

Prospectus for Winter Light, by Ivan Doig

This will be a book about frontiers--the actual frontier of a century and more ago, when the westward push reached the Pacific shore, and my own frontier as a writer and late-twentieth-century American.

The idea is hard to fix into a genre, but I intend Winter Light to be a journal of exploration. It will be set within this coming winter--that is, will begin at dawn on Dec. 22 and close at dusk on the first day of spring, '79--here in the Pacific Northwest. I'll be writing, in first-person and in a tone like that of the landscape-evoking portions of This House of Sky, from my end of the century back into the time of a frontier diarist named James Gilchrist Swan, who was on hand when the American frontier reached its Pacific boundary here. At times, I'll quite literally be trying to explore back inside Swan's skin, to find out through him what the westering experience, and the raw new wealth of landscape, was like.

I suppose I'm attempting in the field of American frontier history something of what Loren Eiseley did with anthropology in The Immense Journey and Richard Selzer with medicine in Mortal Lessons: an evocative crosscut of the past, done with as much exactness of detail and imaginative personal angle of vision as I can manage on my own, and can derive from Swan and his diaries.

Winter Light, then, won't really be "about" either Swan or me, or the both of us, but about the frontier experience, by way of our eyes and brains. That is, as This House of Sky was a book about memory, Winter Light will be about finding a place to invest one's life.

Some quick details about Swan, since he will be such a figure in the book: he came west in the California gold rush of 1849, from Boston. Ever after, he spent his life in a kaleidoscopic assortment of livelihoods along the Pacific shore, mostly on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington. From 1859 until 1898 (he died in 1900, at age 81) he kept a day-by-day diary, a truly diligent and sustained record of frontier life. There's also the benefit that Swan genuinely liked the coastal Indians--one of his favorite drinking chums was a Klallam prince named Duke of York--and recorded their way of life without looking down on it. Given his friendship with the Indians, and his interest in all else of frontier life--the region's natural history, the sailing ships which were its cultural lifeline, his own sense of living at the edge of society and the farthest rim of his country--Swan's diaries are a trove of significant detail.

The diaries are available to me at the University of Washington archives here in Seattle. Other research, besides visiting the Olympic Peninsula coastal sites where Swan lived, likely will be a trip to the Queen Charlotte Islands off northern British Columbia, to retrace an artifact-collecting trip Swan did for the Smithsonian in 1883.

My working schedule will be to write the first draft between December '78 and the end of March, '79; let the manuscript sit for April and May, when I hope to be in Britain on research for the book after Winter Light; then begin in June on the rewriting, to hand in the manuscript by the end of 1979. Since I came up with the title of Winter Light, I've been told that Ingmar Bergman beat me to it. If recasting is needed, I would like to retain "Winter" somehow in the title: the season will be important to the book. Despite that, this will be a cheerier book than Sky--as moving and lyrical, I hope, but brighter-spirited, less death-haunted.

pre-cutting  
revision

Day one

. . . Capt John was here today, Swan writes from a century ago, and I related to him a dream I had last night, in which I saw several Indians I formerly knew who are dead. John said it was a sign the "memelose" or dead people are my friends and I would soon see that they would do something to show their friendship. . . .

Fifteen past nine. Out in the dark the Sound wind visits favorite trees, is shaken off, hankers along the valley in stubborn search. The gusting started up hours ago, during the wink-like pause of daylight that is December evening, and by now seems paced to try to last the night. Until the wind arrived the day was nordic: sunless but silent and dry. The neighborhood's lion colored cat, inspector general of such weather, all morning tucked himself atop the board fence outside the north window as I began to read Swan. Out of his furry doze each several minutes a sharp cat ear would twitch; give the air a tan flick just to be certain it still could. Then the self-hug into snooze again.

The breakers, now Swan the third day after his dream, tore up the beach and rooted out immense numbers of clams which were thrown up by the surf. I gathered a few buckets full and soon the squaws and Indians came flocking up like so many gulls and gathered at least fifty bushels. . . .

