific illustration for the first edition follows the curves of a fly cast, tree line, and a rocky river (page 97). "It's a perfect vignette," says art professor Gregory Poulin, "in that it implies a distinctive shape without using a border."²⁴ But its representation of a hatless boy, casting without energy or drama, raises some interpretive questions. The graphic appears amid Maclean's lyric prose extolling Paul's casting that will make "contact with the magic current of the world" and catch "one last big fish," crowning the sublime day shared by the three men.²⁵ Why did Williams contradict his vow to



Top: Nature dramatized within a tree-framed theatrical stage (page 62). Scratchboard by Robert Williams. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

Center: The famous Bunyan Bug, tied by Norman Means for the Macleans (page 86). Scratchboard by Robert Williams. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

Right: Paul Maclean as the eternal boy inside the man (page 97). Scratchboard by Robert Williams. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

draw “no people”? Why does the boy look to be about fourteen? During this last family-shared moment in Paul’s life—he’s thirty-two at this time in the story—perhaps we’re meant to journey back into the innocence of his youth, before the drinking, gambling, and fighting destroyed him. Such extra-textuality seems to stretch the rules of book illustration. Just as in Redford’s film, however, which returns to brief visual flashbacks of boyhood, this image by Williams opens up more possibilities for reflection. Paul is the eternal teenager, or the boy inside the man, which renders him both hopelessly doomed and archetypally eternal—as flawed and perfect as nature.²⁶

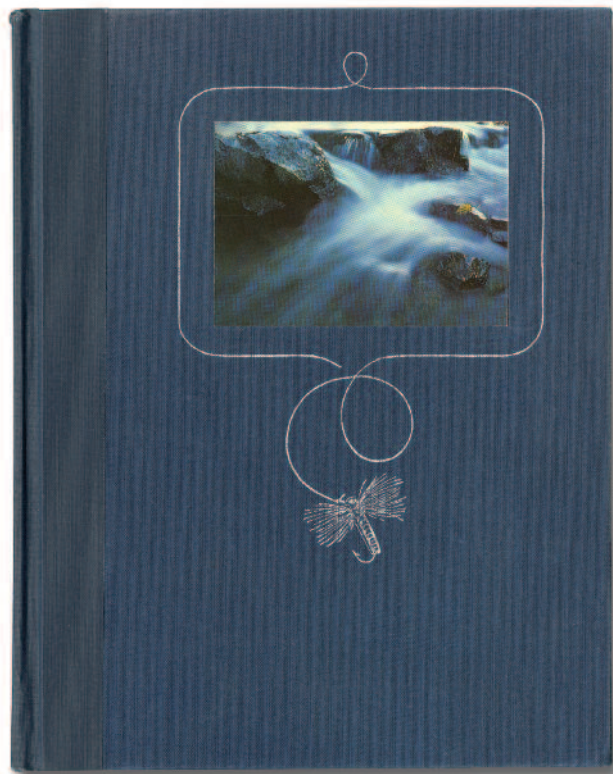
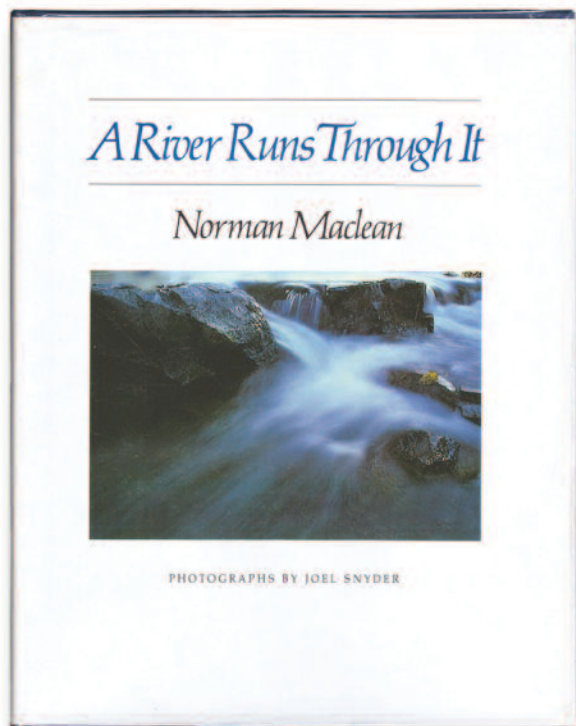
Williams’s four illustrations served the novella in many editions and printings for decades. The images established a formal, traditional, yet animated tone appropriate to Maclean’s voice and the 1930s setting. The first two vignettes offer symbolic prospects of a Montana-based story with universal themes about the human condition. The third, more representational image of the Bunyan Bug grounds us in the reality of fly fishing and Maclean’s angling history. The fourth image of the teenage Paul casting encourages reveries—even beyond what the text offers—of his youth and innocence. These symbolic, literal, and imaginative illustrations effectively synergize with the novella.

Concurrent with the 1976 first press run, G. K. Hall & Company produced a large-print edition of *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*. At more than 400 pages, it allowed for favorably enlarged versions of Williams’s illustrations, albeit in a different order from the Little Blue Book. This edition also featured a dust jacket illustrated by Robert and Marilyn Dustin—a simple, green and blue cartoonish picture of an angler in a mountain stream. Of all the illustrations serving Maclean’s book, this cover seems the least effective or appropriate.²⁷

A BEAUTIFUL STRETCH OF WATER

Seven years after its publication, Maclean’s debut collection sluiced through seven printings, selling more than 35,000 copies and encouraging the press to produce the *Picture Book* (1983), an edition of the title novella on its own with photographs by Joel Snyder.²⁸ The *Picture Book* appeared in both gift and hardbound-trade editions. The gift edition was issued in unjacketed blue cloth, its spine embossed in Argent lettering, its cover shining through a glossy photograph looped in a silver tippet tied to a disco-silvery Bunyan Bug. The trade edition wears a white dust jacket featuring Snyder’s creamy long-exposure photograph of a Big Blackfoot cascade, while the back jacket bears another formal, albeit color, portrait of a stoic Maclean, layered in winter wool, donning his signature plaid fedora. Both books have identical content, the story’s first page ornamented by the one retained scratchboard image from Williams: the Bunyan Bug.

Snyder has a long history with Maclean’s novella, later working on the film set as a still photographer and consultant. Snyder’s fifteen photographs for the 1983 edition focus entirely on water, from straightforward riverscapes to more abstract renderings of sparkling surfaces and shadowy pebbled beds.²⁹ The photographs are conventional, but they document and honor the Big Blackfoot and Maclean’s meditation on time and life. Early in the novella, Maclean describes “a beautiful stretch of water, either to a fisherman or a photographer, although each would have focused his equipment on a different point.”³⁰ Maclean provides a postscript essay, “On the Edge of Swirls,” which brings the points of focus together, citing specific photographs and rephrasing the novella’s “three parts as a unity” passage. The author connects the “rapids,” “the boil,” and the



The 1983 Picture Book trade (above) and gift editions with photographs by Joel Snyder.



Color photograph (opposite page 104) of the Big Blackfoot River by Joel Snyder for the Picture Book edition of *A River Runs Through It* (1983).
 Courtesy of Joel Snyder and the University of Chicago Press.

“tail of the hole” to moments in the narrative: “the artistic unity of each of these three-part movements of water has had its effect on the unity of the story itself.”³¹ Pointing us to Snyder’s shot of a massive rock table, which is the old riverbed above the flowing Big Blackfoot, and quoting from his own story with bracketed commentary, Maclean revisits place, personal history, and his literary creation: “It was here [actually not far from the red rock opposite page 12], while waiting for my brother, that I started this story, although, of course, at the time I did not know that stories of life are often more like rivers than books.”³²

Maclean’s postscript essay constitutes an unusual reversal in which the author discusses the illustrations in his book, creating a confluence of photography and literature flowing from personal geography.

Following a key trope, reified in Williams’s cover vignette, Snyder’s final and finest photograph (opposite page 104) provides an enthralling low-angle shot of the Big Blackfoot running between rocky banks and lines of ponderosa pine toward its dark vanishing point. The river’s cold blue dihedral

complements the sharper V of a cloud-warmed cerulean sky. Blue is dominant in Snyder’s photographs. Maclean offers a long discussion on the color in his essay, claiming that “blue is the all-present color uniting everything,” once again helping us interpret the photographs.³³ There’s a haunting power to this last photograph, and turning the page of this edition, we read of gifts withheld and a predawn phone call from a police sergeant—Paul Maclean is dead.

The Picture Book is slender, broad, and bright, with a more contemporary, Sierra Club feel, and its emphasis on geography and events in the author’s life moves *A River Runs Through It* into the realm of nonfiction, even veneration. It resembles those coffee-table books published long after the death of a famous writer, like Gareth Thomas’s *A Shropshire Lad*, walking us through the famous A. E. Housman poetry collection in photographs of cherry trees, rolling pastures, and misty churchyards.³⁴ Norman Maclean, however, is very much alive when this edition of *A River Runs Through It* hits bookstores and libraries; and although he enjoyed the convenient veil of fiction, he clearly accepted celebration of what

Esquire magazine hailed “The Old Man and the River,” echoing the Hemingway persona of a writer who loved his fishing.³⁵

THE DEEP PLUNGE

The most artistically accomplished edition of *A River Runs Through It* was produced in 1989 by America’s preeminent booksmith, Barry Moser, and his Pennyroyal Press in collaboration with the University of Chicago Press.³⁶ Moser has designed and illustrated more than 300 titles, including *The Odyssey*, *Inferno*, *Frankenstein*, *Moby-Dick*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and the King James Bible. Born and educated in the South, the young artist moved to the Pioneer Valley of Massachusetts, started Pennyroyal Press in 1969, took graduate printmaking classes, mentored under local legend Leonard Baskin, and began to master wood engraving.

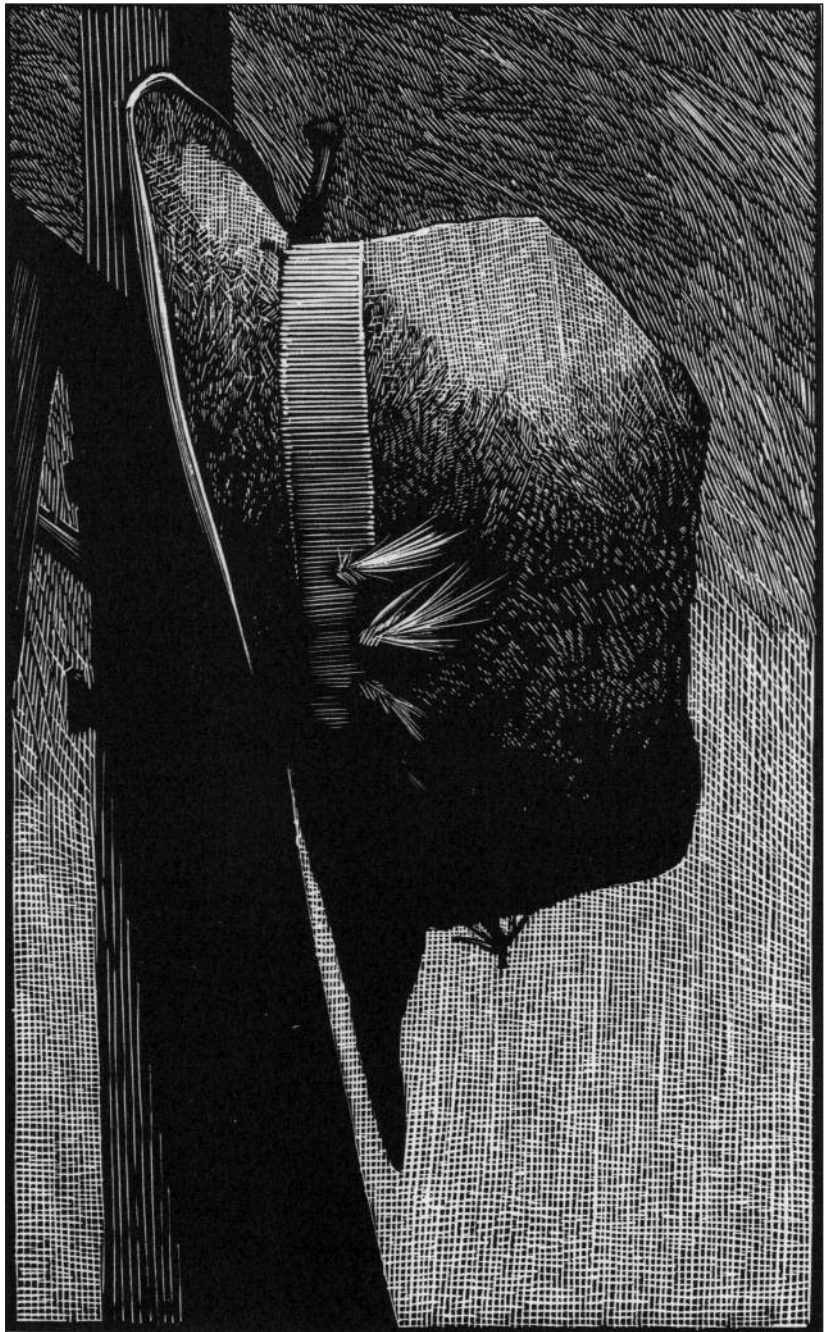
In Moser’s wood engravings, a drawn image is transferred to a block of dense end grain—boxwood is his preference—and each line and space is meticulously tooled away, creating a low relief that is printed with ink on paper. Developed in

Britain and France in the late-eighteenth century by artists such as Thomas Bewick, wood engraving was the dominant method of book illustration in the Victorian era and survives today as a revered practice in fine printing. The precision of detail allows for accurate representation and control of depth, tone, and texture. “And I love the insistence on absolute black and white,” Moser explains. “The way it pulls white lines out of the blackness.” These stark, dense, black-and-white images carry a more formal attitude. “It doesn’t lend itself to whimsy,” Moser admits, although he’s taken the form to profoundly imaginative heights.³⁷ Overall, wood engraving has a classic, vintage feel, hearkening back to the golden age of bookmaking.

Moser’s engraving skills soared in the 1970s and 1980s while Pennyroyal Press teetered on the edge of bankruptcy. Then a friend suggested *A River Runs Through It*. The University of Chicago Press was interested, but Moser would need permission from the sometimes-prickly author. Moser recalls a phone conversation with Maclean: “He asked what I wanted to do with the book, and then he said, ‘I don’t want anybody fucking with my family.’”³⁸ But Moser’s careful cast caught Maclean.

