

How a literary classic emerged

SEEN FROM SEASIDE
R.J. MARX



Amidst an abundance of quality Pacific Northwest fiction, Don Berry presents the most vivid naturalism: bringing to mind the scent of the woods, the hollow of a log or the whisper of a dream.

The writer lived in Gearhart in the 1950s and '60s and managed to capture the essence of the land and water around him along with the heritage of the Nehalem, Clatsop and Killamook people.

The story is almost crude in its overt simplicity — Elbridge Trask, a settler on the Clatsop Plains with his wife Hannah — wants to settle on farmland to the south to what we known as Tillamook Bay — then uncharted territory.

Not a trip to be undertaken lightly, considered the densely packed forests, deep crevasses and tides breaking across the rock.

Trask's quixotic mission is abetted by two Native Americans, a holy man or "tanawanis," and the ne'er-do-well Wahila who signs on as guide.

"It is my goal," Trask tells the Native American Chief Kilchis, "to make of this bay one house, of which we can all live in peace."

Berry's descriptions are magnificent, painting word images of the dizzying heights of Neah-kahnie Mountain to Manzanita and beyond.

"Five hundred feet below," Berry writes, "the surf crashed against the base of the cliffs with a thunderous roar, throwing white water slowly up the side."

"Jagged spires of rock" point upward, and the "base of the sheer slab was a jumble of sharp and angular pinnacles around which the surf surged and churned."

Of the elk who wander the mountains, "they traveled in amiable companionship, a stark contrast to the mating season in the fall, when the bulls would be trumpeting their wild challenges and fighting for harems."

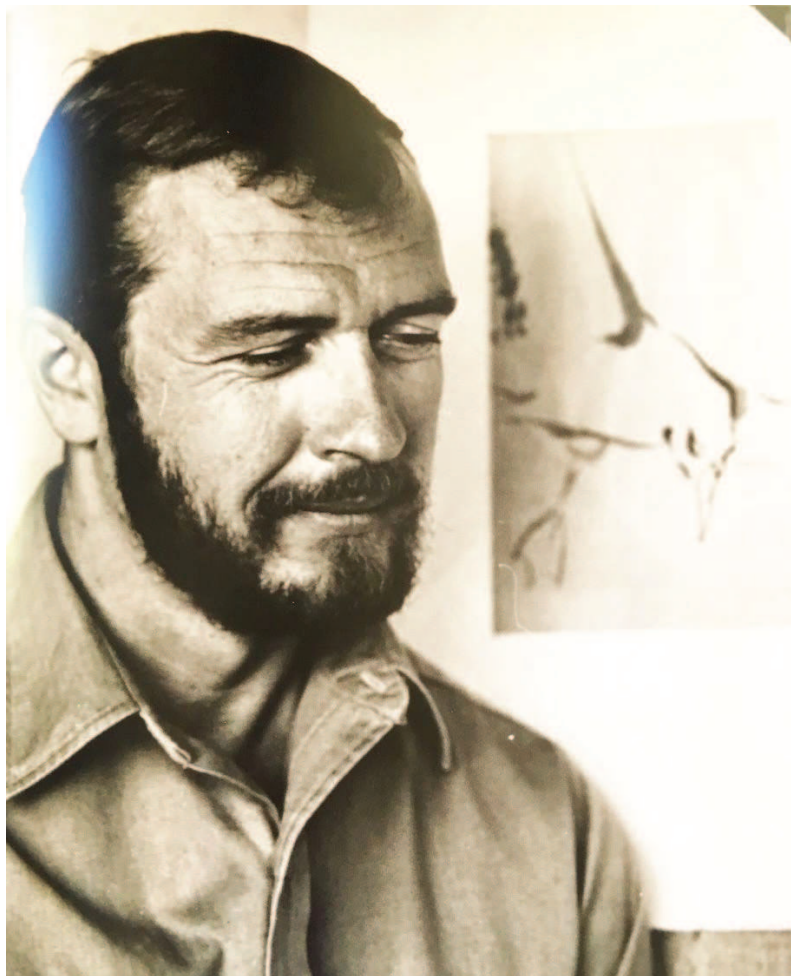
Tillamook Bay is rendered in its primitive isolation: "There was a quietness in the air, and the distant thin screaming of seabirds could be heard clearly. Flights of gulls began to wheel over the flat waters of the bay in long floating arcs."

Such descriptive prose is worthy of a thousand pictures.

The narrative is never predictable, never a "gee-whizz" Western — although this was marketed as a paperback pulp novel in the 60s, followed by "Moontrap" and "To Build a Ship."