Nine eighteen. I see, by leaning to hear into the wind, that the night black window which faces west off the end of my desk collects the half of me above the desktop and its spread sheaf of copied diary pages into quiet of my own. I think of another set of Swan's words in the untold lode I am starting on. The time he tells of a canoe crew of Makahs, Captain John's coastal tribe, stopping for the night at the cabin of an Olympic Peninsula settler; of

how they swung the canoe mast wrong while stowing it and crashed an end through the hard-bought one window of the homestead cabin; of the settler's highest fury, as if they had shattered a diamond. This suburban house of mine glints with thirteen more windows besides the glass my reflection occupies, windows to every direction and inclination. Wobbly mast bearers could pass none of my walls without creating crystal.

Nine twenty. Capt John told me, this the morning following the beach bonanza, that the cause of the great quantity of clams on the beach yesterday was the dead people I dreamed about the other night and they put the clams there to show their friendship. . . .

Nine twenty-one, and now winter. I notice the numbered throb of the moment--this arrival of season at precisely 2121 hours of December 21--which takes us through solstice as if we too, the wind and I and the fencetop cat and yes, Swan and the restless memories of departed Makahs, are being delivered by a special surf. The lot of us, now auspiciously into the coastal time of beginnings. Perhaps I need a Captain John to pronounce full meaning from that.

No, better. I am going to have Swan's measuring sentences, winterlong.

Day two

His name was James Gilchrist Swan, and I have felt my pull toward him ever since some forgotten frontier pursuit or another landed me into the Coastal region of history where he presides, meticulous as a usurer's clerk, diarying and diarying that life of his, four generations and as many lightyears from my own. You have met him yourself in some other form--the remembered neighbor or family member, full of years while you just had begun to grow into them, who had been in a war or to a far place and could confide to you how such vanished matters were. The tale-bringer sent to each of us by the past.

That day, whenever it was, when I made the sidetrip into archival box after box of Swan's diaries and began to realize that they held four full decades of his life and at least 2,500,000 handwritten words. And what life, what sketching words.

This morning we discovered a large wolf in the brook dead from the effects of some strychnine we had put out. It was a she wolf very large and evidently had five whelps. Maggs and myself skinned her and I boiled the head to get the skull... . Mr. Fitzgerald of Sequim Prairie better known as "Skip," walked off the wharf near the Custom House last night and broke his neck. The night was very dark and he mistook the way... . Jimmy had the night mare last night and made a great howling. This morning he told me that the memelose were after him and made him crazy. I told him the memelose were dead squid which he ate for supper very heartily....Mr Tucker very ill with his eye, his face is badly swelled. This evening got Kichook's Cowitchan squaw to milk her breast into a cup, and I then bathed Mr Tucker's eye with it....

I recall that soon I gave up jotting notes and simply thumbed and read. At closing hour, Swan got up from the research table with me. I would write of him sometime, I had decided. Do a magazine piece or two, for I was in the business then of making those smooth packets of a few thousand words. Just use this queer indefatigable diarist Swan some ~~small~~ rapid way as a figurine of the Pacific Northwest past.

Swan refused to stay small, and rapid was the one word that never visited his pencils and pens. When, eight, ten years ago, I took one segment of his frontier life and tried to lop it into magazine article length, loose ends hung everywhere. As well write about Samuel Pepys solely in terms of his office hours at the British admiralty. Another, later try, I set out merely to summarize Swan--oyster entrepreneur, schoolteacher, railroad speculator, amateur ethnologist, lawyer, judge, homesteader, linguist, ship's outfitter, explorer, customs collector, author, small-town bureaucrat, artist, clerk--and surrendered in dizziness, none of the spectrum having shown his true and lasting occupation, diarist. This, I at last told myself, wants more time than I can ever give it.

Until now. This winter will be the season of Swan; rather, of Swan and me and those constant diaries. Day by day, a logbook of what is uppermost in any of the three of us.

It is a three-month venture that I have mulled these past years of my becoming less headlong and more ~~and more~~ aware that I dwell

in a community of time as well as of people. That I should know more than I do about this other mysterious citizenship, how far it goes, where it touches.

And the twin whys: why it has me invest my life in one place instead of another, and why for me that place happens to be western. More and more it seems to me that the westernness of my existence in this land is some consequence which has to do with that community of time, one of the terms of my particular citizenship in it. America began as west, the direction off the ends of the docks of Europe. Then the first comer from the east of this continent to its west, advance parties of the American quest for place (position too, maybe, but that is a pilgrimage that interests me less), imprinted our many contour lines of frontier. And next, it still is happening, the spread of national civilization absorbed those lines. Except that markings, streaks and whorls of the west and the past, are left in some of us.