I told him that my idea was to do small illustrations of some of George Croonenburghs’ [*sic*] trout flies and to punctuate them at every fourth “beat” by larger images of a can of worms, his brother’s fishing hat, a portrait of his brother, and a portrait of George himself. He was very much taken with the idea of the fourth beat since it was a direct extrapolation of his dictum that fly fishing is an art “that is performed on a four-count rhythm between ten and two o’clock.”³⁹

On 8 September 1987, Moser wrote Maclean, “overjoyed . . . with the prospect” of doing a Pennyroyal edition of his novella. He outlines his aesthetics—“open space, large margins”—explaining that he designs the book before making images. The four-count rhythm is marked as “fluid, yet staccato,” where images of flies are punctuated by portraits of people or objects such as a bottle of bourbon, a Hill Brothers coffee can, cars, or trout.⁴⁰ Images of fish, however, would be absent from the finished book. Moser writes: “I had entertained fish as the theme . . . but I don’t see enough variety in them.”⁴¹ He reminisces about fishing as a boy in Tennessee (“To you, I dare not talk about how *we* fished on Chickamauga Lake”) and he remembers his “father’s tackle box with its cache of lures and flies” as “endlessly fascinating and varied.”⁴² As a result,

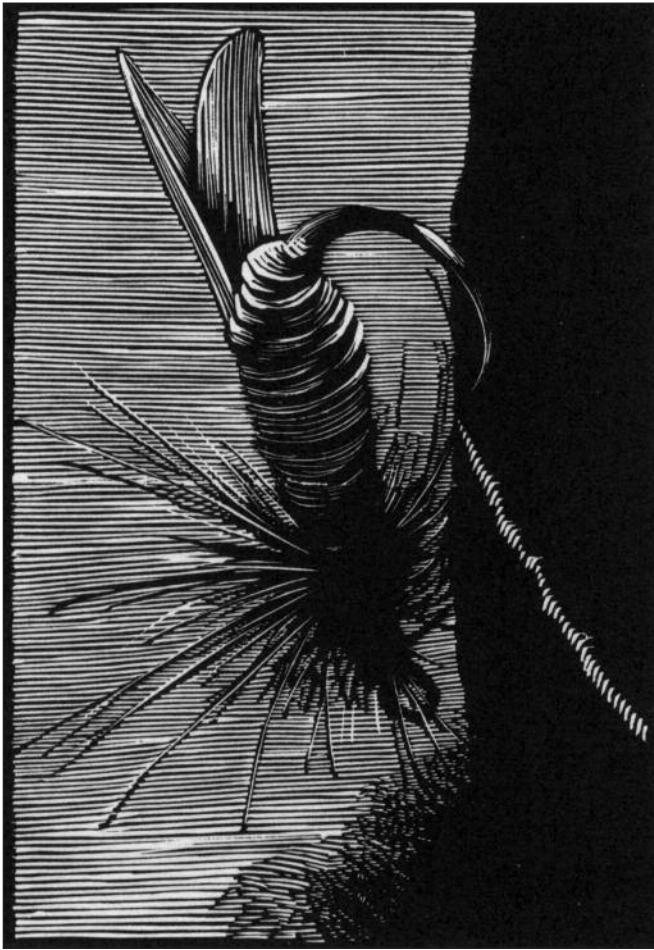


Paul’s Fishing Hat, wood engraving on paper by Barry Moser for the Pennyroyal edition of *A River Runs Through It* (1989), page 5. “There is a bit of beauty and a bit of death in those flies,” Moser reflects. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

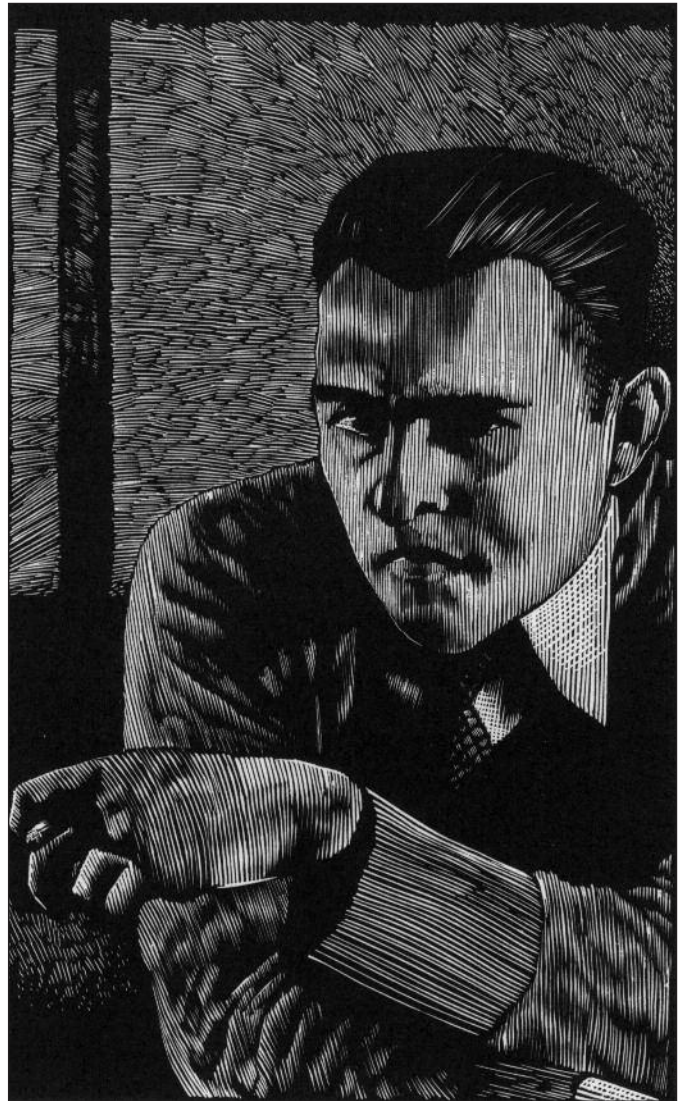
flies become key visual subjects in the Pennyroyal edition.

Mindful of Maclean’s warning about “fucking with my family,” Moser delicately inquired about snapshots, adding, “I realize that this may invade a privacy you wish to preserve and I respect that.” Moser expressed another wish: “If I had my heart’s desire, I would have Paul’s flies—affixed to Paul’s hat—to use as my models, but if not his, then ones like them (perhaps yours?).”⁴³ Moser ended up buying a used fedora and pinning on a few of the flies sent to him by George Croonenburghs.⁴⁴

The Pennyroyal edition moved forward, and Moser created fourteen images for the book, beginning with a superb wood engraving, *Paul’s Fishing Hat* (page 5), achieving what the artist described in that first letter to Maclean: “flies . . . sparkling in and out of the shadows of its folds . . .”⁴⁵ The stark swaths of light and dark give the piece a noir feel, every engraved mark contributing to the haunting depth and texture of the river-worn hat bereft of its angler. “There is a bit of beauty and a bit of death in those flies, and that is what appeals to me,” Moser writes.⁴⁶



This rear perspective of The Brown Quill ominously magnifies the hook's menacing curve (page 17). Wood engraving on paper by Barry Moser. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.



Razor-sharp linear tint and a striking play of black and white imparts a noir severity to Moser's wood engraving of Paul Maclean (page 53). Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

Scaling back the number of engraved flies from twelve to nine, but arguably keeping the four-beat rhythm, Moser offers precise images of regional fly patterns forgotten to most modern anglers. Perhaps because Moser is an artist and not an angler—"I hated fishing, but I loved Maclean's book"⁴⁷—he foregrounds the fly's hook "as a symbol of death."⁴⁸ The rear perspective of the Brown Quill, for example, ominously magnifies the hook's menacing curve (page 17).

On the reverse of each illustrated page we find the fly's colloquial name and brief advice on how it may be fished. The Brown Quill, for example, "works best on slow-moving rivers like the Bitterroot River near Missoula and sixty miles south"; the Santa Claus Streamer "yields a few gifts when nothing else works"; and the Grasshopper "works better when fly gets scuffed up."⁴⁹ These flies are not mentioned in the novella, an example of Moser's notion that "the illustrator adds some vision to the text," and an unusual move for published fiction, steering the book toward the genre of nonfiction and fly-fish-

ing history.⁵⁰ This fly-fishing history is not without poetic embellishments, however. Paul's "shadow casting"—to "keep line circling over the water until fish imagined a hatch of flies was out"—is pure fiction. Even our narrator gives us a wink, qualifying "shadow casting" as "almost too fancy to be true."⁵¹

The second portrait in Moser's edition (page 53) was adapted from a photograph Norman took of his brother, Paul Maclean, "probably taken the year before his murder in Chicago in 1938."⁵²

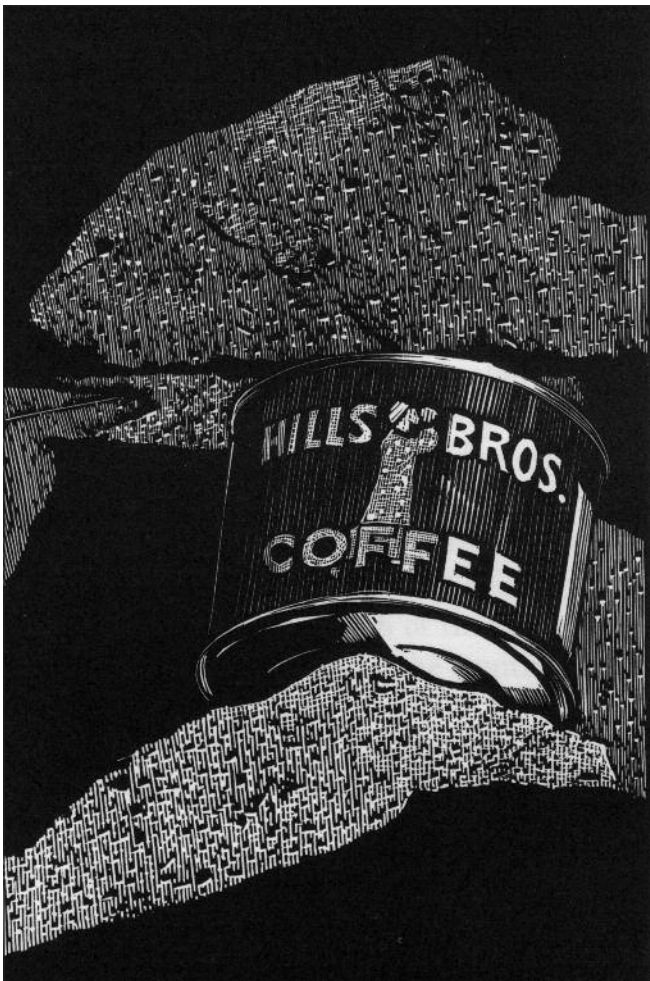
Again, the razor-sharp linear tint and striking play of black and white imparts a noir severity, in this case contributing to Paul's serious, even angry, glare. In a style befitting a 1930s Dashiell Hammett detective novel, the image may also offer an oblique reference to Paul's mysterious, violent death. "I had to be careful with this portrait," Moser remembers. "Norman was sensitive about these things, so I worked directly from the photo."⁵³ Rather than pull the lighter aspects of Paul's character into the illustration, Moser stayed true to the two-dimensional photograph.

The image of the Hills Bros. coffee can (page 101), which Moser refers to as “contemptible, but for contrast,”⁵⁴ is the least artistically successful illustration in the book.

Although the classic dignity of wood engraving nearly always saves itself from the sentimentality so endemic to sugary watercolors, the visually confusing patches of shadow and rock in *The Can of Worms* make it appear more of a moonscape with trash. It may, however, be the artist’s joke about his own bait-fishing history or a sly nod to the art of engraving. The image prepares us for the scene when Norman and Paul find Neal and Rawhide passed out on the gravel bar:

We stood there for a minute and made an engraving on what little was left of the blank tablets of our minds. It was an engraving in color. In the foreground of the engraving was a red Hills Bros. coffee can, then red tenderized soles of feet pointing downward, two red asses sizzling under the solar system, and in the background a pile of clothes with her red panties on top.⁵⁵

The final engraved image (page 149) was adapted from Joel Snyder’s author photograph of Maclean from the first edition.

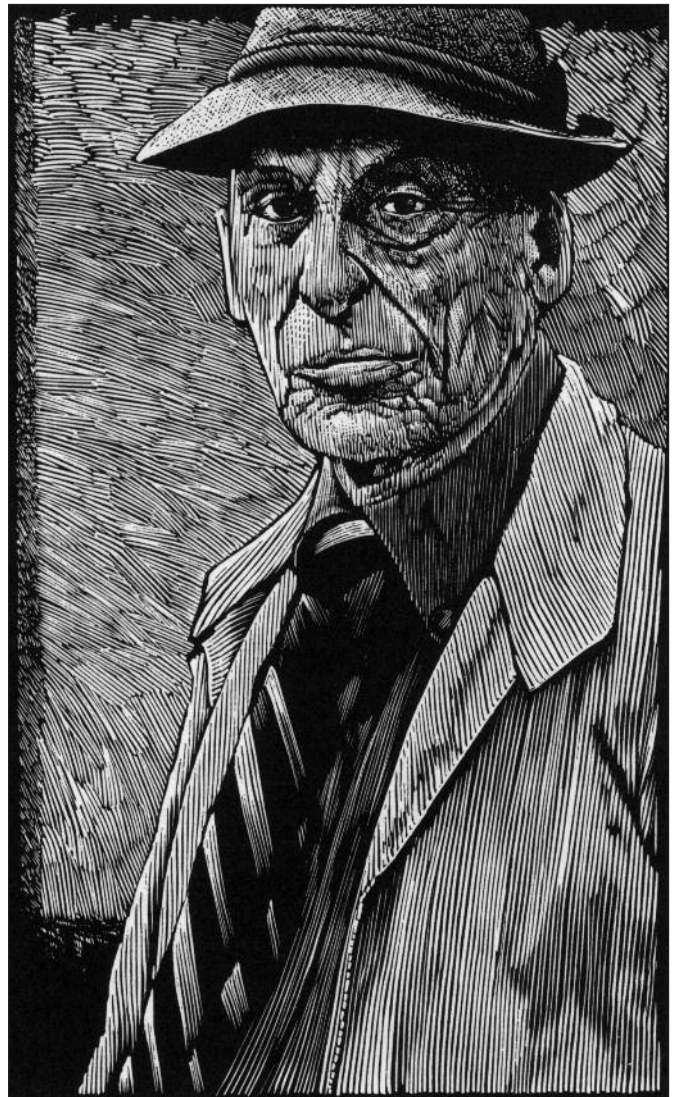


The infamous Hills Bros. coffee can brought by a still-drunk Neal to the Macleans’ morning of fishing (page 101). Wood engraving on paper by Barry Moser. Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.

