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## Words

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### THE INSIDES OF WORDS

#### Words Themselves

It may seem difficult, at first, to think of words apart from contexts; "salt" does not stand alone; it is part of "salt and pepper," or "please pass the salt." Words seem like drops of water in a stream that has its own wholeness and its own motion. But when you write well, each word is accurate and honest and exact in itself, and contributes its special history to the wholeness of the stream of meaning.

The writer must be able to feel words intimately, one at a time. He must also be able to step back, inside his head, and see the flowing sentence. But he starts with the single word. He starts with tens of thousands of these units, and he picks among them. He may end by writing a passage like this account of man's first sleep on the moon:

It was almost three-thirty in the morning when the astronauts finally prepared for sleep. They pulled down the shades and Aldrin stretched out on the floor, his nose near the moon dust. Armstrong sat on the cover of the ascent engine, his back leaning against one of the walls, his legs supported in a strap he had tied around a vertical bar. In front of his face was the eyepiece of the telescope. The earth was in its field of view, and the earth "like a big blue

eyeball" stared back at him. They could not sleep. Like the eye of a victim just murdered, the earth stared back at him.

Norman Mailer, *Of a Fire on the Moon*

Until the end, this exposition seems simple and straightforward. Simple and straightforward it is, with the power of visual exactness, "his nose near the moon dust," and the unexpected detail, "a strap he had tied around a vertical bar." Mailer cements each word in place exactly and inevitably, with the help of rhythm and sentence structure. For now, just look at how he prepares for the last, emotional image with related words.

This passage, and much of Mailer's book, is about man and machine. The machinery is sophisticated, complex, overwhelming. Men are frail in comparison. The language begins to embody this idea, by repeating the names of parts of the body: "nose," "back," "legs," "face." We have become accustomed to the jerking motions of the puffed-up spacesuits, as if we were watching robots. Now suddenly we see "nose" and "face." We might be a mother looking at a sleeping child. From "face" we move to the most vulnerable and necessary of sense organs, the "eye," first by way of a telescope's "eyepiece," then by a visual comparison, easy to follow, of the earth to a "big blue eyeball," which stares. We have departed from the astronauts' bodies, and moved onto metaphorical bodies. Then, because the eyeball stares, we can leap to the emotional crux: the earth is dead, murdered by the astronauts who leave it behind for another planet, beginning the exploration outward, into the stars. Mailer makes his point not by telling us about it overtly, but by his control of language, his understanding of the insides of words, so that the movement from "nose" to "face" to "eyepiece" and "view" to "victim just murdered" has an inner and emotional necessity.

All the warm night the secret snow fell so adhesively that every twig in the woods about their little rented house supported a tall slice of white, an upward projection which in the shadowless gloom of early morning lifted depth from the scene, made it seem Chinese, calligraphic, a stiff tapestry hung from the gray sky, a shield of lace interwoven with black thread.

John Updike

These sentences begin a short story called "The Crow in the Wood." Updike exercises the possibilities of our language in rhythm, in variety

of sentence structure, and in observation that is dreamy and precise at the same time. He does it with words. Instead of looking at everything he does, let us look at two words that stand out. "Adhesively" is a word we all know, from the noun or adjective "adhesive," as a longer way of saying "glue" or "sticky." Here the snow "fell . . . adhesively." Snow really cannot fall like glue, and so we have something apparently inaccurate; yet it is right, because the context prepares us. It is a "warm night"; the snow will be damp. And using "adhesively" rather than "stickily" shows that the snow is not gooey to the fingers, but will actively adhere to something. "Adhesively" by its unusualness draws the right attention to itself.

Then look at the word "slice," "every twig . . . supported a tall slice of white." Most of us would have said something about snow "piling" or "accumulating" on branches. But "a tall slice of white," besides being pleasing to the ear, is a brilliant image; the sharpness of "slice," together with the image of whiteness, nearly dazzles the eye. With the word "slice" is an unspoken knife, just out of sight. And I think we have a moment's vision of an upright piece of white-frosted cake.