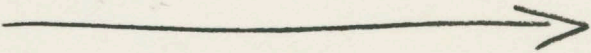
Because, then, of this western pattern so stubbornly within my life I am interested now in Swan as a west comer, and stayer. Early, among the very earliest, in stepping the paths of impulse that pull across America's girth of plains and over its continental summit and at last reluctantly nip off at the surf from the Pacific, Swan has gone before me through this matter of siting oneself specifically here: west.

The companion then, I feel an urgency to spend this winter with; meet day by day on the broad seasonal ground of time, here along the continental edge that drew us both.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
 If Swan attracts me in the way ~~that~~ an oracle such as the  
 Makahs' Captain John attracted him--that here flashes the bard of a  
 vivid tribe--it is the diaries <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ throw Swan's particular glints.

The diaries dazzle and dazzle me, first simply by their  
 total and variety: out of their gray archival boxes at the University  
 of Washington library, they could be the ~~entire~~ secondhand wares of an  
 eccentric stationer dreamed up by Charles Dickens. Some are mere notebooks  
 with cheap marbled covers, and occasionally even a school exercise book  
 will sidle into the collection, but most are formal annual volumes (for  
the purpose of registering events of past, present, and future occurrence,  
 announces the opening page of the 1860 <sup>version</sup> ~~diary~~) and a good number of them  
~~display~~ have left clasps to snug themselves closed from outsiders' eyes. It  
<sup>marginally</sup> exaggerates to say no two ~~are alike~~ <sup>Swan diaries look closer alike than cousins,</sup>  
<sup>any one</sup> of ~~a~~ kind. Black-covered and green, tan and faded maroon, what <sup>they</sup> ~~the~~ diaries  
 do have in common is that nearly all are small enough to fit into the  
 palm of a hand, or a busy pocket. Those that won't are <sup>actual ledgers</sup> ~~great tomes~~, such  
 as the aristocrat of the congregation, 1866, ~~A fat tan ledger~~ some nine  
 inches wide and twelve high, <sup>weighing</sup> ~~it weighs~~ four and a quarter pounds and  
~~displaying~~ <sup>plays</sup> an elaborately hinged and embossed spine and a cover panel of leather  
 into the middle of which has been tooled in rich half inch letters  
 J.G. Swan. I can scarcely wait for 1866--lay it open to the first of its  
<sup>lordly</sup> 380 <sup>instantly</sup> pages and handwriting neat as small embroidery ~~begins~~ to recite:  
Diary and private journal of James G. Swan, being a continuation  
of daily record commencing July 1862 at the Makah Indian Agency Neah Bay, #  
Washington Territory--but what browsing I have done into any of the diaries

has been seductive. Opening the pages of Swan's years is like entering a room filled with jugglers and tumblers and swallows of flame, performance crowding performance. Went to see John this morning, found him better. All the Indians except his squaws and children have left the lodge. John is alone in one corner, surrounded by a mat screen. He tells me that the small pox will collect in his head and when it leaves him it will come out of the top of his head like a puff of smoke. To prevent it spreading he has a large hole left open in the roof directly over his head, through which the sickness is expected to escape....Last evening when the gentlemen from the Cutter were here, Capt Williams asked me for a drink of water. I handed him a dipper full from my pail, and he found a live toad in it which I ~~had~~ had dipped up from the brook....Bricktop the blacksmith and some other roughs got on a spree & took Hernandez the loony shoemaker to Hunt's Hotel and made him treat. John Cornish was there and stripped himself to his drawers to fight....Swan records the weather morning-afternoon-night; notes down when salmonberry has popped into spring bloom, when autumn's geese begin to aim past to the southern horizon; logs all ships that sail past his eyes and on along the Strait of Juan de Fuca or Puget Sound; remarks his off days (Severe attack of





neuralgia today Dr. Minn tried to cure it injecting morphine or something of the sort under the skin on my left cheek--This checked the pain but made me feel dizzy & sick at the stomach--the remedy was worse than the disease) and the other coastal days that shone as doubloon-bright as the most exhilarating hours anywhere; keeps account of letters written and received, and books borrowed and lent, and of his exceedingly ramshackle finances. His jottings overflow the day-by-day pages onto the inside covers of the diaries: mailing addresses <sup>of relatives in his native New England,</sup> ~~(including Matilda's and those of Swan's two brothers in the East),~~