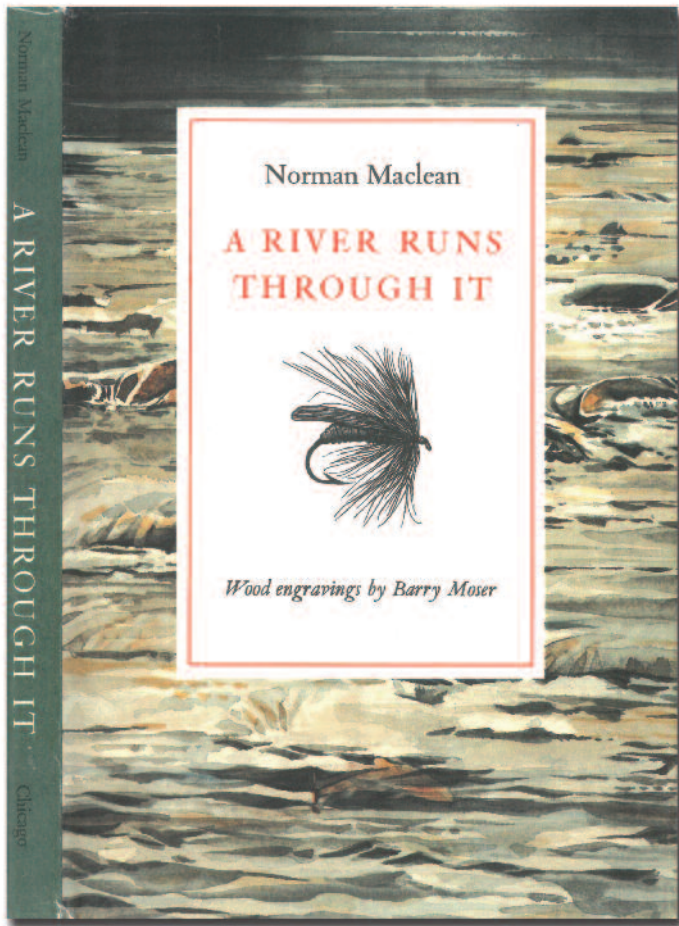
The wood engraver, who relies on lines to create his world, cannot resist making Norman a little craggier, his fedora pulled down a bit tighter. Moser intensifies the figure by cropping the original portrait; he enlivens the sky and drab jacket with deft linear tint; and he brightens those experienced, wise eyes of the now eighty-seven-year-old author. Artists often admit that working from photographs rather than real objects and live models can lead to flatter forms. One of Britain’s most accomplished engravers, Simon Brett, explains an exception: “Moser has developed a way of turning the arbitrary lights and shades of the photograph into atmospheric as much as descriptive shape.”⁵⁶

The standard back-jacket author photograph has now become an interior illustration intensified through fine wood engraving. The line between the author and the character, Norman Maclean, has disappeared.

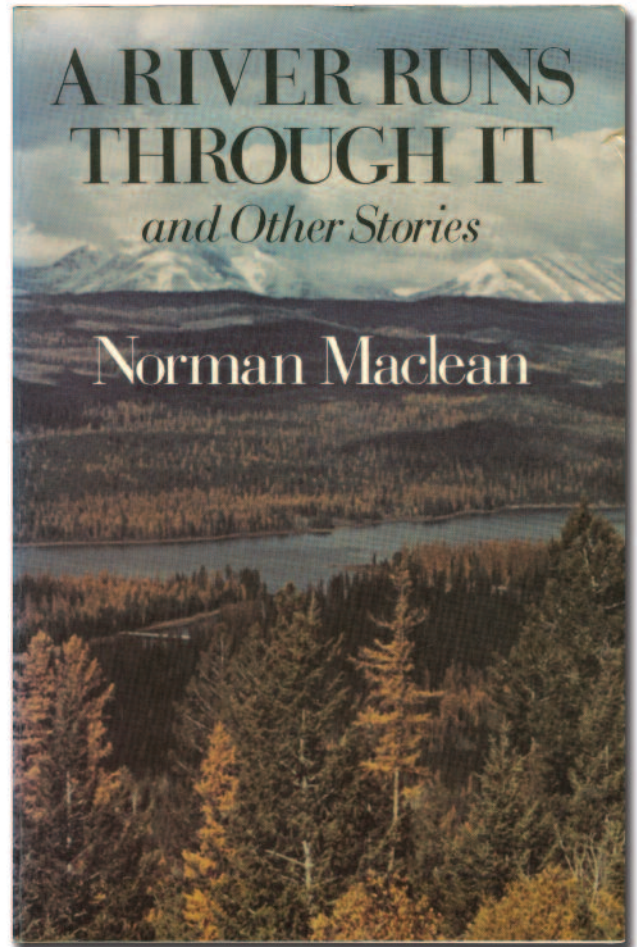
The excellence of Moser’s engravings is self-evident, and the finished product is a masterpiece in bookmaking. But even a master considers feedback from others. Moser’s first sketch for the cover shows what looks like a river in the Himalayas.



Norman Maclean, wood engraving on paper by Barry Moser (page 149). Courtesy of the artist and the University of Chicago Press.



The Pennyroyal edition of A River Runs Through It (1989), designed and illustrated by Barry Moser.



The first paperback edition of A River Runs Through It (1979) ran through seventeen printings. This cover photograph by John B. Roberts depicts a vast forest traversed by Seeley Lake, site of the Maclean family cabin. Courtesy of the University of Chicago Press.

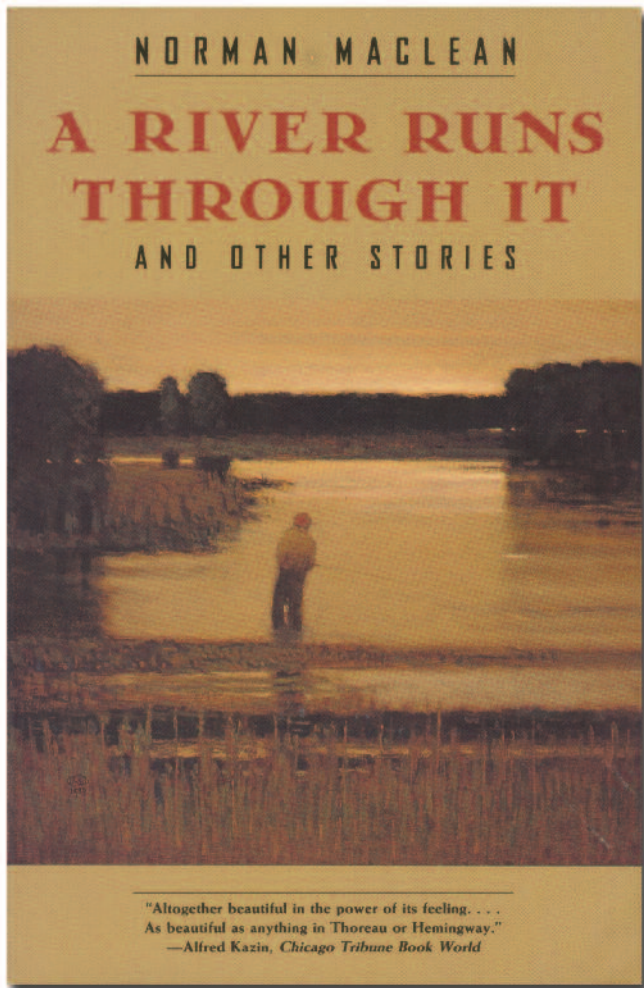
Joseph Alderfer, design manager at the University of Chicago Press, wrote Moser in October 1988, “The Blackfoot landscape is much less dramatic,” and he referred the artist to Maclean’s photographs of the river and Snyder’s Picture Book.⁵⁷ For the dust cover, Moser instead painted a watercolor of a rocky stream near his home—a treatment that may have influenced Redford’s opening shot in the film version. An ivory plate carries the author’s name and title in Van Djck typeface and an engraved profile of the Brown Quill. The book itself is bound in gray cloth upon which a dignified red square frames an embossed iteration of the Brown Quill.

The Moser edition of *A River Runs Through It* went through a dozen printings in the 1990s, reviving Pennyroyal Press. “It was the biggest royalty check I ever received,” Moser says. “It breathed new life into the press.” The real payoff, however, was advancing “one of the great works of American literature,” he asserts. In the summer of 1990, the artist flew to Chicago, eager to finally meet

the famed author. “I found out at the airport that Norman had just died. It was terrible. I thought we might become friends.”⁵⁸

TAILOUTS

A River Runs Through It and Other Stories reappeared with Williams’s original illustrations in several trade paperback editions beginning in 1979. Although the interiors remained the same, the covers changed. The first seventeen printings used a panoramic photograph taken by John B. Roberts that wraps around the book as a vast forest traversed by Seeley Lake, site of the Maclean cabin. “My father chose the photograph,” John N. Maclean explains, a sunny Montana view looking east at Rice Ridge, which captures western larches turning yellow, the narrow lake, and Morrell Mountain at the southern end of the Swan Range covered in snow—a perfect autumn show before the falling curtains of winter.⁵⁹



The 1992 trade paperback of *A River Runs Through It* featured a painting by Russell Chatham, *Evening Fishing*. Courtesy of the University of Chicago Press.

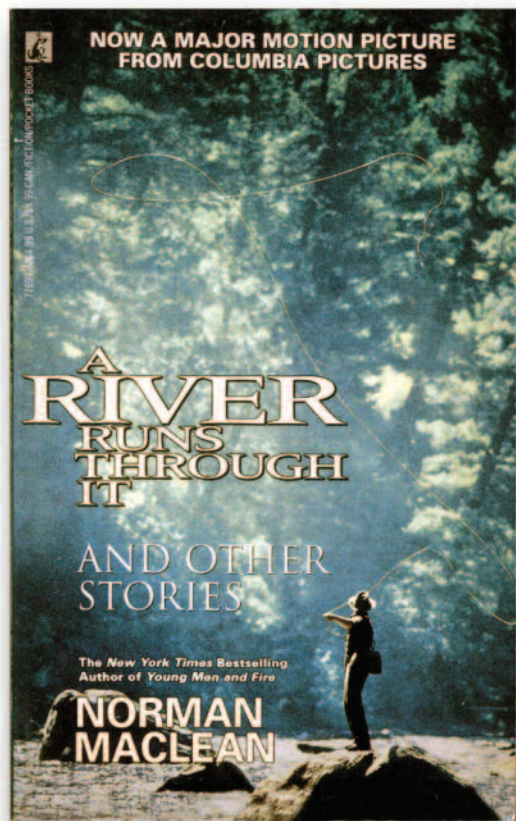
In 1992, the trade paperback carried a new cover that reproduced a painting by Russell Chatham, *Evening Fishing*. Notes on the back cover indicate that the original oil painting (20 inches x 24 inches) was completed in 1989 to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Winston Rod Company.

Chatham (1939–2019), a highly regarded American landscape painter, lived for many years in Livingston, Montana, and was an ardent fly fisherman, long associated with writers such as Jim Harrison and Thomas McGuane. His work has adorned many books, including his own engaging memoirs on fly fishing.⁶⁰ *Evening Fishing*, like much of Chatham's work, has a predominantly soft, atmospheric quality, as if bathed in mist or gold-infused light. And yet it is emboldened by a spiky foreground of reeds, a red-capped angler, and dark stands of distant trees—a lovely painting with, however, little representational connection to Maclean's novella or the geography and rivers of western Montana. This cover reflects more common marketing conventions with images chosen for their popular appeal. Work by a famous artist, even if it doesn't quite match the text, can be commercially effective. Unlike most of the artwork for earlier editions of *A River Runs Through It*, Chatham's painting takes the book further away from memoir into the realm of fiction.

The 1992 release of the film *A River Runs Through It* heightened interest in the novella, and a Pocket Books edition appeared in 1992 with no illustrations, only a cover image borrowed from the Columbia Pictures poster. It's a magisterial moment amid a canyon's cathedral of evergreens, with Paul, played by Brad Pitt, standing on a rock, performing his shadow casting over a sparkling river. The misty green light and silver water highlights this romantic scene, which would become iconic of the increasingly popular story.

The 2001 twenty-fifth anniversary edition (in both hard- and softcover) restores Williams's images and adds a foreword by Annie Proulx. The parchment cover features an illustration of a wingless, collar-hackled dry fly by Dugald Stermer. In 2017, Chicago brought out its newest edition with no interior illustrations and a foreword by Robert Redford. The cover is restyled in trendy layered bands and a sharp photograph of a river.

The 1992 Pocket Books edition of *A River Runs Through It* capitalized on the success of the Columbia Pictures film released earlier that year. Courtesy of the University of Chicago Press.





Norman Maclean in the Bath tub (2019), watercolor wash by Richard Bunse, author's collection. "I sit in the tub until the water gets cold," explained Maclean. "I am not sitting there looking for pretty sentences; I am trying to think and feel through what I am going to write next morning."

THE FOURTH BEAT

We almost never find illustrations in contemporary novels, perhaps because of a preference to have words exist without the dangers of interpretation. Even artist Barry Moser warns that "illustrations can do a great disservice to a reader by fixing images so firmly and specifically in the mind that the reader is deprived of the joy and, indeed, the right to see characters and scenes however his or her imagination dictates."⁶¹ And yet the increased popularity of visually rich children's books, graphic novels, and illustrated reissues of literary classics suggests people still enjoy books with pictures.

Although the first edition of *A River Runs Through It* carried only four images supporting the title story, those images expressed its universal power, its connection to actual places and fishing, and the possibilities for extended interpretation. The Picture Book, with its photographs of the Big Blackfoot River, moved Maclean's novella toward geography and history, and the appended essay by Maclean increased the role of the author as an actual participant in his narrative. Barry Moser's Pennyroyal edition reified *A River Runs Through It* as a work of literary art worthy of veneration while amplifying its identity as nonfiction. The historical Norman and Paul Maclean exist as illustrated characters within the text, and detailed engravings of flies used

by the Macleans in the 1930s deepen the importance of this "whole book," to use Moser's term, as a cultural history of American fly fishing.⁶²

All of the illustrated editions of *A River Runs Through It* helped achieve its destination at the confluence of creative writing and personal and cultural history. Visual artists continue to produce work independently of the printed novella. Fly-fishing illustrator Richard Bunse, for example, offers a playful portrayal of Norman Maclean blissfully cogitating in his bathtub.

Maclean valued the nonverbal: "[D]espite outside opinion, a great deal of the art of narrative writing is non-verbal," he explained in a talk about the craft of fiction. "I sit in the tub until the water gets cold. I am not sitting there looking for pretty sentences; I am trying to think and feel through what I am going to write next morning."⁶³ Whether it was wading a swift cold river or relaxing in a hot bath, Maclean found the ideas, emotions, and images that would become the language of his stories. Graphic artists interpreted and recreated those textual images, completing the fourth beat of a good cast and allowing the literary and visual to merge into one.

Special thanks to John N. Maclean for his tremendous assistance in my research for this article.

ENDNOTES

1. All editions of *A River Runs Through It* contained illustrations until the 1992 paperback Pocket Books edition issued as a tie-in to the newly released film. Sadly, the current 2017 edition with a foreword by Robert Redford is also devoid of illustrations.

2. Unless otherwise noted, the edition cited throughout this essay is the first: Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). The edition nicknames—"Little Blue Book," "Picture Book," and "Pennyroyal" edition—are those most commonly used in Maclean studies. I owe a great debt to the detailed bibliography and publication history created by Peter Gambitsky. See his "*A River Runs Through It*, a Bibliography," 2012, at <http://www.firesideangler.net/home/arrtibib.htm>. Accessed 15 October 2020. Thanks also to Paul Schullery and Jim Hepworth for sharing their tremendous knowledge of fly-fishing literature.

3. Timothy Foote, "A River Runs Through It—A Film at Last," *Smithsonian* (September 1992, vol. 23, no. 6), 120–34, 134.

4. Norman Maclean, "Acknowledgments," *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*, xi.

5. Nicholas O'Connell, "Interview with Norman Maclean" (1986), in O. Alan Weltzien, ed., *The Norman Maclean Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 170–71.