We could pick many more words for praise in the passages from Mailer and Updike, and maybe for blame as well (we will do that later). But the excellence here is perhaps like all excellence. These writers are *original*, as if seeing a thing no one has seen; yet they report their vision in a language that reaches the rest of us. Here, again, we find the opposites we must combine. For the first quality the writer needs imagination; for the second he needs skill. Without both qualities, he could not write the passage. Imagination without skill makes a lively chaos; skill without imagination, a deadly order.

### No Synonyms

To appreciate the word—the "eyepiece," the "eyeball," the "slice," the "adhesively"—the writer and the reader must first realize that no words can be synonyms. Some words are close to each other in meaning, close enough to reveal that they are not the same. The writer must know not just the surface definitions of words; he must go deeper, and realize the families of contexts into which words have extended their associations—like "slice" with "knife" and even "cake." These families are the connotations of the word and the asso-

ciations we make with its denotation; "pepper" is not a connotation of "salt" but an association of it. Since the writer uses the whole family, it does not matter that he discriminates connotation from association. But he must know the insides of words; he must be a friend of the family.

The verbs "to emulate," "to imitate," "to copy," and "to ape" are synonyms, by definition — but when we use them in a sentence they carry slight differences in meaning. "To emulate" sounds fancy; also it usually implies that the imitation involves self-improvement. "To imitate" is neutral, except that everyone knows that an imitation is not the real thing; inferiority shadows the word. "To copy" is to reproduce exactly; like "to imitate" it states a lack of originality. "To ape" is to mimic, and to be comical or mocking about it. If you wanted to say that a young pianist imitated a famous virtuoso, but you carelessly used "ape" instead of "imitate," you would grant his style the grace of a gorilla. Context is all; the inside of a word must reinforce or continue the force built by the context. When a sportswriter wrote that one middle linebacker aped another middle linebacker, he was being witty.

Dictionaries of synonyms and other books, especially *Roget's Thesaurus*, list words that resemble each other. The experienced writer can sometimes use a thesaurus to joggle his brain, to find not a "synonym" but the *right* word. He will be aware of the insides of the words he discovers. The thesaurus can be useful, not for supplying words never heard before (we know words only when we have met them in sentences; some dictionaries supply examples of words in use) but to remind the writer of words known in the past, but not remembered when needed.

Sometimes an unsophisticated writer finds disaster in such a book. A thesaurus supplies us with words that *resemble* each other, but we must recognize the *differences* between them. When I look up "imitation," in my pocket *Roget*, I find under Verbs:

imitate, copy, mirror, reflect, reproduce, repeat; do like, echo, re-echo, catch, match; parallel; forge, counterfeit.

mimic, ape, simulate, impersonate, act, etc. (*drama*), 599; represent, etc., 554; parody, travesty, caricature, burlesque, take off, mock, borrow.

follow in the steps (or wake) of, take pattern by, follow suit [colloq.], follow the example of, walk in the shoes of, take after, model after, emulate.

The editors separate the verbs into three categories, which ought to help the cautious writer, but it is difficult sometimes to defend their sorting out. Why does "forge" or "counterfeit" belong among the closer synonyms in the first group, and "emulate" among the phrases in the third group? Why is "represent" among the comic or belittling words? Putting "ape" with "travesty" and "parody," however, reminds us of the comic insides of "ape." The beginning writer should certainly be wary of a thesaurus, because if he believes in synonyms he could produce a prose that means something wholly different from what he intends.

I walked in the flowers that bordered the garden, sniffing the sweet airs of spring.

could become,

I peregrinated in the flowerets that flounced the orangery, sniffing the saccharine ventilation of the vernal equinox.

Spoken by W. C. Fields, the second version could be perfect for its context, but as an example of how people misuse a thesaurus, it is exaggerated.