Indian words and their definitions, sketches. On one back page a little Indian girl on the wharf at Seattle, the child prettily prone on the planks as she ~~holds~~ <sup>directs</sup> a tiny fishing ~~pole~~ <sup>stick-and-string</sup> to the water and ~~directs~~ a level stare at the pencilman creating her. Elsewhere the unmistakable pyramidal outline of Mount Baker, <sup>the</sup> dominant peak of the Strait country; how many thousand times Swan saw its <sup>wide</sup> white cone. On an inside cover inspiration of one more sort, a pasted-in clipping of a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier: Though dim as yet in tint and line/We trace Thy picture's wise design/And thank Thee that our age supplies/The dark relief of sacrifice/Thy will be done!

Terrific as all the expended diary energy is, page upon page and volume after volume, the simple stubborn dailiness of Swan's achievement seems to me even more dazing. It compares, say, to that of a carpenter whanging an hour's hammerstrokes on the same framework each morning for forty years, or a monk or nun spending ~~the same span in recitation of missals.~~ <sup>that span of time tending the same vineyard.</sup> Or to put it more closely, a penman who a page or so a day writes out a manuscript the ~~span of~~ <sup>equivalent length</sup> five copies of War and Peace, accomplishing the masterwork in frontier town and Indian village and sometimes no community at all.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
¶ For example, this:

This is the 18th day since Swell was shot and there is no offensive smell from the corpse. It may be accounted for in this manner. He was shot through the body & afterwards washed in the breakers--consequently all the blood in him must have run out. He was then rolled up tight in 2 new blankets and put into a new box nailed up strong.

Like Captain John, Swell was a chieftain of the Makah tribe of Cape Flattery, that westmost prow of this coast. Swell also was Swan's best-regarded friend among the coastal tribes of Washington Territory, a man he had voyaged with, learned legends from. The diary pages show them steadily swapping favors: ~~Now~~ Swell detailing for Swan the Makahs' skill at hunting whales, now Swan painting for Swell in red and black his name and a horse on his canoe sail. Swell said he always went faster in his canoe than the other Indians...like a horse, so he wanted to have one painted... On yet another diary end-page there is the roughed outline of a galloping horse and above it in block letters the name SWELL, with five-pointed stars fore and aft. If Swan carried out the design, Swell sailed under the gaudiest canvas in the North Pacific.

I know the beach at Crescent Bay where Swell's life was snapped off. Across on the Canadian

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shore of the Strait of Juan de Fuca the lights of modern Victoria now spread as white embers atop the burn-dark rim of coastline, and west from the city occasional lighthouses make blinks against the black as the Strait seeks toward the Pacific. But on Swell's final winter night in 1861 only a beach campfire at Crescent on our southern shore flashed bright enough to attract the eye, and Swell misread the marker of flame as an encampment of traveling members of his own tribe. Instead, he stepped from his canoe to find that the overnights were of the Elwha village of the Clallam tribe, among them chanced to be a particular rival of Swell, and his bullet spun the Makah dead into the cold quick surf.

It was a killing less casual than the downtown deaths my morning newspaper brings me three or four times a week--the Elwhas and the Makahs at least had the excuse of lifetimes of quarrel--or that I might go see in aftermath, eligible as I am for all manner of intrusion because of being a writer, were I to accompany the Seattle homicide squad. James G. Swan did go hurrying to be beside Swell's corpse, and there the first of our differences is marked.

A morning soon after learning of Swell's death Swan strolled into the Elwha village. Charley, the murderer, then got up and made a speech. He said that he shot Swell for two reasons, one of which was, that the Mackahs had killed two of the Elwha's a few months previous, and they were determined to kill a Mackah chief to pay for it. And the other reason was, that Swell had taken his squaw away, and would not return either the woman or the fifty blankets he had paid for her.

Swan was not swerved. I could not help feeling while standing up alongside this murderer. . . that I would gladly give a pull at the rope that should hang him. . . The day's chastisement was administered with vocal cords rather than hemp, however. My object was not to punish or kill Indians, but to recover property. Swan haggled out of Charley Swell had been carrying as cargo for a trader, the potwear, several blankets and a dozen yards of calico, and as I had no authority to make them disgorge any other plunder called it sufficient.