6. Robert Williams, letter to Norman Maclean, 28 July 1975, Norman Maclean Papers, University of Chicago Library, Box 44, Folder 9, "Correspondence—Robert Williams." See University of Chicago Library,

- Guide to the Norman Maclean Papers 1880–1990, <https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/scr/c/findingaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.MACLEANN>. Accessed 15 October 2020. Williams refers to Kenneth D. Swan's *Splendid Was the Trail* (Missoula, Mont.: Mountain Press, 1968), a rich collection of commentary and photography, although no images directly match Williams's illustrations in *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*. Williams writes that the images were "partly imaginary and partly based on some photos." Williams, e-mail to author, 1 August 2019.
7. Williams, letter to Norman Maclean, 28 July 1975, Norman Maclean Papers, University of Chicago Library.
 8. As recounted by Veronica Wald in an e-mail to the author, 17 August 2019. Williams's sketches appear in a mock-up included in the Norman Maclean Papers, University of Chicago Library, Box 44, Folder 9, "Correspondence—Robert Williams."
 9. Robert Williams, letter to Norman Maclean, 2 August 1975, Norman Maclean Papers, University of Chicago Library.
 10. Norman Maclean, notes written on an envelope from Robert Williams, Norman Maclean Papers, University of Chicago Library.
 11. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories*, copyright page.
 12. *Ibid.*, 63.
 13. Robert Williams, e-mail to author, 30 July 2019.
 14. John N. Maclean, e-mail to author, 26 July 2019.
 15. Appropriate to Norman Maclean's love of Shakespeare, Bulmer typeface, a crisp serif designed by William Martin in the late-eighteenth century, was used by William Bulmer's press to produce the famous Boydell editions of Shakespeare (1802).
 16. Joel Snyder's 1975 jacket photograph of Maclean was adapted by several illustrators, including Barry Moser (see the Moser discussion in this article); Arny Skov, who produced a pen-and-ink drawing for the cover of Ron McFarland's *Norman Maclean* (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University Western Writers Series, 1993); and James G. Todd, in the woodcut *Norman Maclean* (1988), represented by Radius Gallery, Missoula, Montana.
 17. In this direct form of engraving, ink is applied to clay-coated paper, allowed to dry, and then scratched away, revealing the white layer beneath.
 18. Robert Williams, e-mail to author, 14 August 2019.
 19. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 104.
 20. *Ibid.*, 86.
 21. *Ibid.*, 6.
 22. *Ibid.*, 88.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. Gregory Poulin, professor of art at Western Oregon University, interview with author, 10 May 2019.
 25. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 97–98.
 26. The film's flashback to the Maclean boys fishing takes place after Norman breaks the news of Paul's death to his parents and before the last scene of an elderly Norman casting. Thanks to O. Alan Weltzien for an extended conversation with me about Paul's character.
 27. Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1976).
 28. Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, photographs by Joel Snyder (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). See also Peter Gambitsky, "A River Runs Through It, a Bibliography."
 29. One photograph (facing page 28) was printed upside down, although as a shore-to-sky reflection, its inversion is hardly noticeable.
 30. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 16.
 31. Norman Maclean, "On the Edge of the Swirls," in *A River Runs Through It*, photographs by Joel Snyder (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 109–21, 110, 111, 112.
 32. *Ibid.*, 112. (The passage appears on page 63 of the original edition.)
 33. Maclean, "On the Edge of the Swirls," 115.
 34. A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, photographs by Gareth B. Thomas (Shropshire, U.K.: Merlin Unwin Books, Ltd., 2009).
 35. Pete Dexter, "The Old Man and the River," *Esquire* (1 June 1981), 86–91.
 36. Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, wood engravings by Barry Moser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press and Pennyroyal Press, 1989).
 37. Barry Moser, phone interview with author, 2 August 2019.
 38. *Ibid.*
 39. Barry Moser, *In the Face of Presumptions: Essays, Speeches, & Incidental Writings* (Boston: David Godine, 2000), 60. George Croonenberghs—Moser often misspelled his name—was a longtime family friend of the Macleans. In his acknowledgments for the first edition of *A River Runs Through It*, Maclean states that Croonenberghs "received his first lesson in fly tying from" Norman's father, and that Croonenberghs "tied flies for my brother and me over forty years ago" (xiii). Norman discusses Croonenberghs's flies and tying in the novella (59–61).
 40. Barry Moser, letter to Norman Maclean, 8 September 1987. Papers of Barry Moser (ML-39), Box 111 (1985–1988), Rauner Special Collections, Dartmouth University. See Dartmouth Library Archives and Manuscripts, Barry Moser Papers, https://ead.dartmouth.edu/html/ml39_fullguide.html. Accessed 16 October 2020.
 41. To my knowledge, the only image of a fish to appear in Maclean-related literature is the golden trout adorning the cover of *The Norman Maclean Reader*. Editor O. Alan Weltzien states that the image was chosen by the marketing department at the University of Chicago Press and that John N. Maclean believed that "the Old Man [Norman] wouldn't have liked that—too glossy, too special, too unlike anything he ever fished." O. Alan Weltzien, e-mail to author, 14 April 2019.
 42. Moser, letter to Norman Maclean, 8 September 1987, Papers of Barry Moser, Dartmouth University.
 43. *Ibid.*
 44. Moser, phone interview with author, 2 August 2019.
 45. Moser, letter to Norman Maclean, 8 September 1987, Papers of Barry Moser, Dartmouth University.
 46. *Ibid.*
 47. Moser, phone interview with author, 2 August 2019.
 48. *Ibid.* "I hated fishing," Moser said. "We set trotlines baited with meat. We did jug fishing. I was bored. I'd rather be home drawing."
 49. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It* (University of Chicago Press and Pennyroyal Press, 1989), 17, 78, 90.
 50. Moser, letter to Norman Maclean, 8 September 1987, Papers of Barry Moser, Dartmouth University. On the last (unnumbered) page of the Pennyroyal edition, Moser thanks "George Croonenberghs, who tied all the flies depicted—and wrote the accompanying notes—with the exception of the 'Bunyan Bug,' which was tied by Norman Means."
 51. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 21.
 52. The photograph of Paul Maclean and this quoted caption appear in Ron McFarland and Hugh Nichols, eds., *American Author Series: Norman Maclean* (Lewiston, Idaho: Confluence Press, 1988), unnumbered photographic plate. An excellent reprint of the photograph also appears in *The Norman Maclean Reader* (2008).
 53. Moser, phone interview with author, 2 August 2019.
 54. Moser, letter to Norman Maclean, 8 September 1987, Papers of Barry Moser, Dartmouth University.
 55. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 67–68.
 56. Simon Brett, "Abigail Rorer & Barry Moser," *Parenthesis* (Autumn 2011), 17.
 57. Joseph Alderfer, letter to Barry Moser, 13 October 1988, Papers of Barry Moser (ML-39), Box 111 (1985–1988), Rauner Special Collections, Dartmouth University. See Dartmouth Library Archives and Manuscripts, Barry Moser Papers, https://ead.dartmouth.edu/html/ml39_fullguide.html. Accessed 16 October 2020.
 58. Moser, phone interview with author, 2 August 2019.
 59. John N. Maclean, e-mail to author, 19 December 2019.
 60. See Russell Chatham's *The Angler's Coast* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), *Silent Seasons* (Clark City Press, 1978), *Dark Waters* (Clark City Press, 1988), and *One Hundred Paintings* (Clark City Press, 1990).
 61. Moser, *In the Face of Presumptions*, 160.
 62. *Ibid.*, 96. Moser writes: "The whole book' is one wherein the materials, text, design, and pictures are so coherently joined that not one of the parts can be separated from it without diminishing the whole or even the parts themselves. For me, a book is what a painting is for a painter—a thoughtfully conceived and carefully executed object; an adroit arrangement of plastic elements; a coherent and intelligent marriage of text, type and image."
 63. Norman Maclean, "An Incident," in *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 117. This is the transcript of a talk Maclean gave in Missoula, Montana, in 1979.

Paul Newman, Robert Redford, and *A River Runs Through It*

by Robert A. Oden Jr.

WHEN I BECAME president of Kenyon College in the 1990s, the first of many talented and widely recognized graduates I met was E. L. Doctorow. In company with a host of others, I had long admired Doctorow's novels, especially his bestselling *Ragtime*. He was as engaging as I had hoped, his every sentence filled with warmth and irony and wit.

Early in my initial conversation with him, I asked Doctorow if he had enjoyed, had learned from, had prized his years at Kenyon College. "Oh no," he replied, "I was miserable throughout. I had gone to Kenyon hoping to act but I never secured any leads in any of Kenyon's dramatic productions. The leads all went to some guy from Cleveland called Newman."

Paul Newman and Doctorow were classmates, Kenyon class of '49, and close friends despite Doctorow's puckish reference to Newman's stealing all the best acting roles. I met Newman just a few months after my conversation with Doctorow. Newman was, beyond all doubt, the finest, most decent, compassionate, and down-to-earth person of great renown whom I have met. Every good thing you may be tempted to believe about Paul Newman is true: his founding of camps for desperately ill children, his granting to various charitable enterprises the profits of his culinary products, and much more. When we met in the apartment he and his wife, Joanne Woodward, owned on Fifth Avenue, Paul immediately offered me a Budweiser, which we drank on the balcony overlooking Central Park. Not some fancy, fashionable international brew, but a Budweiser. "I am going to like this man," I thought. "He's as genuine as they come."

As we came to know one another, Newman and I shared more Buds on his balcony. During one such conversation, when Joanne brought each of us a second beer, he said, "I understand that while you should be devoting every waking moment to advancing the college I love, in fact you take off fly fishing for many days a year. Can you really be that irresponsible?" Having learned early in life that confession is good for the soul, I confessed that, yes, I had begun tying flies when I was five years old, fly fishing a year later, and

that among my clearest youthful memories was sitting on the banks of the Big Hole River when I was twelve with my very-much-older cousin, who had taught me to fly fish and who said, "Now, Robbie, you have fished every major drainage in Montana."

"So," Paul Newman continued, "given those years of fly fishing, you will doubtless be intrigued to learn that my friend Robert Redford is making a movie of *A River Runs Through It*." I knew the novella, of course, had known of its author, Norman Maclean. I recommended Maclean for an honorary degree from Dartmouth, from which he graduated (a year before Theodor Geisel [Dr. Seuss], his friend and fellow writer on the *Jack-O-Lantern*, the college's humor magazine) and where I was a professor, because Maclean was the William Rainey Harper Professor of English at the University of Chicago and had won Chicago's highest teaching prize, the Quantrell Award, three times. Just the kind of distinguished teacher Dartmouth should honor, I thought. And I would come to learn, years later, that Maclean had all but completed a yet finer book, *Young Men and Fire*, a nonfiction account of the 1949 Mann Gulch fire, which claimed the lives of thirteen young firefighters. However, I was deeply skeptical about the transformation of *A River Runs Through It* into a movie and said so, swiftly and directly, to Paul Newman. "No," I said, "Robert Redford cannot make *A River Runs Through It* into a movie. No one can. The book is all interior monologue, and interior monologue does not make a movie. It's like a Willa Cather novel, a novel not about plot but about people—in Maclean's case about family's shared love and equally shared inability to understand one another. It's about Montana's passion for nature, moving water, and cold beer.* First-rate novella, to be sure, but not the stuff of movies."

Paul Newman was surprised, and doubtless put off, by my curt rebuttal of his friend Redford's ambitions. This concluded our conversation, but I learned

*Growing up in South Dakota, I learned early that in Montana drinking beer is not considered drinking.

later that he repeated it to Redford. After Redford had, indeed, directed the movie, and after *A River Runs Through It* had become a justly decorated critical success, I received a brief, handwritten letter from Redford. (Note: Despite repeated attempts, the letter cannot today be located.) Redford's brief letter read:

President Oden,
My friend Paul Newman tells me that you told him I could not make a gripping movie from the book *A River Runs Through It*. I think I did.
Yours,
Robert Redford

Redford was, of course, quite right, and I was, of course, quite wrong. He had done what I thought impossible: made an entirely engaging movie out of a novel that was all but entirely interior monologue. Among Redford's strokes of genius was to retain Maclean's narrative voice in the film. Another was to transform the drama—often quite profound and ultimately tragic—of that interior monologue into action. Redford had the imagination, which I lacked, to see that this could be done. And he did it.

Many think, quite correctly, of the movie *A River Runs Through It* as a film that prompted millions of Americans to learn how to hurl an impossibly small and light fly 60 to 80 feet toward a feeding trout. I think of the film as that which meaningfully enhanced my already lofty regard for Robert Redford. And fully confirmed my reverence for Norman Maclean.



AMFF Trustee Rob Oden began his career as a professor of ancient Near Eastern religions at Dartmouth College, eventually became a college president, and retired from the presidency of Carleton College in 2010 to return to Hanover, New Hampshire, where he and his wife, Teresa, live today. Rob guesses that he taught more than a thousand students how to tie knots, fly cast, and fly fish in the course of his academic career, always teaching them the important distinction between authentic fishing (figuring it out for oneself) and inauthentic or concierge fishing (hiring a guide).

Redford's *A River Runs Through It*: An Assessment of the Adaptation

by Timothy P. Schilling

All images courtesy of John Dietsch



Robert Redford in 1997.

MIDWAY THROUGH the making of *A River Runs Through It*, in October 1991, director Robert Redford turned to another project. Agent Michael Ovitz had secured for him a role in *Sneakers*, would which bring in \$8 million against 10 percent of the gross. Reluctantly, Redford agreed. Having sunk his own money into the development of *River*, he was glad to reduce his financial strain. And *Sneakers* would prove to be a pleasant enough diversion. Redford enjoyed working with director Phil Alden Robinson and the cast of big-name costars. He appreciated, too, the film's warning about loss of privacy in the information age. But the interruption underscored that not all projects were equally dear to his heart. After completing the star vehicle, Redford broke with Ovitz,

telling his new agent, Bryan Lourd, that "he didn't want to go the direction Ovitz was pushing him." Redford wanted "significant movies, not significant checks. . . . He wanted a substantial body of work to look back on."¹

That *A River Runs Through It* fit in the latter category and mattered to Redford personally did not escape his collaborators on that film. Scriptwriter Richard Friedenberg said, "You only had to see the passion he put into it to know there were private elements of Bob's biography there," and producer Patrick Markey observed that at a certain point, the film "poured out" of Redford.² Later Redford said as much himself: "For me it was very, very personal."³

The project had started with a conversation with Redford's friend, the writer Tom

McGuane: What counted as "the real thing" in Western writing? McGuane gave Redford the Maclean novella, saying it would settle the question. As soon as he read it, Redford wanted to film the story, which connected, as he saw it, "environment, family and the immutable nature of destiny."⁴ "This," he said, "is the western I want to see."⁵ The story brought to mind Redford's own youth, and the strained communications within his family.⁶ He identified with the character Paul Maclean, later telling journalist Timothy Foote: "I was that son. I was that brother."⁷ Making the picture would allow him to address these and other matters as well, including conservation, the American West, and the larger question of what our lives are ultimately about. But wanting to and being able to make the film were two separate

things. Others, including the late actor William Hurt and writer Annick Smith, had tried and failed to launch the project. An executive at Paramount had laughed at the idea. "It was," he said, "a goddamn movie about trout,"⁸ echoing the rejection Maclean himself had reportedly received from a publisher who complained the book had "trees" in it.⁹ Then there was the wariness of Maclean himself. He had told the *Los Angeles Times* he would not let his "love poem to my family" be reduced to a stereotypical Western. "Nobody's going to touch it unless I can control it—and be sure it's not changed and my family is not degraded."¹⁰ That Redford finally was able to make the film is testament to his commitment and perseverance.