Using dictionary synonyms, you can test your sensitivity to the insides of words. Put the adjectives "false," "fake," "phoney," and "insincere" with the noun "laugh." Everyone has heard laughs that were unreal, laughs for the sake of flattery, laughs that express the laugher's nervousness, or laughs at jokes that are not funny. If we wrote a description of such a laugh, we might want to write, "His laugh was false," or "His laugh was fake," or "His laugh was phoney," or "His laugh was insincere." Each time the exact meaning differs. "His laugh was false" sounds direct and serious, a stern and objective judgment. "His laugh was fake" sounds harsher, a strong indictment of the laugher; it implies that the falseness was deliberate. "His laugh was phoney" tells us more about whoever wrote the phrase. The choice of "phoney" over "false" or "fake" or "insincere" makes the speaker imply something like, "I am relaxed enough to be slangy." On the other hand, "His laugh was insincere" sounds pompous in its moral judgement — partly pompous, partly naïve.

These attempts to name the associations that words gather, without seeing the context that story or essay bestows, are speculation; but, whatever the context, the words would all be different. Slightly,

but genuinely, different. Katherine Anne Porter announced in 1961 that she had discovered "a law" that she put into "a little axiom":

There is no such thing as an exact synonym and no such thing as an unmixed motive.

### Literalness and Metaphor

Another way to become sensitive to the insides of words is to take them as literally as you can. When you read, "Fog enveloped the city," try seeing a gigantic gray-brown envelope enclosing Los Angeles. You can see some silliness in literal images — but it is a silliness that can increase your sensitivity to words. Puns help too, working through the ear. Literal-mindedness, like all exercises that can improve your writing, can improve your reading as well.

Literal-mindedness exposes mixed metaphors, careless phrases comparing things that are comic or gross or inappropriate when brought together. Metaphors usually become mixed when a writer uses the kind of clichés called dead metaphors without noticing their original meanings. Sometimes people write, "The door yawned open"; the would-be comparison of door to mouth is dead from overuse. Sometimes people write, "The door beckoned," and the dead metaphor has the door turn into a hand that gestures an invitation. Once a student wrote in a paper, "The door yawned and beckoned." Two clichés make a mixed metaphor, if we are reading the insides of words: first the door is a huge, gaping mouth; suddenly an arm materializes between rows of teeth, and motions us to enter. Seeing the silliness in some mixed metaphors, you can invent situations to explain them. If you read, in a newspaper headline, that A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY GOES DOWN THE DRAIN you can translate the sentence, "Somebody dropped the lemon jello down the disposal."

When we take words literally, we respond to metaphor. We see the fog *compared* to an envelope. A metaphor is a comparison made without being stated. We *state* a comparison as a simile — "like a big blue eyeball" — and we *make* a comparison when we leave out "like" or "as." Hamlet in his soliloquy wonders if he should "take arms against a sea of troubles." It is futile to fight with the ocean. The futility is what Shakespeare had in mind. If you take the words literally, you can see an armored knight wading into the surf and slashing at the waves with his sword. The image shows an emotion that the

abstract word (futility) would only name. The picture — which we receive by literal reading — gives us the emotion, without losing the idea of futility that the picture expresses.

### Sense Words

Words that carry feeling most strongly are pictures and smells and touches and tastes and noises. Images are details of sense. The more sensuous words are, the more they reach us and move us. Updike embodies feelings of cozy shelter, and of precise observation of the outside world, by using images, not by using words that *tell* us how to feel (like "cozy") or that abstract ideas from actions (like "observations"). Mailer gives us an exact visual image of the astronauts trying to sleep on the moon. We feel the astronauts' cramp and discomfort because of the images; he need not say "cramp" and "discomfort." In the next paragraph, Mailer writes about the failure to sleep, and he writes ideas, but he uses images as well.

It used to be said that men in the hour of their triumph knew the sleep of the just, but a modern view might argue that men sleep in order to dream, sleep in order to involve that mysterious theater where regions of the unconscious reach into communication with one another, and charts and portraits of the soul and the world outside are subtly retouched from the experience of the day.