Swan next carried the matter of Swan's death to the federal Indian agent for Washington Territory. Met inconclusion there. Sent a seething letter to the newspaper in the territorial capital of Olympia. . . an Indian peaceably passing on his way home in his canoe, laden with white men's goods. . . foully murdered. . . too good an Indian and too valuable a man. . . to have his murder go unavenged. . . agents of our munificent government have not the means at their disposal to defray the expenses of going to arrest the murderer. . . And at last canoed once more along the Strait to accompany Swell, still nailed up strong, to burial at the Makah village of Neah Bay.

At Neah, Swell's brother Peter came and wished me to go with him and select a suitable spot to bury Swell. . .

I did as he desired--marked out the spot and dug out the first sand.

And this further: <sup>Peter</sup> ~~He~~ also brought up the large Tomanawas boards, the Makahs' cedar tableaux of magic which would <sup>stand as</sup> ~~be~~ the grave's monument, of Swell's for me to paint anew. . .

There then is Swan, or at least a shinnying start on him. A penman from Boston asked to trace afresh the sacred designs of a murdered Northwest chieftain. I can think of few circumstances less likely, unless they are my own. <sup>The</sup> ~~an~~ onlooker who has set himself <sup>this</sup> ~~a~~ winter's appointment back <sup>into the last century</sup> ~~so many dozens of years~~ and across geography to the Olympic Peninsula and elsewhere along the coastal tracery of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and indeed into the life of a person born <sup>ten dozen</sup> ~~121~~ years before him.

~~country all looked, so the Nisqually must have loomed when  
it decided to do something about habitations crowding its banks.  
I was careful to tell the river, in my mind where its rapid  
keens burble kept asking, that I am only visiting.~~

Day forty-nine

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About daylight this morning, the twenty-first of September, 1868,  
in Swan's small pages, a party of 26 Clallams attacked a party of 19  
Chimseans who were asleep near Dungeness light, and killed 18 of them.

The numbers of the situation have never been so certain--Swan himself next hears the death toll given as 19--but one Tsimshian woman did survive the ambush, and the strand of beach that was the killing ground has become known as Graveyard Spit. Other than those yoked facts of casualties, survivor and nomenclature, this incident drifts in the history of the Strait country as a wayward half-legend, some-Indians-sometime-slew-some-other-Indians; I am impatient to see whether Swan can detail the story. I can help him this far: that that single bloody dawn tided over nature's own fact about the little coastal loop of sand, which is that here abides one of the stubbornest sites of life anywhere. Graveyard Spit is a pocket desert, sheltered into its thirstless ecology by

larger Dungeness and the dry rain shadow which extends north from the Olympic Mountains out over the Strait. Rubbery buttons of flowers and varieties of crawler plants hug low and determined onto the beach-like hundred acres or so; sand rodents <sup>imprint</sup> ~~make~~ tiny roads among them and are ambushed by nighthawks in whistling dives.

Went with Agent King, the twenty-ninth of September, to Pt  
Discovery relative to the Indian murder at Dungeness. . . Mr King had a  
talk with the Indians implicated in the Simsean murder and told them they  
must go to the Reserve tomorrow.

It can't be known either whether the incident conformed to the version "a gentleman from Dungeness" furnished the newspaper at Olympia: that "as the unfortunate victims were all asleep at the time of the attack, the murderers made quick work of it, and then commenced mutilating the bodies, dismembering them, throwing the legs here, the arms there, and the hands

elsewhere." Nor is it definite that the survivor "received seven stabs and cuts in her right side, three near the heart, and others on her head, arm and hip," although that relentless counting suggests mightily that the informational gentleman was Swan. What seems sure is an element of revenge in the attack, product of the history of raids into the Strait and Puget Sound by the powerful tribes from the northern reaches of the British Columbia coast--Haidas, Tlingits, Tsimshians. The immediate motive, however, was that the Tsimshians overnighing on the sheltered spit had just finished a summer of work in the Puget Sound sawmills, and their homebound canoe rode low in the water with the goods their wages had bought.

This morning, the thirtieth of September, Mr King started for Hoods Canal with the Indians and their families whom he yesterday told to go.

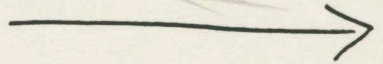
He also requests me to proceed. . . to Dungeness & get the rest of the murderers and also to get all the goods I can recover. . .