Getting Maclean to agree had been the first hurdle. In retrospect, it's interesting to see the terms Redford used to describe Maclean.

I had heard . . . that he was not easy to approach. He was a phenomenon—a retired English professor at the University of Chicago who at age seventy-four wrote three stories and struggled to have them published. He was born in Montana at the turn of the century, and his early years were a blend of fighting, fishing, forestry, literature and the strict discipline of his Presbyterian minister father. Maclean had achieved a position in the pantheon of revered writers with no nod to self-promotion or reviews, and he had very strict ideas regarding word and honor.¹¹

Here was, Redford suggests, the real deal—and to some, Redford knew, the embodiment of what (they presumed) he only appeared to be. Maclean's artistry, intellectual caliber, and western pedigree were from the beginning integral to his public image and in contrast to Redford, who had never shaken entirely free of the early impression that he was above all a "Hollywood" cowboy—a "star" (from California!)¹²—who "had it all" (money, women, fame), thanks to looks and an easy smile.¹³ Yes, Redford had shown his quality as an actor time and again (*The Candidate*, *All the President's Men*, and *Out of Africa*, for example). Yes, he had used his influence to support independent film production (Sundance) and care for the environment. Yes, he had won Oscars (including best picture and best director) with his directorial debut, *Ordinary People*. But to many, he still was and ever would be that charming train robber, the Sundance Kid.¹⁴

When Redford approached Maclean, Maclean admitted he'd never seen *Ordinary People*, although journalist Timothy Foote reports Maclean "liked what he heard about it."¹⁵ Norman Maclean had better things to do than fol-

low the career of Robert Redford. So Redford had something to prove. To make the film at all, he would need to convince Maclean of his seriousness, his ability, and his good intentions. But beyond that lay—I suspect both men knew—the imminent artistic challenge. Maclean already had Redford's respect and admiration as an artist. Wouldn't it be nice to have that reciprocated? What if Redford—who was a painter before he was an actor—were to make a film that not only made both men money and honored Maclean's family, but also wowed Maclean like his brother's fishing had once done?

Which is not to imply Maclean had nothing to gain by working with Redford. One can imagine the delight Maclean took in telling friends of Redford's interest in the project. First, Alfred A. Knopf had, after initially rejecting his submission of *A River Runs Through It*, come humbly requesting the honor of publishing his second book. (The only dream in his life, Maclean said, that ever came perfectly true.)¹⁶ And now the biggest name in Hollywood wanted to film it! Beyond the pleasure of validation and welcome financial remuneration, the film would also, Maclean knew—if well done—draw new readers to *River* and heighten interest in his work-in-progress, *Young Men and Fire*. That said, Maclean understood there was risk involved as well. A bad film could give the wrong idea about his book and his family.

Thus emerge standards by which we might judge the success of the film. Given Redford's respect for Maclean's integrity, one criterion is the *honoring of commitments made*. Does the film respect Maclean's wishes with regard to his family? Beyond this criterion of personal fidelity lies one of *artistic fidelity*: does the adaptation do justice to the content and spirit of its source? A third possible criterion is *how the film measures up as a work of art*. Is it successful in its own right? Finally, there is matter of *popular appeal and financial success*. Does the film reach a wide audience, make money, and draw new readers to the book?

This last question is the easiest to answer. I will retire it right away by saying, yes, the (1992) film was well received. It brought in \$43 million in domestic box office receipts on a \$12 million investment,¹⁷ got "two thumbs up" from the critics Siskel and Ebert, won the Oscar for best cinematography, and has been approved by 80 percent of the reviewers and 83 percent of the audience on Rotten Tomatoes.¹⁸ The rate of book sales doubled after release of the film: a million copies were sold in the twenty years after the film, compared with 400,000 sold in

the sixteen years before. The fly-fishing industry in Montana, moreover, saw a 60 percent jump in business in 1993, the year after the film appeared.¹⁹

The other three questions are to my mind more complex and, frankly, more interesting. Let's consider them one by one.

PERSONAL FIDELITY

It was not a given that Redford would honor Maclean's wishes in the making of this film. Much as Redford, by all accounts, admired the author and his work, Maclean was inevitably, to some extent, an obstacle. Redford had his own artistic vision and Maclean could, with his veto power, keep it from being realized. Should Redford, in pursuit of his goal, shortchange Maclean—and the opportunity certainly presented itself after Maclean died (two years before the film was released)²⁰—he would not be the first artist to put his own vision ahead of a personal relationship. (Indeed, Maclean himself noted that writing cost him friendships in the last years of his life.²¹) It is notable, then, that in his own evaluations, Redford himself repeatedly raises the question of fidelity. To journalist Timothy Foote, Redford said that he felt he had kept his word to Maclean: "I think he would have been pleased, [but] he was so tough and critical he might not be."²² And in the published screenplay, Redford observed, "I'd like to think we saw eye to eye on much, and that the end result reflects that unison."²³ The film's producer, Jake Eberts, confirms as well that keeping his promise to Maclean was a priority for Redford: "My objective had been to preserve Bob's vision, as Bob's was to preserve Norman's. It was undiluted, which is all he wanted."²⁴

The intention seems clear. But if the faithfulness is there, where do we see it in the film? To answer this question, we need to step back to see more precisely what *A River Runs Through It* meant to Maclean. He summed it up in a 1986 interview:

The title story . . . was the big tragedy of our family, my brother's character and his death. He had a very loving family, but independent and fighters. We were guys who, since the world was hostile to us, depended heavily upon the support and love of our family. That tends often to be the case with guys that live a hostile life outside.

There was our family, which meant so much to us, and there was my brother who was a street fighter, a tough guy who lived outside the mores of a preacher's family. We all loved him and stood by him, but we couldn't help him. We tried but we couldn't. There were



*Robert Redford sets up a shot during the filming of *A River Runs Through It*.*

times when we didn't know whether he needed help. That was all and he was killed. I slowly came to feel it would never end for me unless I wrote it.²⁵

These observations about familial love, Paul's dark side, and the futile attempts to help should be joined in our consideration to one other notion, not stated here but central to the story: Paul was, to Norman, "beautiful."²⁶ He radiated vitality and grace. These are notes Redford would need to hit to respect Maclean's wishes with regard to his family. Being

true to the memory of Paul, moreover, would require a balancing act. For Redford would have to, as Maclean did, reveal Paul's attraction to trouble without accompanying him too far in his embrace of it. Foote reports that Maclean "was terrified that simply in trying to personify the character of Paul successfully, Redford would have to branch out into the dark side of Paul's life."²⁷

Did Redford succeed? The boxes, again, are easily checked. The film version of *River*, like the novella, is a tragedy (ending with Paul's death) that foregrounds

the graceful and charismatic Paul (played by Brad Pitt in a breakthrough role) and surrounds him with a loving but worried family.²⁸ A scene holding all of these aspects in tense unity is a dinner scene, three-fourths of the way through. Here we see Paul holding court, telling jokes at his brother's expense, as well as an impressive story about meeting the president. All is well until Paul stretches and excuses himself to go out on the town. This news casts a pall over the family gathering, but no one expresses outright the worry they all clearly feel about Paul's lifestyle. (Paul cuts his mother off when she tries.) As in the book, we get hints or brief glimpses of the trouble Paul gets into—drinking, gambling, fights, arrests—but no extended exploration of his motives or activities. This is fitting, because the natural identification figure for the reader of the story is not "beautiful" Paul, but his worried brother Norman, who wants to help but doesn't know how.²⁹

A key to success here is the casting of Pitt and of Craig Sheffer (as Norman), both of whom give first-rate performances. The quieter style of Sheffer—he credibly courts and reads poetry, while remaining a "tough guy"—contrasts well with Pitt's flamboyance. Pitt, who looks like a young Redford,³⁰ walks the fine line of attractiveness and self-destructive arrogance. Throughout the film he glistens—a quality deriving from golden hair, physical prowess, and reflected light on the river. But it comes, too, in a more unsettling way, from the wet lips and shiny eyes of drunkenness.

In short, in the limited sense of respecting Maclean's familial loyalty and the tragic nature of his story, it is safe to say Redford kept his word. But change the story Redford did, a reality inevitable in adaptation from one medium to another. To what extent do these changes reflect the content and spirit of the original?

ARTISTIC FIDELITY

When Richard Friedenbergh received Redford's invitation to write the screenplay, he was delighted. But upon reading the story, his heart sank. "It was beautiful," he said. "It was profound. It was moving. [But] it was not a movie."³¹ He went on:

The problem facing me was not one of condensation. "A River Runs through It" is only 104 pages long, fifty-two of which consist of detailed passages about fly fishing. That left me barely a wisp of a story, evocative and elegant though it was. . . . I faced a beautiful book that I could only see as a movie about a middle-aged professor explaining the

sadness of his brother's life, interspersed with fifteen-page exegeses on the art and religion of fly fishing. My task, finally, was to recreate the book's magic without having benefit of the book's methods.³²

Friedenberg decided that if he managed to retain the spirit and intention of the story—if he kept Maclean's "spark alive, despite the changes"—then he succeeded.³³ To solve the problem of the lack of dramatic dialogue and action, Friedenberg delved into Maclean's personal history, conducting interviews and searching through scrapbooks, yearbooks, and more. The breakthrough came on a flight to Montana.

I saw that the problem of the novella was the balance between the competing brothers who reflect different values in a changing world. In the book, Norman is in his thirties, and he describes the tussles with his father and his brother, Paul. But because he is recounting events, he himself never matures as a character. It is all told from the thirty-year-old perspective. What I realized was, I had to find a Norman who grows. What I did was fix on the moment he returns from college, intending to join the Forestry Service, and discovers his younger brother has somehow assumed seniority as the star journalist and general high achiever in his absence. So the older became the younger and the movie dynamic of raw competitiveness was set up.³⁴

Friedenberg's changing of the time frame occasioned the more obvious differences between book and film. Those who see the film before reading the book will be surprised to find Maclean says nothing in *River* about "shooting the chutes" with his brother. Nor does he speak of his father teaching him to write, or of his first encounters with his future wife, Jessie Burns. But the script does not only add. It also cuts, primarily passages on fly fishing.

Do these changes amount to a betrayal of Maclean's content? Betrayal is too negative a word, but the departures do go far enough to produce a shift in genre. Redford's *River* is a coming-of-age story in the literal sense, whereas the book is that, at most, only figuratively. One can argue that Maclean's Norman matures spiritually—by recognizing his brother's beauty and tragedy while accepting the loss of him—but physically, he is already of age. Note, too, that Maclean designed *River* to be a manual and poetics of the art of fly fishing.³⁵ He wanted, in other words, to tell us how to fish and show us how it feels. Redford's film, though, is stronger on the latter than the former. Fishing practices discussed in the book—including

reading the water, selecting and tying flies, and casting for and playing fish—are evocatively shown but barely explicated.

Maclean might have balked at the changes, but he would have appreciated Redford's efforts to ensure plausibility and historical accuracy. Maclean himself was a stickler on this point. "I meant these stories to be in part a record of how certain things were done. . . . I meant when I said we fished with an eight-and-a-half-foot rod weighing four and a half ounces that it was a rod and not a pole and that it was four and a half ounces and not four."³⁶ Or as he put it to Pete Dexter, "When I tell you how to pack a mule, goddammit, that's how you pack a mule."³⁷ Maclean boasted that no fisherman had ever pointed out an error in his book.³⁸

Redford, for his part, went to great lengths to see that the outfits, sets, and music matched the period they depicted.³⁹ He also made sure additions to the storyline were in keeping with Maclean's personal history. The "shooting the chutes" scene, for example, recalls an adventure the Maclean boys had in a duck boat,⁴⁰ and Jessie Burns really did drive Maclean through a railroad tunnel and over a trestle on the opposite side.⁴¹ The scene showing Rev. Maclean teaching Norman to write is straight out of life as well.⁴²

Beyond appreciating Redford's quest for authenticity, Maclean would also have understood the need to modify source material to make it ring true within the new creation. Scriptwriter Friedenberg points out that Maclean fictionalized his life before Redford ever did.⁴³ *River* is, after all, a roman à clef, not a historical report, and within it Rev. Maclean suggests Norman "make up" a story that is in some sense true.⁴⁴ Maclean admitted that in his writing he allowed himself "literary latitude," noting that "often things don't happen fast enough in life. Literature can condense them."⁴⁵ The crucial point was not whether events happened exactly as depicted, but whether the pertinent deeper reality is expressed.

Although Friedenberg put retaining Maclean's "spark" ahead of replication of content, the film manages, nonetheless, to include much we wouldn't necessarily expect. Consider, for example, its God-talk. If there is one element beyond technicalities of fishing we might expect the filmmakers to drop, it would be the theological discourse. For although familial love and loss are themes accessible to almost any viewer, fishing is for the few, and theology has a tendency to polarize. Neither subject is commercially enticing.⁴⁶ Redford's oeuvre, moreover, is on the whole devoid of films with explicit religious content. It was far from his core business. It is all the more surprising,

then, that here he retains not only the religious language of the book—presented in the film in Norman's voiceover and the reverend's sermons—but even expands on what the book provides.⁴⁷ See, for example, Rev. Maclean's words early in the film: "The poor without Christ are of all men most miserable, but the poor with Christ are princes and kings of the earth." Religious language bookends the film, and church scenes appear at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end.

Foote called Redford's adaptation "a remarkably faithful rendering into film of one of the least likely books for the purpose imaginable."⁴⁸ I agree with this assessment. Despite the inherent difficulty, Redford remains faithful to the story's content, and even more to its spirit. How exactly the latter is the case becomes more clear as we consider the story as a film.

REDFORD'S RIVER

During the filming of *A River Runs Through It*, actor Brad Pitt speculated that Redford was motivated by artistic competitiveness: perhaps he wanted to top what Redford's director Sydney Pollack had done in *Out of Africa*.⁴⁹ I cannot speak to that matter, but I cannot imagine Redford did not at least want to measure himself against Maclean's artistry. For what better way could there be of respecting this man he professed to admire than by first showing mastery of his principles, and then rising from them in superior expression, as Paul did in the story? Here I mention Paul advisedly, because I take Redford at his word, that he identified with him. Indeed, a look at Redford's biography suggests a natural affinity between the two.⁵⁰ Like Paul, the young Redford resisted the imposed discipline and conventionality represented by his father. He was, in addition, physically adept, a good dancer, an athlete, competitive, popular with girls, and known for his recklessness. Like Paul, the young Redford frequented bars, commiserated with a shady crowd, crashed his car, got arrested, and knew difficult communications within a loving family. Finally and most importantly, he was an artist: first a painter, then an actor, and now a director.

Of course, when Norman Maclean used the word *artist*, he did not mean simply "someone who makes art." It was a term of honor. It meant one had earned the title. Would Redford's film be enough for Maclean to call him a true artist? Based on Maclean's own writings, it is clear that the finished work would need to show one quality above all for Maclean to concede this point: it would have to be

graceful. That is, following Maclean's reflections on art in the opening pages of *River* and elsewhere, it would have to smoothly, precisely, and economically employ its means to achieve its ends. It would have to show mastery of rhythm, touch the heart, and lead to some kind of transcendence. This is a tall order. So how did Redford do?