"Theater," "charts," "portraits . . . retouched" — Mailer uses images to make his concept clear by a comparison. Not all writing can be sensuous and figurative, but most writing can be. Of course it is always possible to be safe and boring by stating only the facts, without images and feelings. Mailer could have said that the astronauts arranged themselves to go to sleep but couldn't, perhaps because so much had happened that day. Updike could have said that when his characters woke up, they discovered that it had snowed while they slept.

Sense words carry feeling, and they fulfill purposes appropriate to different kinds of writing: for Mailer, the sense words embody a speculation; for Updike, they convey sensation that will soon body forth fiction to the reader's imagination. For Jane Addams, in this passage from *Twenty Years at Hull House*, images explain a scene at the same time as they express outrage over poverty in Victorian London:

. . . On Mile End Road, from the top of an omnibus which paused at the end of a dingy street lighted by only occasional flares of gas,

we saw two huge masses of ill-clad people clamoring around two hucksters' carts. They were bidding their farthings and ha'pennies for a vegetable held up by the auctioneer, which he at last scornfully flung, with a gibe for its cheapness, to the successful bidder. In the momentary pause only one man detached himself from the groups. He had bidden on a cabbage, and when it struck his hand, he instantly sat down on the curb, tore it with his teeth, and hastily devoured it, unwashed and uncooked as it was. He and his fellows . . . were huddled into ill-fitting, cast-off clothing, the ragged finery which one sees only in East London. Their pale faces were dominated by that most unlovely of human expressions, the cunning and shrewdness of the bargain-hunter who starves if he cannot make a successful trade, and yet the final impression was not of ragged, tawdry clothing nor of pinched and sallow faces, but of myriads of hands, empty, pathetic, nerveless and workworn, showing white in the uncertain light of the street, and clutching forward for food which was already unfit to eat. . . .

Notice that our sense of outrage, almost without exception, comes from the images chosen; we are not *told*, except when she writes "that most unlovely of human expressions"; we are *shown*. If Jane Addams used only abstractions like "degradation" and "extreme poverty," we could forget them easily; we do not forget the man who devours the cabbage "unwashed and uncooked," or the hands clutching at inedible food.

### Misusing the Insides of Words

Just as we can learn to embody feelings by being aware of a word's whole family and by using language that appeals to the senses, so we can misuse words to fool ourselves and other people. The poet W. B. Yeats wrote, "The rhetorician would deceive his neighbors, / The sentimentalist himself." Sentimentality means faked or exaggerated feeling, emotion that is not genuine. Usually, the rhetorician who wishes to deceive others must first become a sentimentalist who deceives himself. In the advertising business, it is common wisdom that you have to *believe* in your product; so that grown people ride the commuter trains believing that Hotz is superior to all other cold breakfasts. To con others, you begin by conning yourself, or you end that way.

Some propagandists deceive by will. The conscious manipulator sets out to change minds by slanting words to *seem* objective and yet

to carry a disguised subjective content. Newsmagazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*) often convey subtle editorial comment within their reporting. Newspapers do the same, though editors try to keep the editorials editorial, and the news objective. But even when you appear objective, you can select with bias. One photograph of candidate Y looks flattering; another makes him look like an ass.

We will never destroy bias, but we can learn to see bias, and not be deceived by reporting that is really editorializing. A few years back, one newsmagazine blatantly supported one presidential candidate. It openly supported him editorially. And in its "news" stories it supported him subtly, using the associations of words. Candidate A, they said, "in his rumpled suit slouched into the gleaming limousine." Candidate B, on the other hand, "strode smiling into his black sedan."

Now a sedan may sound expensive, but it may also seem to suit the dignity required of a candidate for high office. "Gleaming limousine" is more lavish, more gloatingly rich. "Rumpled suit" and "smiling" are obvious contrasts. The most telling use of the loaded word is the contrast between "strode" and "slouched." Who would vote for a man who slouched when he could pick one who strode instead? Yet in all fairness, can we say that the *news* in each sentence is different? In Dick-and-Jane language, the sentence would read, "The man got in the car." The rhetoricians of the newsmagazine, playing upon the separation between meaning and expression, flash us the sign: "Vote for B!" Because they pretend to objectivity, their use of sense words to influence opinion is dishonest and underhanded.

