Reading through an issue of the New Yorker from 1962, I came across an article on Cassius Clay written by A.J. Liebling. He had watched Clay fight in the 1960 Olympics in Rome, and though he had not been astounded by Clay's work in the ring (Liebling thought Clay had won with "aplomb" rather than adroitness), he had been impressed sufficiently to document Clay's transition from amateur to professional boxer. But Liebling begins his first article, not with a description of Clay's style inside the ropes or his work ethic in the gym, but rather with a discussion of poetry.

"When Floyd Patterson regained the world heavyweight championship by knocking out Ingemar Johansson in June, 1960," Liebling begins, "he so excited a teenager named Cassius Marcellus Clay, in Louisville, Kentucky, that Clay, who was a good amateur light heavyweight, made up a ballad in honor of the victory." He goes on to discuss in brief the history of "pugilistic poetry," and then moves into the Department of Parks gymnasium on West Twenty-Eighth Street in New York where Clay, doing sit-ups while Angelo Dundee held his feet, recited his verse about Patterson.

"'You may talk about Sweden, You may talk about Rome, But Rockville Centre is Floyd Patterson's home. A lot of people say Floyd couldn't fight, But you should have seen him on that comeback night.'"

And later, after Patterson had knocked out Johansson:

"'A reporter asked: 'Ingo, will a rematch be put on?' Johansson said: 'Don't know. It might be postponed.'"

Although Liebling never said it, Clay's poem is, in respect to the canon of English poetry, non-canonical. Clay had composed trite, doggerel rhymes, but that didn't matter. What fascinated Liebling was that Clay had composed them at all. Clay had been inspired enough by a fight to translate the emotion he experienced into song. Liebling, who'd made a career doing the same, felt a kinship.

Evident in the way Liebling wrote about boxing is that he esteemed two things: boxing, and the language used to discuss it. He wielded metaphor deftly. For instance, in recalling Clay's gold medal victory over Zbigniew Pietrzykowski, Liebling said, "Clay had a skittering style, like a pebble scaled over water." Later, as the fight between Clay and the Detroit fighter Sonny Banks commenced (this bout was, after all, the subject of that New Yorker article I found), Liebling wrote of Clay, "The poet, still wrapped in certitude, jabbed, moved, teased, looking the

Konzertstück over before banging the ivories." Clay, the poet, becomes the concert pianist, ready to delight the audience with his music. To
Liebling
, what happened inside the ropes was high art. He felt, therefore, that a good fight demanded an artful retelling as deliberate and thoughtful as a prizefighter's training.

The Sweet Science is dedicated to in-depth boxing coverage and breaking news, but as a new member of the team, I will be trying to preserve the art of boxing journalism. I don't make any claims to possessing Liebling's linguistic prowess, but in writing my impending series, *Brute,* a section of which will run every Tuesday for 20 weeks starting January 5th, I had Liebling in mind.

Brute follows two Sacramento boxers: Mike Simms, a cruiserweight who trained with the Olympic team in 2000, who when I found him had lost five successive fights; and Stan Martyniouk, a young, Estonian-born featherweight, who when I found him had just fought and won his professional debut by decision, despite breaking his right hand in the first round.

Over the next 20 weeks I look forward to sharing the stories of these two fighters with the readers of the Sweet Science, and I look forward to hearing from any and all of you.