A North Coast heritage

In Jeff Baker's introduction to the Oregon State University republishing of the books in 2004, he describes how Berry wrote the trilogy published between 1960 and 1963 "in a spasm of sustained creativity unequalled in Oregon literature. ... Berry believed fiction



Wyn Berry/For Seaside Signal

Don Berry in Gearhart after a trip to France, New Zealand and Hong Kong. One of his sumi drawings is in the background.

could tell larger truths as effectively as history."

Cannon Beach artist Rex Amos knew Berry as a colleague and friend. "Don was a painter before becoming a writer," Amos said. Amos knew Berry as a colleague and friend.

Berry lived in a cabin in Gearhart then had a log cabin on the Nehalem River, Amos recalled. "One day I dropped in on him and he came to the door with a bloody apron on. He had just shot a bear and was making bear jerky. Long story there; sort of Hemingwayish."

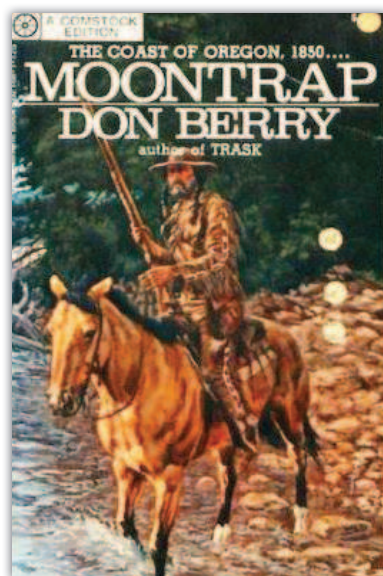
Their acquaintance was launched in the '60s, set up by a mutual friend Friedrich Peters, first director of Deutsche Sommerschule am Pazifik — a German summer program then in Manzanita and now offered from Lewis and Clark College.

John Allen of the Pacific Way Cafe recalled Berry as a legend in Gearhart. While he never met Berry, he knew Wyn as a journalist and erstwhile restaurant server.

Wyn, reached via email from her home in Vachon Island, Washington, recalled a happy time in Gearhart with family and friends in the early '60s.

Don Berry met Gearhart's Graham and Bunny Doar while at college at Reed, and the Doars introduced him to the North Coast. (Graham Doar was a recognized TV and science-fiction author whose short story "The Outer Limit" — a "close-encounter" story written in 1949 — was rewritten and readapted throughout the 1950s.)

Graham's daughter, also at Reed, Wyn Berry said, met Don at the Reed Bookstore where he was working, heard him talk about



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An entry in the Western trilogy with "Trask" and "To Build a Ship."

wishing he could talk to a published writer, and Jane said, "Pops writes for Saturday Evening Post and Esquire — why don't you go to Gearhart and talk to him?" He did, and thus began a long friendship, quickly followed by the addition of (the Berrys' children) David, Bonny, Duncan and myself. Both Graham and Bunny considered the kids to be their own grandkids."

"Trask" was researched at the Tillamook County Museum and written in a barn on a farm in Peach Cove on the Willamette River, Wyn Berry recalled. He also wrote the last chapter in a cabin he built in the Coast Range forest.

Berry loved the Northwest in all its rainy glory. He spent many days wandering or hunting all over Clatsop County. He was one-eighth Native American, Fox, and always had an affinity for wildness."

Berry walked every step of

Evolution of a classic's ending

By WYN BERRY
For Seaside Signal



Courtesy Wyn Berry/For Seaside Signal
Wyn Berry at Little Beach in Gearhart in the 1960s.

Wyn Berry, the former wife of Don Berry, lives on Vachon Island, Washington. She looks back on the writing of "Trask," and the shaping of its emotional conclusion.

In the late fall of 1958, we were living at Peach Cove on the Willamette River, south of Portland, Oregon. We were managing financially, but barely. Three kids in the same independent school, Catlin Gabel, where I taught, 40 miles away, my salary our only income. Berry, wrote obsessively in those years, on a portable Olivetti typewriter in the old red barn across the garden from the Red House in which we lived.

While preparations were underway at Viking Press for Berry's first novel, "Trask," to be published, his agent, Barthold Fles, sent a copy to Readers Digest's owner-editor Lila Wallace. One day, Berry received an amazing letter from her saying she would fly him to San Francisco if he'd come and talk with her about the book. The possibility of a lucrative publication with the popular Digest was truly exciting!

Needless to say, Berry decided to go and hear what Mrs Wallace had in mind. This could be the big break that every beginning writer dreams of. With high hopes, I took him to the airport. He was back the next day.