They seem to be doing it consciously, though no one can ever be sure of someone else's consciousness. More dangerous, for anyone who wishes to be honest, are the loaded words we kid ourselves with. We use euphemism to persuade ourselves that one thing is really another; a janitor cleans floors, but it sounds more lofty to call him a custodian. When we say that someone is "wealthy," we avoid the plainer word "rich," which has acquired overtones of vulgarity. If a real estate agent shows you a two-room shack converted from a chicken coop, he does not call it a "house," he calls it a "home." A Cadillac is never a "used car"; it is "previously owned."

Often, a euphemism is more abstract or general than the plain word. The euphemism not only sounds fancier (mortician / undertaker; route salesman / milkman) but it has less color or imagery. Apparently,

Americans are especially prone to euphemism. H. L. Mencken, in *The American Language*, gave some historical background.

The tendency to engaud lowly vocations with names presumably dignified goes back to the Revolution, and has been frequently noted by English travelers, beginning with Thomas Anburey in 1779. In 1784 John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth observed that the smallest American shopkeepers were calling their establishments *stores*, which indicated a large place to an Englishman. "The different distinct branches of manufacturers," he said, "such as *hosiers, haberdashers, clothiers, linen drapers, grocers, stationers*, etc., are not known here; they are all comprehended in the single name and occupation of *merchant* or *storekeeper*." By 1846 the American barbershop had begun to be a *shaving salon* and by 1850 a photographer was a *daguerrian artist*. By 1875 barbers were *tonsoorial artists* or *tonsorialists*, and in the early 80s presentable saloonkeepers became *restauranters* or *restauranteurs*. By 1901 the *Police Gazette* was carrying on a campaign for the abandonment of the lowly *bartender* and the adoption of either *bar clerk* or *mixologist*. . . .

But euphemism is not only comical. We employ euphemism, frequently, when we want to conceal something painful. When we have a tomcat castrated, we hesitate to admit that we have cut off his testicles, or even that we have castrated him; we have had him "altered." We have a tooth "extracted"; it would be more painful to have it "pulled."

Politics and political acts of destruction always bring forth the worst in our prose, as we struggle to justify ourselves. Hitler euphemistically labeled his genocide of Jews "the final solution." One of the finest essays on style is George Orwell's "Politics and the English Language," written in the forties. He says:

Millions of peasants are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the roads with no more than they can carry: this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*. People are imprisoned for years without trial, or shot in the back of the neck or sent to die of scurvy in Arctic lumber camps; this is called *elimination of undesirable elements*. Such phraseology is needed if we want to name things without calling up mental pictures of them. Consider for instance some comfortable English professor defending Russian totalitarianism. [George Orwell was British, and was writing after Stalin's execution of the Kulaks and the mass murders of the Soviet purges of the late thirties.] He cannot say outright, "I

believe in killing off your opponents when you can get good results by doing so." Probably, therefore, he will say something like this:

"While freely conceding that the Soviet regime exhibits certain features which the humanitarian may be inclined to deplore, we must, I think, agree that a certain curtailment of the right to political opposition is an unavoidable concomitant of transitional periods, and that the rigors which the Russian people have been called upon to undergo have been amply justified in the sphere of concrete achievement."

Meanwhile, the bullet enters the back of the head. Always be suspicious — as Orwell advises — when the words do not call up a picture. "Terminate with extreme prejudice" does not call to mind the prisoner bound, blindfolded, kneeling, the pistol at the back of his head, the sound, the rush of the body forward, the splatter of brains and blood.

#### Avoiding Self-Deceit

Sometimes, then, we use abstractions or euphemisms to avoid or suppress feeling. And sometimes we use sense words in dishonest ways, not so much to evade feeling as to twist it. "Slouched" and "strode" are both verbs of action that make us see. We must decide, by using our brains and our sensitivity, whether the difference between two images is literal description or an emotional nudge disguising itself as objective description. We do not complain that emotions *show*; we complain that the emotions are *disguised*. We do not object to laughter or to anger. We object to laughter that hides anger, expressing gaiety while it means hostility. We can learn to sense the falseness in language — our own or others' — as we learn to sense falseness in a gesture or a facial expression.