At Graveyard, Swan salvaged the Tsimshian canoe, some sails and a few paddles, four sacks of flour and four trunks and four guns, and five gallons of molasses. Missing, according to the wounded Tsimshian woman, were \$330 in coin, a quantity of silver jewelry, some blankets and much clothing. (When the woman--her name was Kit-tairlkh--eventually recuperated enough to travel, Swan would put her aboard a Hudson's Bay Company steamer to go north to her home village with the salvage and some gifts to her tribe as restitution from the Indian Affairs officialdom of Washington Territory.)



Slept at Mr Clines last night, the first of October, & made a memo of articles saved from Chimsean canoe.

Indians say that Charley Blake & Smalley advised them not to go to Hoods Canal & consequently none left with me altho some promised to go & meet me at Pt Townsend.



Left Dungeness river at 10 am & reached Pt. Townsend 6 Pm

That Swan could nod to the divvy of opinion among the Clallam raiders and blithely canoe home to await those who promised to go to the Reservation with him says all about his authority among the Northwest natives. He could be as supple, bendable, as they were; in the hard-edged white society which had taken over this coast, one man of contours.

Indians arrived this forenoon, the second of October, from Dungeness for Hoods Canal.

Started from Port Townsend at 1 PM with Patrick Henry, Emily & Dan in Lane Billy's canoe.

The Dungeness Indians in two canoes, with 2 small canoes towing.

The canoe flotilla went south up Admiralty Inlet, the high clay bluffs of Whidbey Island announcing one shore and the blunt timbered headlands on the Olympic Peninsula side the other; paddled for Foulweather Bluff and the entrance to the eighty-mile fjord called Hood Canal; passed Port Ludlow, with its lumber schooners tethered like workhorses; and pulled ashore for the night at the next sawmill village, Port Gamble.

Paid my hotel bill at Port Gamble, the third of October. \$1.00 & started at 8 am for Hoods Canal.

. . . opposite Sebec near mouth of Nuth lu wap--took lunch.

. . . 6 PM camped at bend in Canal opposite Humhumi.

Where Swan's canoe party that morning came around the first point of land after leaving Port Gamble a highway bridge today sweeps across the water on barge-sized concrete pontoons. The five canoes would look like ~~the~~ <sup>so many pieces of</sup> driftwood ~~passing~~ <sup>bobbing</sup> beneath the girderwork of the Hood Canal span. A few miles more, on the eastern shore a military base is being built for

~~nuclear-missile-bearing Trident submarines. The killing capacity of Swan's passing Indians compares to that of a Trident as a jackknife to bubonic plague.~~

~~Started at 7 AM after eating breakfast and breaking up camp, the fourth of October. Arrived at Reservation at noon. Mr King paid me \$25. coin. . . . Left Reservation at 3:45 PM & camped at 7 PM about 10 miles down the Canal.~~

~~second day after that,  
The ~~next day~~<sup>1</sup> last line of the Graveyard Spit saga, Swan was back in Port Townsend by supertime.~~

It was the body of a woman, niece of Yah sood...laid in state.

The Indians said she had a fall accidentally which injured her spine and bringing on premature child birth, last night or early this morning she died. I saw Yahsood outside his house evidently in great mental affliction I told him I had come to visit at the lodges but out of respect to his feelings I would not call on any more but go on home. He then invited me to go in his house and see the corpse which I did.

The body was dressed in the best attire, the face painted red and hair nicely combed. On the head was a sort of crown curiously carved, and on the back part was a sort of apron or cloak reaching to the ankles, thickly covered with ermine skins...On her right near her head was her husband, on her left was her father, at her feet were her mother and two aunts, and two or three other women. The deceased was about 20 years of age very regular and pretty features and looked as if asleep...The poor old father kept up a conversation with his dead daughter. The husbands head was bowed to the ground with grief and the women were all weeping. It was a very affecting sight. I addressed a few words of sympathy... This is the first scene of the kind I ever saw.