"Well, what did she say? Will she take it?" I pressed, the moment he got into the car.

whatever way he wrote about, from Hug Point, in "Trask," to Sawtooth Mountain past the Lewis and Clark River, she said.

He was lucky enough to have an agent, based on his years' of award-winning science fiction, who took "Trask" to publishers.

Trask's contract asked for and got first refusal on any subsequent book, and "off he went," Wyn Berry said. "He wrote Moontrap in southern France, collected the galleys in New Zealand, and proofed them in Hong Kong," she said. "Then (he) came home, went to the cabin, and wrote 'To Build A Ship,' again based on early journals. Last time I looked, his cedar cabin was still there."

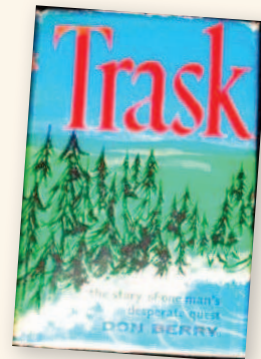
Don Berry's books earned

"No, she said I had not completed the story. She wanted me to add a chapter," he said tersely, "I refused. I'll not change my writing for anyone. It is as it stands."

My heart sank, even though I respected his standing up for his principles. So that was that. Quietly, we drove home.

But almost a year later, Berry reread his manuscript, went out to the barn, and all through the night, bombarded by nesting peregrine falcons and a young barn owl, he wrote the glorious last chapter. "Trask" was in galleys by that time, so he had to talk Viking into adding it, but they did.

"Trask," in the timeless, profound, popular book it has become, was published in 1960. Berry refused to send this final version to Mrs Wallace. He could not admit to being wrong, but he had realized it, and completed the book after all.



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"Trask" in its original printing.

immediate recognition by the public and critics quickly, she added, and the author enjoyed the accoutrements of success: glowing reviews, writers workshops and travel.

"Trask" won a Library Guild Award; "Moontrap" was nominated for a National Book Award and won the Golden Spur Award, given by the Western Writers of America for best historical novel that year.

Berry moved on from the area to develop a long career in Portland, San Francisco, the Caribbean and Vashon Island, in a career that is exotic as it sounds.

Berry gave up writing except on the internet, Amos said, of which Berry was considered (appropriately) "a pioneer."

Thai Me Up, baby, and don't forget the curry puffs

VIEW FROM THE PORCH
EVE MARX



When Mr. Sax and I were getting to know each other in New York City back in the '80s, a favorite place for lunch was a Thai restaurant on Ninth Avenue. The neighborhood was gritty, truth to tell. The restaurant was a storefront, family operation on the street level of a somewhat dilapidated apartment building. Our friend Bill, also a writer, lived in a small apartment upstairs. Bill, who appeared to live on cigarettes and beer, didn't care for Thai food, which I thought a pity since this great restaurant was so near. Mr. Sax and I lunched without him at the Thai restaurant often since it was inexpen-



Eve Marx/For Seaside Signal

Chicken curry puffs at Thai Me Up are pretty yum.

sive and had lots of small plates and pad Thai. It was also conveniently located only a block or so from my office.

This area is not bereft of good Thai food. We felt pretty lucky when we moved here to find out about Nisa's Thai Kitchen in

Warrenton, and shortly after Yellow Curry Cozy Thai in downtown Seaside opened up. Now there is a third Thai restaurant nearby, the beguilingly named Thai Me Up in south Seaside.

In addition to terrific food and modest prices, Thai Me Up shares an important element in common with our old fave in New York. Thai Me Up's owner is a Thai lady who hails from New York. She said she started her business with a food truck in Portland; asked how she found her way to the ocean, she smiled and said, "It was meant to be."

Sunday afternoons at Thai Me Up is becoming our winter jam. We're working our way through the menu. Every time, Mr. Sax tries a different style of wings. There are eight to choose from. I'm partial myself to the appetizers, in particular salad roll with peanut sauce; coconut shrimp; and chicken curry puffs. A friend

in Gearhart recommended papaya salad she described as "spicy, garlicky heaven." She also recommends chili mango wings. The next time, I'm trying crab fried rice or fried calamari. There are plenty of vegetarian choices and lunch specials are available Monday through Friday 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Thai Me Up has a chill, relaxed ambience, and, at least for now, no wine or beer license. You can order Thai iced tea, Thai iced coffee, Thai lime tea, juice, hot tea, or soda. To be honest I'm perfectly happy with water. It's healthy and keeps the bill down.

Thai Me Up is located at 1575 S. Roosevelt Drive in Seaside. Hours are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Closed Wednesdays in winter. Prefer take out? Call 503-717-5586. Connect with them on Facebook or check the menu and prices at www.thaimeupdx.com.

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