If we ourselves have strong opinions or biases, we must try to correct for the veer of our own wind, both in reading and writing. If we react instantly to a cliché like "the military-industrial complex," we are not thinking about it, and we can manipulate ourselves or be manipulated by others. We must become aware of our habits of opinion. We need not alter our convictions; we need only open them to the air — and to our own conscious minds. When we hear a phrase like "iron-curtain countries," we must not respond like an automaton to a pressed button, but like a human being, and decide what the phrase means, if it means anything, in its current context.

The more intense our convictions, the more vulnerable we are to

self-deceit. Knowing ourselves comes first: if we understand our feelings, we are forewarned of our vulnerability.

### Collecting Words

We must watch our words to see if we are using them with respect for honest expression. It helps to love words, and a love of words is something that we can develop. The growing writer finds pleasure in becoming a word collector, picking up, examining, and keeping new words (or familiar words seen suddenly, as if for the first time) like seashells or driftwood. Think of the richness in "hogwash," or the exact strength in "rasp." English is thick with short, strong words. You can collect words from books, of course, but you can also find them in speech; a sense of lively speech adds energy to the best writing. A writer listens to speech — others' and even his own — with a greedy ear. Primitive people and children love words as things in themselves and collect them as ornaments. To become a better writer, rediscover some of the pleasure from words-as-things that you had in your childhood but have probably lost along the way. Patrol the miles of speech looking for words like "flotsam."

Dictionaries can help, too. A thesaurus or a list of synonyms has the limitations mentioned earlier (pages 60–61). Brief dictionaries have brief definitions, and though they may light up a dark patch in our reading, they often give such a limited definition for the word, so void of context, that we may misuse the word when we try to say it in a sentence. Good-sized college dictionaries carry more information, and can be a pleasure to read. The more information, the better. The biggest dictionary in the language rewards investigation. Some time, when you are in the library, take down from the shelves one of the thirteen volumes of the *Oxford English Dictionary* and browse a little. The English poet and novelist Robert Graves says only one book is indispensable to the writer's library: the OED. In the thirteen volumes, the editors collect almost all the words you are likely to come across, except for new words, and words that at the time of publication were considered unprintable. Currently, new editors are making a supplement that includes new words, and old words newly printable. Now the publishers have photographically reduced all the pages of the dictionary, making a two-volume set out of the original thirteen. The price of the two-volume set puts this great dictionary within many people's reach.

It is not the OED's completeness that makes it so valuable; it is

the context given — the editors try to supply a context for the earliest example of each shade of meaning for every word. Suppose we look up the word "vegetable." More than three columns of small print chronicle the life of the word, which began as an adjective meaning "having the vegetating properties of plants; living and growing as a plant or organism endowed with the lowest form of life." The earliest example is from 1400. The poet John Lydgate, a couple of decades later, wrote of the wind (spelling modernized): "... that is so comfortable / For to nourish things vegetable." When Andrew Marvell wrote "To His Coy Mistress" two and a half centuries later (1687), he used the adjective in the same way: "My vegetable love should grow / Vaster than empires and more slow." Six examples (complete with small context) come between Lydgate and Marvell.

Meanwhile, the noun "vegetable" got started in 1582, when an author named J. Hester spoke of "the Hidden Vertues of sondrie Vegetables, Animalles, and Mineralles." The reader can discover thirty-six contexts for the word vegetable as a noun from 1582 to modern times — and many shades of meaning. If you take pleasure in words, you will find your sensitivity to the insides of words increasing the more you know the history of words. So much of our history, external and internal, global and psychic, is coded into our words. The more you know, the more you respect the integrity of the word; integrity means wholeness; a word's wholeness includes all its possibilities: its family, its insides.