I first saw *A River Runs Through It* at a theater in Leuven, Belgium, in 1993. I watched it for two reasons. One was that I had thrilled to my reading of *Young Men and Fire*, which had recently been published. (I had not yet read Maclean's *River*.) The other was that while studying abroad, I had become increasingly aware of just how much a Westerner I was. (I grew up in Washington State.) So I was glad for any opportunity to visit the American West vicariously.

I loved it. Almost thirty years later, I still love it. I've watched the film at least a dozen times because it rewards the investment. It gets the West right, the people seem real to me, and I am ever touched by the central dilemma of wanting to help a struggling loved one without knowing how. Such responses, however, do not arise simply because an artist wants to raise them. They have to be artistically generated. To see how Redford managed this, let's consider a moment near the end of the film: Paul ties a fly on his line and says, "Yes, quite a day."

This remark follows Norman's announcement that he is going to ask Jessie to marry him, and his earlier disclosure that he's been offered a position at the University of Chicago. Paul's words appear simply to affirm Norman's good news, but actually there is much more going on here. A closer look shows that this moment is pivotal to the overall meaning and thrust of the film. Note first the ambiguity of the words themselves. They could just as easily refer to the weather, and Paul speaks them noncommittally, concentrating on his task. This ambiguity of diction and tone suggests the underlying psychological dynamics. By now we know that a rivalry exists between the boys and that Norman's star is rising as Paul's declines. This matters to us because the acting and storyline have made us care about the characters. We understand that Paul, though he has difficulty with this news, wants to be generous toward his brother. We understand, too, that we are near the end of this story, and that tragedy is imminent. The earlier boyish risk-taking of "shooting the chutes" has been replaced by progressively more troubling descents into jail and seedy bars. The musical score, lighting, and sound effects have heightened our sense of foreboding by striking dark, worri-

some, and at times eerie notes (the drunken man singing in jail and the weird laughter at Lolo). If we zoom out, we will see that this penultimate moment sums up the film as a whole. "Quite a day" suggests both the brevity and glory of life, pointing at once forward and backward: backward past youth now gone and forward to Paul's imminent, shining day (the next scene), when he will catch his last big fish and manifest himself artistically as one eternally beautiful.

To fully appreciate Redford's accomplishment, we need to realize just how much creative insight and expertise are required to pull this off. Filmmaking is different from writing. Whereas Maclean produced *River* in isolation, drawing on the resources of his own mind, Redford's challenge was a far-ranging, multidisciplinary, collaborative one. It involved recognizing and modifying a suitable story, securing funding, choosing actors and locations, overseeing photography and development of the musical score, coaching and guiding the actors, managing the overall production process, and bringing the total assembly of filmed images and sounds to a seamless unity. He needed thus to ensure the production of successful art within various fields at once, and then bring them together, much as a conductor does with his or her musicians. Here we may beneficially invoke Maclean's notion of superimposed rhythms. This idea, which Maclean applies to Paul's casting in *River* and to poetry elsewhere, suggests that a work of art communicates on multiple levels (or frequencies) at once.⁵¹ Paul's casting involves three rhythms applied in sync, just as Maclean himself draws on multiple schools of thought—including geology, biology, history, theology, and psychology—in telling his story. Redford retains Maclean's multilevel thinking and adds at least one more theme into the mix: care for the environment. He does this by showcasing the natural beauty of Montana and Wyoming, by harming no fish in the production process, and by supporting fundraisers for restoration of the Blackfoot River. Given the totality of artistry on display, it is all the more unfortunate that Maclean did not live to see the film as a finished product. I am convinced that however much he might have squirmed at the bending of his story, he would have marveled at the craftsmanship, just as he had admired horse packers, ballplayers, and crane operators.

Is the film graceful? Yes, it is. It is tightly constructed, with no excess verbiage or clearly dissonant elements. Showing his own commitment to the principle of verbal economy, Redford, while filming, was at pains to keep actor

Craig Sheffer from creating new lines for his character. We see an example of the nonverbal signaling Redford preferred when young Norman sits up attentively in church, while Paul leans, bored, against their mother. We see another when young Norman adopts his father's posture at riverside (both lean forward, each with his hands behind his back), which contrasts with Paul's precocious swagger. And again: when the boys (now older) sneak out at night, Paul simply jumps off the roof, but Norman cautiously clings to the drainpipe.

But gracefulness does not reduce to sheer minimalism. Elegance in art has much to do with rhythm. The filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky called rhythm the main formative element in cinema, being that which organizes chaos and time.⁵² To get a sense of this, consider the many ways rhythm manifests itself in Redford's film. It is there in the musical score, of course (the four-count rhythm of Mark Isham's theme underwrites the film as a whole).⁵³ But it is carried as well by the spoken words (the voiceover, the dialogue, the recitations of poetry), and demarcated by periods of silence and (repeated) sound effects (the bagpipes at the Independence Day picnic return as Norman travels bearing news of Paul's death).

Light, too, can express rhythm—by alternations of light and darkness, by variations of intensity or recurring color patterns. At a higher level of composition, think of how changes of setting (river, church, manse, bar, jail) affect our experience of the film. Such alternations raise or reduce tension, condition our mood, and speed up or slow down the action. The onscreen presence of characters (and what they represent) also affects the pace of the film and how we feel about it. In Redford's *River* we find a parallel between Neal and Paul: both sneak off to drink, both seem to need help they won't take. (Another parallel exists between Norman and Jessie, both of whom try to help.) In one of the more painful moments in the story, Paul, after having scolded Neal for showing up late for their fishing appointment, later does the same himself. Such parallels structure the film and underscore key themes. In the pairing of Neal and Paul, we see how comic relief heightens the power of the tragedy. Laughing at Neal provides respite from worry about Paul's decline. The humor enables us to stay with the story longer. Its hold on us grows. (Maclean expounds upon this Aristotelian principle of "tragic relief" in his academic writing.⁵⁴) Seeing Paul at Neal's level prompts sadness, but also makes his subsequent success—catching the big fish in

the film's climactic scene—all the more satisfying. In Redford's film these rhythms synchronize, resonating to greater effect. A glimpse of how the director pulled it all together on the set is provided by Redford's biographer:

When *River* started shooting . . . around Livingston and Big Timber, Montana, Redford told Patrick Markey, "The movie's already done in my head." Markey recalls, "He was sizzling. It was the sweetest filming experience I've ever had. It poured out of him, and there was no indication of the paucity of the source material. Instead, it felt like he was compressing a saga comparable with Flaubert or Proust into this immaculate vignette. [Cinematographer Philippe] Rousselot didn't lead it visually, Bob did. He was onto every fiber of it. The sound. The costuming. The accents. The attitude of people. Everything."^{55, 56}

The result of Redford's shadow casting is a fish risen, played, and landed with aplomb in a glorious setting. Is his film as good as the book? Let's just say that each, in its own genre, ranks among my all-time favorites. When I think of the two together, I see Tom Skerritt—

Rev. Maclean in the film—watching as the boys lay out their trophy fish side by side. Smiling, he says, "They're both marvelous."



ENDNOTES

1. Michael Feeny Callan, *Robert Redford: The Biography* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 339–42.
2. *Ibid.*, 335, 338.
3. Robert Redford, remarks at the twenty-fifth anniversary screening of *A River Runs Through It* at Sundance Resort, Utah, 14 October 2017. See Brett Prettyman, "Robert Redford on 'A River Runs Through It'" (posted 26 October 2017), www.youtube.com/watch?v=iSkBMefpYDA, accessed 10 May 2021.
4. Callan, *Robert Redford*, 333. See, too, Robert Redford's discussion of his motivation to make the film in the introduction to Richard Friedenberg and Robert Redford, *A River Runs Through It: Bringing a Classic to the Screen* (Livingston, Mont.: Clark City Press, 1992), 1. The book includes Redford's introduction, an essay by screenwriter Friedenberg on the difficulty of adapting the story, and the screenplay itself.
5. Callan, *Robert Redford*, 333.

6. Timothy Foote, "A New Film about Fly Fishing—and Much, Much More," Footnotes, <http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>, accessed 20 June 2021 (originally published as "A River Runs Through It"—A Film at Last," *Smithsonian* [September 1992, vol. 23, no. 6], 120–34); Callan, *Robert Redford*, 335, 337; and Roger Ebert, "Redford's Cast into Past: A Tale Runs Through It," www.rogerebert.com/interviews/redfords-cast-into-past-a-tale-runs-through-it, accessed 10 May 2021.

7. Foote, "A New Film about Fly Fishing," <http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>.

8. Callan, *Robert Redford*, 335.

9. Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It and Other Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976), ix. In his memoir *Home Waters: A Chronicle of Family and a River* (New York: Custom House, 2021), John Maclean nuances the abovementioned claim his father made in the acknowledgments section of *A River Runs Through It* that the book had been rejected because a publisher complained "it has trees in it." According to John Maclean, "the phrase was a casual observation by one of Norman's followers from the East Coast, and it was merely a statement to explain away the rejections" (192).

10. Myrna Oliver, "Norman Maclean, 87; Author, Professor," *The Los Angeles Times* (4 August 1990), A31. See, by way of comparison, Maclean's comment in "The Hidden Art of a



Tom Skerritt, Craig Sheffer, and Brad Pitt as Rev. John Maclean, Norman Maclean, and Paul Maclean in *A River Runs Through It*.

Good Story” in Ron McFarland and Hugh Nichols, eds., *Norman Maclean* (Lewiston, Idaho: Confluence Press, 1988), 28: “I do not speak, at least in private, of ‘A River Runs Through It’ as a story about the tragedy of my family—among my friends, I speak of it ‘as my love poem to my family.’”

11. Redford, “Introduction,” *A River Runs Through It: Bringing a Classic to the Screen*, 1. Actually, Maclean was born in Clarinda, Iowa, in 1902. The Macleans moved to Montana in 1909.

12. To Pete Dexter, Maclean voiced his disdain for “the lowest of the low”: film studio lawyers “who can’t make it in New York and go to California.” See Pete Dexter, “The Old Man and the River,” in McFarland and Nichols, *Norman Maclean*, 146. In Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, Paul says to Norman of Neal (the brother of Norman’s girlfriend: “I won’t fish with him. He comes from the West Coast and he fishes with worms” (9).

13. In his introduction to the published screenplay, Redford notes that a “mythology” surrounded both men. See Redford, “Introduction,” *A River Runs Through It: Bringing a Classic to the Screen*, 1.

14. Redford plays with this notion in his purportedly “last” film, *The Old Man and the Gun* (2018), in which his charm enables him repeatedly to rob the bank.

15. Foote, “A New Film about Fly Fishing,” <http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>.

16. Nicholas O’Connell, “Interview with Norman Maclean,” in Norman Maclean and O. Alan Weltzien (ed.), *The Norman Maclean Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 178. In fact, five New York publishers had passed on *A River Runs Through It*. See also Maclean’s 27 October 1980 letter to Nick Lyons in *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 244.

17. See “A River Runs Through It (1992),” AFI Catalog of Feature Films, The First 100 Years (1893–1993), <http://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/59375>, accessed 10 May 2021.

18. “A River Runs Through It,” Rotten Tomatoes, www.rottentomatoes.com/m/river_through_it, accessed 10 May 2021.

19. Pocket Books released a mass market edition in November 1992 that featured the shadow-casting scene from the film on its cover. For book sales and impact on the fly-fishing industry, see Vince Devlin, “20 years after the film ‘A River Runs Through It,’ a river of tourism runs through Montana,” in *The Oregonian* (18 August 2012), www.oregonlive.com/outdoors/2012/08/20_years_after_the_film_a_rive.html, accessed 10 May 2021. Timothy Foote notes in “A New Film about Fly Fishing” that 400,000 copies of the book had been sold between 1976 and 1992 (<http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>).

20. Maclean died on 2 August 1990, before the start of filming.

21. O’Connell, “Interview with Norman Maclean,” *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 168.

22. Foote, “A New Film about Fly Fishing,” <http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>.

23. Redford, “Introduction,” *A River Runs Through It: Bringing a Classic to the Screen*, 2.

24. Callan, *Robert Redford*, 340.

25. Maclean, in O’Connell, “Interview with

Norman Maclean,” *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 170–71.

26. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 103.

27. Foote, “A New Film about Fly Fishing,” <http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>.

28. That the film version remain a tragedy was absolutely essential to Maclean. To Nicholas O’Connell, he observed: “I’m unbending about this, just totally unbending. I’m not going to compromise” (O’Connell, “Interview with Norman Maclean,” *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 175).

29. Maclean told interviewer Nicholas O’Connell, “I received over 100 letters about that story [River], saying ‘I have a brother just like that, and I can’t find anything to do that will help him’” (O’Connell, “Interview with Norman Maclean,” *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 177).

30. Manohla Dargis has noted that both Brad Pitt’s and Robert Redford’s career have been helped and hindered by their striking good looks, with each embodying a “sun-kissed, golden and very white California dream” (“Brad Pitt and the Beauty Trap,” *The New York Times* [30 January 2020], <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/30/movies/brad-pitt-oscar.html>, accessed on 20 June 2021).

31. Richard Friedenberg, “Preface,” *A River Runs Through It: Bringing a Classic to the Screen* (Livingston, Mont.: Clark City Press, 1992), 5.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, 6: “In a larger sense the issue is not whether I changed the book, but whether I retained its intention and the spirit of the book. If I violated Norman’s original intention, I failed. If I managed to keep his spark alive, despite the changes, then I succeeded.”

34. Richard Friedenberg, quoted in Callan, *Robert Redford*, 334–35.

35. See Norman Maclean, “Teaching and Story Telling,” in McFarland and Nichols, *Norman Maclean*, 95: “I had hoped it would be . . . a manual of an art, that is a poetics of an art, all the main elements of the art of fly fishing would have to be presented together with insights into what constitutes excellence in each element.”

36. Norman Maclean, “The Woods, Books, and Truant Officers,” in McFarland and Nichols, *Norman Maclean*, 81. On page 2 of *A River Runs Through It*, Maclean writes of his father’s fishing rod: “Although it was eight and a half feet long, it weighed only four and a half ounces. It was made of split bamboo cane from the far-off Bay of Tonkin. It was wrapped with red and blue silk thread, and the wrappings were carefully spaced to make the delicate rod powerful but not so stiff it could not tremble.”

37. Pete Dexter, “The Old Man and the River,” reprinted in McFarland and Nichols, *Norman Maclean*, 145.

38. To Pete Dexter, Maclean said, “There’s no bastards in the world who like to argue more than fishermen, and not one of them corrected me on anything.” *Ibid.*, 146.

39. Friedenberg, Foote, and Callan all attest to this.

40. See Foote, “A New Film about Fly Fishing,” <http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>.

41. See William Kittredge and Annick Smith, “The Two Worlds of Norman Maclean:

Interviews in Montana and Chicago,” in McFarland and Nichols, *Norman Maclean*, 123–24.

42. Maclean, “The Woods, Books, and Truant Officers,” in McFarland and Nichols, *Norman Maclean*, 82.

43. Friedenberg, “Preface,” *A River Runs Through It: Bringing a Classic to the Screen*, 6.

44. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 104.

45. Maclean, in O’Connell, *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 174.

46. In an interview (Roger Ebert, “Redford’s Cast into Past: A Tale Runs Through It”), Redford said, “If you wanted to make [the studio executives’] knuckles white, you’d ask, ‘How’s Redford’s fishing film coming along?’ Everybody in town passed on it. And had it not been for the low budget—\$12 million, not much these days—I still couldn’t have done it. There was no way to explain why this could be a film that a number of people would go to see.”

47. The same is true of poetry. The film contains citations of works by Elizabeth Akers Allen, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and William Wordsworth that do not appear in Maclean’s *River*.

48. Foote, “A New Film about Fly Fishing,” <http://footnotes.net/Pages/River.htm>.

49. Callan, *Robert Redford*, 340.

50. See Callan, *Robert Redford*, especially 16–54.

51. Maclean, *A River Runs Through It*, 22: “It was one rhythm superimposed upon another, our father’s four-count rhythm of the line and wrist being still the base rhythm. But superimposed upon it was the piston two count of his arm and the long overriding four count of the completed figure eight of his reversed loop.” See, too, in Maclean, “The Woods, Books, and Truant Officers,” *The Norman Maclean Reader*, 133–35, Maclean’s discussion of rhythm in poetry, including “quantitative and qualitative, accentual and intonational and superimposed rhythms.”

52. Andrey Tarkovsky, *Life and Work: Film by Film, Stills, Polaroids & Writings* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2018), 16.

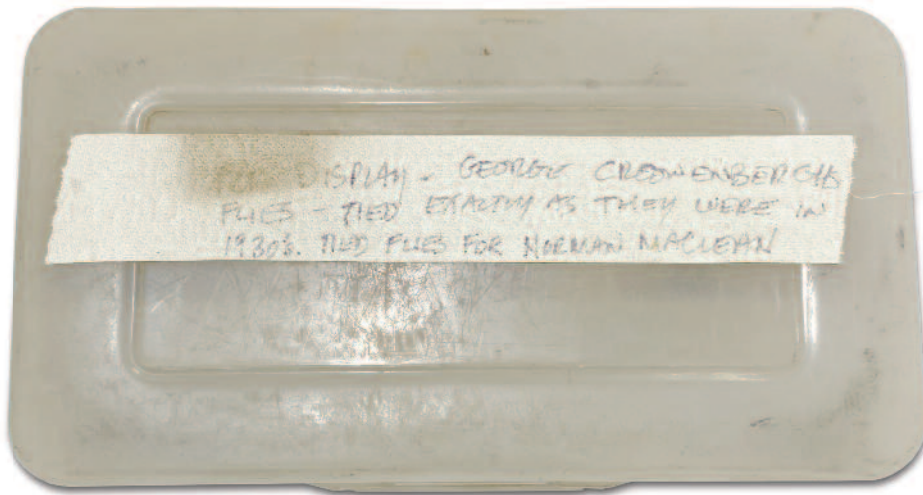
53. Isham’s score deserves its own essay. Note, for example, the thematic suggestiveness contained in jazzy versions of “Bye Bye Blackbird” and “The Old Rugged Cross,” this last playing while Paul and Mo-nah-se-tah/Mabel perform their lusty dance.

54. See Norman Maclean, “Episode, Scene, Speech, and Word: The Madness of Lear,” in R. S. Crane (ed.), *Critics and Criticism: Ancient and Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 408–50.

55. Callan, *Robert Redford*, 338.

56. Evidence of Redford’s background in and sensitivity to the art of painting turns up in the film in visual references to works of Winslow Homer. Knowledgeable viewers will note affinities between Homer’s *Boys in a Pasture*, 1874 and *Crossing the Pasture*, 1872 and the early boyhood scenes of Norman and Paul; between *Watermelon Boys*, 1876 and the watermelon-eating boy in the picnic scene; and between *Waterfall*, *Adirondacks*, 1889 and *The End of the Hunt*, 1892 and the shooting-the-chutes scene in the film. See, too, Homer’s *Leaping Trout*, 1889.

The George Croonenberghs Fly Box



A box containing flies tied by George Croonenberghs.

Photographs by Sara Wilcox



THE OLD FLY BOX seems nondescript at first glance. It's worn and dingy, the plastic now nearly opaque with age. The strip of white athletic tape on the lid, however, lets anyone who examines the box know that the contents are anything but ordinary. Written on that tape are the words "For display—George Croonenberghs flies—tied exactly as they were in 1930's [sic]. Tied flies for Norman Maclean."

When former deputy director Yoshi Akiyama came across this box, the mention of Norman Maclean naturally caught his attention. However, he could not immediately identify the tier because—thanks to a wrinkle in the tape and a stray pen mark—the spelling of the surname was somewhat unclear. So he showed the box to me, and I immediately turned to the go-to resource for so many of us these days: Google. I typed "maclean george cr" and scanned through the options provided by the autocomplete function, quickly zeroing in on the name that looked most like the one on the box.

The top search results were obituaries from 2005, marking Croonenberghs's death at the age of eighty-seven. All of the results confirmed the spelling of George's last name, as well as his association with the Maclean family. Many referenced his behind-the-scenes work on Redford's movie, for which he was credited as "period fly tyer/technical advisor." Most important, the obituary in Montana's *Missoulian* opened with a fascinating anecdote:

It was, his son-in-law says, a ridiculous-looking thing. George Croonenberghs called it the Santa Claus fly, and he swore by it.

It had a bright red body wrapped in golden tinsel, with polar bear hair for wings, and it wound perfectly around Croonenberghs' preferred fly-fishing technique.

"When he fished, he liked to put the fly between the sun and the fish so it was more radiant," says Karlheinz Eisinger, who is married to Croonenberghs' only child, Sandra. "He liked to cast into the sun so the fly would light up. It seemed to excite the fish."²¹



The Santa Claus fly (above) and the Croonenberghs Grasshopper (right).



After reading the entire piece, I looked into the box more closely, and suddenly noticed that among the flies it contained was one (pictured above left) that perfectly matched Eisinger’s description of the Santa Claus fly. With that realization, I felt confident we were indeed looking at what the label indicated: flies tied by George Croonenberghs.

Even though Croonenberghs is mentioned throughout Maclean’s novella, he doesn’t appear in the movie as a character. But because of his work as a fishing and period advisor, his presence is woven into nearly every frame. This feels more than appropriate, as the threads of his life were intertwined with those of the Maclean family from the early days of his childhood.

He not only grew up fishing alongside Norman and Paul, but learned to tie flies from their father, the Reverend John Maclean, at the age of six. According to Norman’s son, John N. Maclean:

George soon became skilled enough to tie saleable flies, but making a name in a crowded field proved difficult. He solved the problem one day when he caught a magnificent basketful of fish on a secret stretch of river. In those days, Bob Ward’s sporting goods on Broadway would display a fine catch on ice in a glass case on the sidewalk. They put George’s fish on exhibition with a note, craftily written by George: “Caught on the Croonenberghs Grasshopper on the Blackfoot River above Clearwater bridge.” For weeks afterward the Croonenberghs Grasshopper, which is a big cork thing that works only once in a while, was a sellout, and fishermen lined up basket to basket at the Clearwater bridge, which even back then was fished-out water. George wasn’t lying—the fish were caught above the Clearwater bridge—miles and miles above it.²

While working on this article, I’d barely finished adding in the text of that story when I decided on a whim to check the box again, just in case. I was delighted to discover a Croonenberghs Grasshopper (pictured above right) among the flies as well.

As an adult, Croonenberghs would test his flies by dropping them into a glass-bottomed aquarium suspended on two chairs, then crawl under to see what they looked like from a fish’s perspective. John Maclean noted, “at the age of eighty-seven he could still tie flies that brought joy to the hearts of fishermen and false hopes to the brains of fish.”³

Today, the museum is proud and honored to have some of George Croonenberghs’s flies in the collection. Although they won’t be giving false hopes to fish ever again, they’ll forever bring joy to the hearts of anglers everywhere.

SARA WILCOX

DIRECTOR OF VISUAL COMMUNICATION

ENDNOTES

1. Vince Devlin, “A River Runs Through It’ fishing, period adviser dies,” *Missoulian (Mt.)* (27 September 2005), https://missoulian.com/news/local/a-river-runs-through-it-fishing-period-adviser-dies/article_15ba605c-3781-5ef2-85da-a0961a3cfa75.html. Accessed 14 March 2022.
2. John N. Maclean, “George Croonenberghs,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20081204111914/http://johnmacleanbooks.com/george/>. Accessed 14 March 2022.
3. *Ibid.*

Mea Culpa: More on the Fishy Thoreau Quotation

by Robert DeMott

RETIRED UNIVERSITY of Utah folklore professor and current Master of the Utah Cutt Slam Jan Harold Brunvand's excellent exposé "Famous Thoreau Quotation Is Pretty Fishy" in the *American Fly Fisher* (vol. 48, no. 1, Winter 2022, 20–24) put much-needed light on a comically persistent misattribution that has been so often repeated verbatim that it has taken on (until now) an unchallenged gospel truth. The quotation—some version of "Many men go fishing all of their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after"—is attributed (mistakenly) to Henry David Thoreau.

I can't speak for the many others who have been guilty of fostering this unintentional (and perhaps even well-meaning) mistake upon the angling world, but as Professor Brunvand called me out (on page 22) as a two-time perpetrator of Thoreauvian misattribution malfeasance in my books *Astream* (2012) and in *Angling Days* (2016), I fess up here and say that he is absolutely correct in doing so; to which I add that the truth behind the misstatement is probably a good deal more egregious (and perhaps ironic) than even he realized.

By that I mean that I wasn't exactly an amateur where Thoreau is concerned. In 1969 I wrote my PhD dissertation on Thoreau, read nearly every word he ever wrote, including the multiple volumes of his journal, and taught *Walden* and his shorter essays many times in my earlier years to undergraduate and graduate students, which is to say I should have known better. But it turns out, especially with a fly-fishing geezer like me (prevarication being a natural part of our *modus operandi*), memory is notoriously unreliable. Not having been back intimately into *Walden* for a couple of years before my first mention of the mistaken quotation, I was running on faulty, senior-citizen memory alone. The misattributed quotation sounded so distinctly Thoreauvian, so *Walden*-like, and so much a part of the widely circulating

Thoreau info-sphere that I convinced myself it *had* to be correct and that there was no need to recheck the source, because, well, I swore it was his and his alone. Not so!

Of course, it is no defense to hide behind the erroneous belief that even if Thoreau did not say it, he surely should have. As with many of the others who have fostered this wayward piece of misinformation, I was dead certain I remembered Thoreau writing those words somewhere in *Walden*. Made up? Impossible! Misremembered? No way! Of course, along with many other shamefaced commentators of the same ilk, I was dead wrong.

We have Professor Brunvand to thank for reminding us that Thoreau never wrote these words in *Walden*, although an approximation appears in the "Higher Laws" chapter in a passage based on his 26 June 1853 journal, which even at that would require some mental acrobatics to make the shoe fit the foot: "They [townspeople] might go there [to Walden] a thousand times before the sediment of fishing would sink to the bottom and leave their purpose pure," he says (Henry D. Thoreau, *Walden*, ed. J. Lyndon Shanley [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971], 213).

Thoreau's writings are notoriously knotty, athletic, and ramified, and they invite secondhand paraphrase and after-the-fact approximation to get at their gist, which is sometimes a shorthand way of catching the essential spiritual flavor of his words. I went back recently to his entry from 26 January 1853 that, imperfect as it is in matching all elements of the infamous quotation, might nevertheless have been the instigator of my wayward recollection.

It is remarkable that many men will go with eagerness to Walden Pond in the winter to fish for pickerel—and yet not seem to care for the landscape. Of course it cannot be merely for the pickerel they may catch—There is some

adventure in it—but any love of nature which they may feel is certainly very slight and indefinite. They call it going a-fishing, & so indeed it is, though perchance, their natures know better—Now I go a-fishing & a-hunting every day, but omit the fish & the game, which are the least important part—I have learned to do without them. They were indispensable only as long as I was a boy—I am encouraged when I see a dozen villagers drawn to Walden Pond to spend a day in fishing through the ice—and suspect that I have more fellows than I knew, but I am disappointed & surprised to find that they lay so much stress on the fish—which they catch or fail to catch, & on nothing else, as if there were nothing else to be caught (Henry D. Thoreau, *Journal, Volume 5: 1852–1853*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997], 455–56).

As I said, I can't speak for others, and I am not letting myself off the hook here, either, but a paraphrased version of this passage (first encountered years earlier) may have been the source of my confusion and memory warp, and having been paraphrased once, it was quickly accepted as indisputable fact afterward without being challenged or vetted. Whatever the origin and cause, I certainly am among the guilty. Anyway, bravo to Professor Brunvand for setting the record straight at long last and perhaps, let us hope, saving us from further "chaos" (page 24) once and for all.

~

Robert DeMott is Edwin and Ruth Kennedy Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Ohio University, where he taught in the English department from 1969 to 2013 and taught a course on the literature of fly fishing. His most recent books are *Up Late Reading Birds of America* (2020) and *Steinbeck's Imaginarium: Essays on Writing, Fishing, and Other Critical Matters* (2022).

Paul Bruun Receives the 2022 Izaak Walton Award

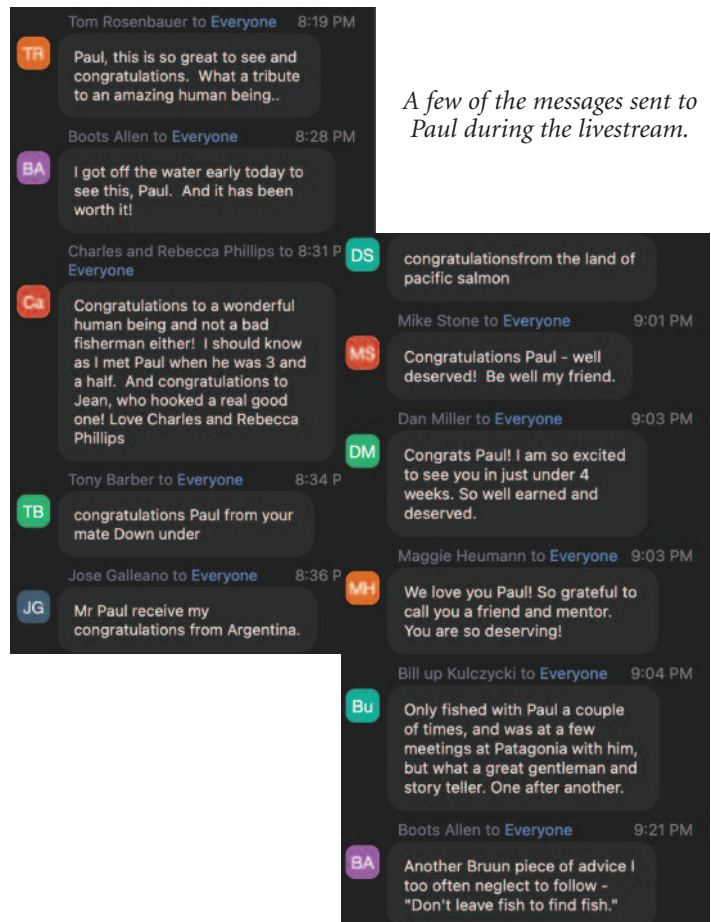


Clockwise from above left: Rick Ruoff, Yvon Chouinard, Paul Bruun, AMFF President Fred Polhemus, Steve Huff, and Cary Kresge paid tribute to Bruun during the Izaak Walton Award livestreaming event.