### Words as Blanks

A frequent failure in our language, spoken or written, is our use of words that can mean anything the context requires. These words are like blanks for the reader or listener to fill in. Words of vague praise or blame—"lovely" and "terrible"—are frequent blanks. "Great." "Terrific." What does "lovely hair" look like? Is it red or blonde or white or black or brown? Long or short? Liveliness is specificity. Vogue words are usually blanks also. "Dig," "heavy," "cool." "Fink" was popular a few years ago as a vogue word of contempt, no more precise than the "jerk" or "creep" of earlier generations. Yet once "fink" meant something exact: a man employed to join a labor union and spy for bosses. Words of complex history suddenly come into fashion and lose all color. "Funky" and "uptight" are words that moved from black American speech into the television set — and no longer have anything to say.

### Words and Associations

Words used as blanks get in the way of writing and thinking and feeling. Words mean things only by our agreement. If we start using "April" to mean "sunset" or "anything pleasant," it will not be of use to us any more. Our agreements about words are coded into dictionaries, which of course change, as the words shift gradually in meaning because of historical change and the literary genius that adapts old words to new conditions. Our agreements about words are also coded into the dictionary from which we really make our sentences — the dictionary (the computer) of the brain. This mental collection is even more complicated and useful, for our writing, than the dictionary on the shelf. The thirty thousand associations of the word "April" are stored in it, waiting to be used in the right way at the right time. The inside of a word is a huge room of possibilities, limited — because "April" does not include "August" or "catsup" for most of us — but multiple: flowers and showers, Easter, spring, seeds, vacation from school, Chaucer and Browning and Eliot for readers of poetry, ploughing or manure-spreading for farmers.

Someone might associate April with catsup or cats or soup or a girl in the first grade called April. These associations are private; the few phrases I listed at the end of the last paragraph are public or general. A moment's thought will usually reveal to the writer, at least in revision, whether he is using a word privately or generally. "Tulips like catsup" would be a grotesque and inappropriate simile for most of us — despite the real color — though it might be a spontaneous expression of the writer who privately associated April with catsup. A writer must learn to suppress the highly private, because writing must get through to an audience; you are talking to someone besides yourself; you have climbed out of the pure autism of the crib, and are trying to make human contact.

### Words and Audience

But we must also remember, in choosing words, that an audience is not "everyone." The larger the audience we try to reach, the fewer associations we can take for granted, and the more circumscribed our room of possibilities. If we are writing for a big newspaper, we probably do not assume that most of our readers associate April with Chaucer, Browning, and Eliot. An idea of the audience is crucial to our choice of

words. Everyone makes this sort of choice in conversation: we use words with our best friend that we do not use with our grandmother; if we hitch a ride with a white-haired man wearing a blue suit, our words differ from those we would use if the driver wore sunglasses, bell-bottoms, and long hair. If our vocabulary stays the same, chances are that we are being hostile in the sacred name of honesty.

In writing we make the same choices. If we write a letter to the college newspaper, we choose the words from a pool different from the one we choose from when we write a thank-you letter to an aunt. The term paper in business administration requires a vocabulary different from the one for a term paper in literature.

The difficult, necessary task is to adjust your vocabulary to your audience with tact, humility, and appropriateness — but without hypocrisy, without being false. Sometimes it is merely a matter of common sense. If you are writing for an audience from the southern hemisphere, you must remember that April connotes autumn and leaves falling, not green and seeds sprouting. But common sense is easy, compared to the difficulties of learning the difference between appropriate tact and gross hypocrisy. When Jim Beck wrote his first essay, the one about "well-rounded individuals" and so on (on page 8), he was writing *for* an assumed audience, and *against* himself. Probably at that moment he did not believe that he could write with honesty for an audience that was a teacher. Probably Jim Beck had no vocabularies to fall back on at that moment but that of high-minded hypocrisy, and that of the boys in the locker room or the dorm, which can be just as hypocritical and one-sided as graduation oratory. By learning to write with more respect for himself, for his own feelings told in his own words, he learned to write with honesty, and to face things with honesty. By becoming aware of the insides of words, he learned a lot about the insides of Jim Beck; and he learned to make the inside outside — to *write*.