AMFF WAS THRILLED to honor writer, guide, innovator, mentor, conservationist, and fly-fishing oracle Paul Bruun with its 2022 Izaak Walton Award during a livestreaming event on June 30. AMFF President Fred Polhemus kicked off the evening from the museum's Gardner L. Grant Library, then handed things off to host Captain Rick Ruoff. Ruoff—along with Yvon Chouinard, Captain Steve Huff, and Cary Kresge, all friends and colleagues for about a half century—paid tribute to the Jackson Hole resident with wonderful and humorous stories that can only come from time spent on the water.

Bruun, who was a local city councilman dubbed the “fishin’ politician,” gratefully recognized other anglers who had chosen to enter politics on a conservation platform. He also acknowledged his wife and fellow guide, Jean Bruun, for her love and support, as well as for her always wanting to stay out late to get in an extra “five or six casts.” Stories shared varied from how Bruun got his first passport to travel to Argentina with Chouinard to a mystery client who turned out to be actress Angie Dickinson, the mid-twentieth-century icon. Messages of goodwill poured in through the night. For those who missed it, the recorded event is available to view at amff.org.

We appreciate Frankie Wolfson’s underwriting of this event. We’d also like to thank our Leadership Circle supporters and those who made donations in honor of Paul Bruun. The online silent auction was a great success, and we would like to extend our gratitude to all of the bidders as well as our wonderful auction donors: Jean and Paul Bruun, Yvon Chouinard, Fishpond, Gary Grant, Patagonia, Rustico, Trout Unlimited, VAER, World Cast Anglers, Wyoming Whiskey, Yellow Dog Fly Fishing, and Yeti.



A few of the messages sent to Paul during the livestream.

Save the Date November 3, 2022 AMFF Returns to New York City for the Heritage Award honoring *A River Runs Through It*

This fall, AMFF will recognize the extraordinary contribution to the sport of fly fishing made by the film adaptation of Norman Maclean's novella *A River Runs Through It*. Producer Patrick Markey will accept the award at the Racquet and Tennis Club in New York City as several cast and crew reunite to tell stories from this landmark film, shot thirty years ago but fondly remembered to this day.

In 1992, Robert Redford brought Maclean's beautifully crafted tale of family and fly fishing to the big screen via screenwriter Richard Friedenberg's remarkable adaptation of Maclean's beloved novella. Filmed on Montana's Gallatin River, a generation of filmgoers became captivated by the stunning Oscar-winning cinematography of Philippe Rousselot. The fly-fishing industry is reputed to have grown 60 percent in 1993 as a direct result of the film.

Renowned Montana author and previous Heritage Award honoree Tom McGuane originally introduced Redford to Maclean's seminal work when Redford paid him a visit at his home east of Livingston. Redford returned to the area to film, with the town serving as Missoula in the early twentieth century and the Gallatin standing in for the Blackfoot.

Redford and Markey took the fly-fishing discipline in the film very seriously, as many fans find Maclean's book to be the sacred text of western fly fishing. Legendary anglers—including KC Walsh of Simms, John Bailey of Dan Bailey's Fly Shop, and Jerry Siem of Sage Rods—advised Redford and Markey. Colorado fishing guide John Dietsch coordinated the technical team and, along with angling expert Jason Borger, doubled for the leads in several of the fly-fishing sequences. Bozeman's fisheries biologist and stream builder Joe Urbani safely handled all of the fish seen on camera. Award-winning documentary producer Dennis Aig and outdoor cinematographer Paul Ryan, longtime colleagues of Redford and Markey, were also an invaluable part of the team.

The movie's success inspired multiple generations of new fly fishers around the world who would go on to become advocates for cold, clean rivers and a healthy fish habitat. The film was definitely an economic and environmental boon, contributing millions to the industry while focusing attention on the restoration of Maclean's home water, the Big Blackfoot River, which is once again a pristine fishing destination.

A River Runs Through It introduced a wide range of new readers to the works of Norman Maclean and captured the essence of fly fishing in such a way that it is simply referred to as "the movie" in angling circles, although it only contains eleven minutes of fishing footage. Arguably, it also gave us one of the great final lines in film history, humbly borrowed from Maclean: "Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters."

AMFF would like to thank Erik Oken and Eric Roberts for co-sponsoring this event at the Racquet and Tennis Club.

For more information, please contact Sam Pitcher at spitcher@amff.org or (802) 362-3300.





AMFF

The American Museum of Fly Fishing was well represented at the annual Marlborough Fly Fishing Show, held April 22–24 at the Royal Plaza & Hotel Center in Marlborough, Massachusetts. Visitors to the AMFF booth were greeted by staff and volunteers, pictured here (left to right): AMFF Curator Jim Schottenham, members Peter Castagnetti and Katie Polhemus, and AMFF President Fred Polhemus. Special thanks go to Katie and Peter for generously donating their time. Show attendees were treated to a large casting pool, fly-tying classes, casting demonstrations, and the chance to view numerous films related to fly fishing, including the award-winning *Mighty Waters*, presented by the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

Museum Ambassador

Al Quattrocchi (aka Al Q, pictured at left), joined the museum ambassador program in February. Al has been a saltwater fly angler, fly tier, and fly-fishing advocate for more than thirty-five years. An educator and environmentalist, he has created fly-fishing events along the coast of California to introduce new anglers to the exciting and challenging world of saltwater fly fishing.

Al was the recipient of the Pasadena Casting Club's 2017 Ross Allen Merigold Complete Angler Award and is a two-time IGFA world-record holder. Both saltwater records were accomplished in a single day: the 12-pound tippet record for calico bass and 20-pound tippet record for white seabass. He founded the popular One Surf Fly event in Southern California, which lasted nine seasons and raised thousands of dollars for nonprofits and fly shops up and down the West Coast. His articles, illustrations, photography, and fly patterns have been published in many prominent fly-fishing magazines.

Al is currently West Coast editor of *Tail Fly Fishing Magazine*. Although he has fished in many places around the world, his passion is still sight fishing his local Southern California beaches in search of the ghost of the surf: the elusive corbina. In 2021 he self-published *The Corbina Diaries* with Love2FlyFish Media. He lives in Los Angeles.

Member Day at WOW

Join Executive Director Sarah Foster and Curator Jim Schottenham at the AMFF Gallery at the Wonders of Wildlife (WOW) in Springfield, Missouri, on August 19. AMFF members will receive free admission to WOW, a chance to tour the

new AMFF gallery, and spend some time with AMFF ambassador Jess Westbrook, who will be on hand all afternoon to tie flies and chat about classic tackle. Gallery tours are at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. To receive complimentary WOW tickets, please RSVP with your name and the number of tickets needed to amff@amff.org by August 11.



Larry Acord

Al Quattrocchi with his grande roosterfish, caught on a 10-weight fly rod in Baja.

Recent Donations to the Collection

Ben Blaney of Cincinnati, Ohio, donated a rare circa 1862–63 C. F. Murphy fly rod. It is an example of the first all-split-bamboo rods built in America. **Ron and Jane Stuckey** of Hopewell Junction, New York, sent us a Green Slime fly tied by angler William Knobloch, and **Howard Bleakie** of Manchester, Vermont, shared two Heddon fly lures in their original packaging. **Ron and Jane Gard** of Dallas, Texas, donated a wood fish weathervane, previously mounted on Lee Wulff's barn on the Beaverkill. It is now installed on the exterior of our new satellite gallery space at Wonders of Wildlife in Springfield, Missouri.

We were thrilled to receive a copy of *The Honest Flies of Dale Greenley* from **Dale Greenley** of Myrtle Creek, Oregon, plus the seventy-seven flies featured in the book. **The Flyfishers' Club of Oregon** (Portland) sent us commemorative issues of the *Creel*, including a special sixtieth-anniversary edition. And **Paul Schullery** of Manchester, Vermont, rounded out our library with some of his titles that we did not already have in our collection.

Joan Wulff of Livingston Manor, New York, continues to share more fantastic treasures documenting her career and that of Lee Wulff, including her first-prize medals for casting; a no. 28 midge fly tied by Lee Wulff in his hands without aid of a vise; and the exact Farlow's Lee Wulff model rod owned and used by Lee Wulff during his competition with Jock Scott (D. Rudd) in a well-publicized 1962 transatlantic salmon match.

Upcoming Events

Events take place on the museum grounds in Manchester, Vermont, at EST unless otherwise noted.

August 13

15th Annual Fly-Fishing Festival
10:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Outdoor Screening
Influential fly-fishing films from the 21st century
8:00 p.m.

October 27

Members-Only Event
Charles Thacher Book Collection
5:00 p.m.

November 3

Heritage Award honoring the 30th anniversary of the film adaptation of *A River Runs Through It*
Award to be accepted by Producer Patrick Markey
Racquet and Tennis Club
New York City
6:00 p.m.

Always check our website (www.amff.org) for additions, updates, and more information or contact (802) 362-3300 or events@amff.org. The museum's e-mail newsletter offers up-to-date news and event information. To subscribe, look for the link on our website or contact the museum.

CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Bunse



Henry Hughes is the author of the memoir *Back Seat with Fish: Adventures in Angling and Romance* and the editor of the Everyman's Library anthologies *The Art of Angling: Poems about Fishing* and *Fishing Stories*. His work often appears in *Gray's Sporting Journal*, *Harvard Review*, *Anglers Journal*, and *Flyfishing & Tying Journal*, where he serves as deputy editor. He teaches literature and writing at Western Oregon University.

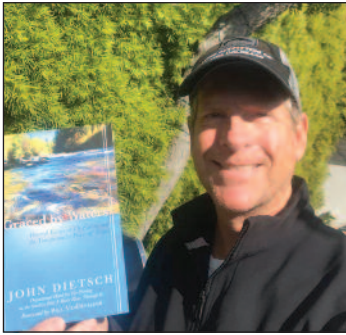
Timothy P. Schilling is by his own estimate perhaps the least accomplished fisherman ever to have graced the pages of this journal. He remains, nonetheless, perpetually fascinated by the metaphysical significance of fish and fishing, and by angling as a means to contemplation and reflection. This interest began at Princeton University, where he wrote a long paper on *Moby-Dick*, and grew when he conducted graduate studies in theology in Belgium and in the Netherlands. When he gets to heaven, God willing, he will ask the Lord why there were 153 fish in the disciples' net in John 21:11. Dr. Schilling, a theologian, is currently at work on a book on the life and work of Norman Maclean.

Annegien Schilling



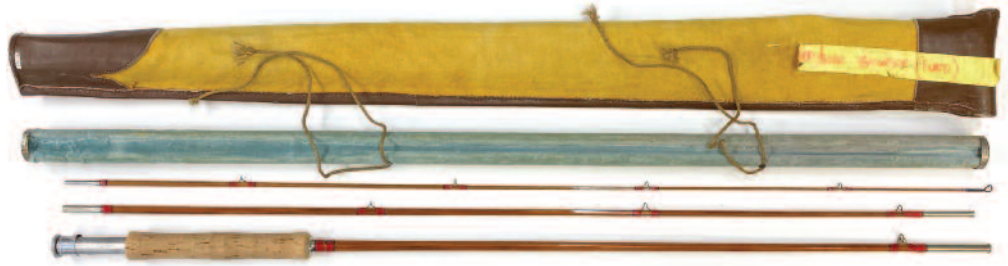
A Reason to Celebrate

Courtesy of John Dietsch



A River Runs Through It fly-fishing coordinator John Dietsch.

Sara Wilcox



A rod used by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who played young Norman Maclean, in the film adaptation of *A River Runs Through It*. From the collection of the American Museum of Fly Fishing.

ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3, at our Heritage event at the Racquet and Tennis Club in New York City, AMFF will be celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of the film adaptation of *A River Runs Through It*. The 1992 release was considered a major factor in a steep uptick in the fly-fishing industry—both in sales and in advocates for the conservation of angling waters. That’s reason enough for celebrating this treasured production, but when I sat down with John Dietsch (the film’s fly-fishing coordinator and Brad Pitt’s stunt double), he offered much more through his personal insights.

SARAH FOSTER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In your words, why is it important to reflect back on *A River Runs Through It*?

The film really did encapsulate the story. I have people all the time come up to me and say that it was one of the best translations of a novella or fictional piece of writing that they’d ever seen. That’s a testament to the power of the story and how much we put into it to make it synonymous with the literary version of what people call the holy grail of fly fishing.

I think there’s a real need for not just fly fishers but everyone to reflect on the power of nature and its ability to heal. *A River Runs Through It*—especially now, with the pandemic and other challenges that seem to be increasing in our world—is evergreen and still applies to things that are happening today. It’s important to reflect on why it was such a powerful film and still is. It has so many stories about resilience and the understanding that there are just some questions that we have to leave to the river.

“It’s not a movie about fly fishing” was a popular phrase. Why do you think it took the fly-fishing industry by storm?

Robert Redford would say to me, “*A River Runs Through It* is not a movie about fly fishing. It’s a story about family.” I’d agree, but the fly fishing is the vehicle that takes us into the river. As Norman Maclean indicates in the very beginning of the book, he felt that the river was a reflection of God, a reflection of spirit, and every time he stepped into that river it became this through line in his life that helped explain that there are a lot of unexplainable things that happen not only on the river, but in life. It was where I think he was most touched by his own soul, and he felt that all the souls of all his ances-

tors, all the people that touched his life who had passed, were somehow in the river. He talked about that in terms of the words beneath the rocks, and, he said, “some of the words are theirs.”

Can you talk about the support AMFF offered during production?

It was fascinating learning about how people fished in the 1920s and 1930s. Of course, I was familiar with brands like Pflueger, Orvis, and Hardy (to name a few), but I had to call the museum frequently about things like Pott’s flies, fly wallets, catgut leaders, silk lines, creels, and snelled hooks.

I spent a lot of my time bringing in as many older and more knowledgeable professional anglers as fast as I could: Jerry Siem, a caster; John Bailey, a second-generation Montana fly fisherman whose dad was a contemporary and friend of Maclean; and George Croonenberghs, whom Maclean mentioned in the book, a dear friend who tied the majority of the flies for the brothers that they used on the Blackfoot in those days. I also watched the videos that Gary Borger made with his son Jason and swiftly brought them on as well. Jim Belsey helped us find waters on the Gallatin that helped us mimic the Blackfoot. Ralph Moon, president of the Federation of Fly Fishers at the time, was also very helpful. Bob Auger, the riverkeeper at DePuy Spring Creek, and I consulted with Walton Powell, who built us the graphite replicas of the bamboo rods used by the actors so they could cast faster-action rods whose loops would look better on camera. And of course there was Len Codella, who ended up refurbishing a handful of Granger and Montague rods and sourcing a bunch of the old tackle.

AMFF was a helpful consultant, ensuring that we were using the right attire, gear, and techniques and finding good fly-fishing personnel. Keep in mind that I was twenty-nine years old at the time, and even though I had been guiding in Aspen, Colorado, working for old-timers like Roy Palm, Chuck Fothergill, and Georges Odier, I didn’t know the first thing about “old-fashioned” fly fishing. Like so many projects I have worked on in film and TV, I had to bone up quickly and surround myself with the most knowledgeable people I could find. Working with the museum was an obvious choice.

I’m so looking forward to this reunion of cast and crew.



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