At Fort Simpson, Swan went to a wedding feast by special invitation of the Indians, through their pastor Rev Mr Crosby. Swan sat in a place of honor near the bride and groom with Reverend Crosby and his wife and Lieutenant Kilgore. We were served with a nice roast goose & roast ducks potatoes bread cake tea & coffee &c. 6 or 8 young men dressed like hotel waiters attended on us and the whole passed off pleasantly. Then, an incident occurred which was

very gratifying to me. A Tsimshian woman came up to him: she was Kik-tairlkh, the lone survivor of the Graveyard Spit massacre seven years earlier. She told me through an interpreter that she never should forget my kindness, and that she thought of me every day and considered that I had saved her life. Mr Crosby called the attention of the Indians at the feast to the fact, and they gave me applause by stamping their feet and clapping their hands, after which one old man made a speech in which he said that I had showed myself a friend of the Simseans and they never would forget...

which was the last time I had them on. A few minutes afterward I could find them nowhere. The boys and myself hunted for over an hour without success. Next day: I took down my prescription book and to my great pleasure found my spectacles which I had placed in the book and had unthinkingly shut...

That he is not a jokey man, but laughs at the frontier's humor probably more than a sound Bostonian ought to. The Olympic Peninsula settler who has a prized rooster named Brigham Young is cheerfully in Swan's pages, as is the sailor--a Dago or a Russian Finn--who notices the carcasses of skinned fur seals on the shipdeck and asks, Captain will I throw them cartridges overboard? Swan can ping a nice note of irony, as when he stepped from the Neah Bay schoolhouse to watch a Makah tamanoas ceremony and was much edified to notice that two of my scholars Jimmy, who had just recovered from a severe attack of cold, and George, were performing on the beach entirely naked... #

That, in the frequent way of solitary people, he loves song: <sup>regularly</sup> his <sup>at times</sup> ~~cooing~~ <sup>at number of evenings he vocalizes the</sup> began long before Dolly Roberts was there to share a hymnbook, and after ~~an evening when one friend fiddles, another strums the banjo, and a couple of others vocalize with Swan, he exults that it was a grand frolic...I have not had such a funny time nor laughed so much for years.~~ <sup>the living room of one friend or another, an occasion he</sup> I imagine his voice as a bit nasal, <sup>and,</sup> ~~still Yankified after the 25 frontier years; we do not easily shed habits the mouth learned earliest.~~ <sup>notwithstanding,</sup> <sup>notably Yankified accent</sup>

P.224B plows

That he can get very full of himself, particularly when his own evidence on a matter is contradicted. During a dispute with a Smithsonian scientist who maintained that fur seals ~~all~~ birthed their young at the Pribilof Islands off the Alaskan coast ~~because it was "impossible" for pups to be born in the ocean,~~ Swan tetchily writes to Baird: I do not believe all the fur seals of the North Pacific Ocean assemble on the Pribiloff Islands any more than I believe all the flies of this coast alight on one or two carcasses of dead animals... *(Swan, who had seen seal pups brought in by the Makahs from the offshore waters of Cape Flattery, was correct*

*Current science suggests Swan somewhat misjudged the seal situation. The Pribilofs are considered to be the primary birthing site* in the argument.) But other times he can go into a dress-blue funk: the great care and anxiety I feel... Evidently not for long, and perhaps most often when he has to count another birthday (I trust that the remainder of my life may be passed more profitably than it has so far...), but he does know gloom.

That all the regularity in him is channeled down his right arm into his pen. He may pass from job to job to job with the liquid hops of a squirrel, but his diary account of his days and his record of effort to learn from the Indians are the steadiest kind of achievement. Constantly I am impressed with Swan's care to be exact; the steady spatter of arithmetic through the diary pages as he measures things, for instance, and the fact that as early as his stint at Shoalwater he made it policy that whatever lore was given him by a tribal member, he would check by later asking others about it, one by one. A scrupulous correspondent,

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~~Day sixty~~

The Bone River is flowing into itself, turned backwards by the tide of Willapa Bay advancing between its banks. For some hundreds of yards here at its mouth the Bone slowly, slowly creeps back toward its origin, like a bolt of olive-drab cloth surreptitiously trying to roll itself up.

The course of the Bone here where Swan filed his river-side land claim in 1853 does some final indeterminate wandering before snaking into the northeast side of sprawling Willapa Bay, or Shoalwater Bay, as it was in Swan's time here. Even today, with the highway and its sporadic towns, there hangs a sense of this area going its own ~~geographical path~~ <sup>route</sup> indifferent to man. The ridge country around Willapa, for instance, ~~is~~ <sup>declares itself</sup> ~~entirely~~ single-purposed: it bulks there to produce trees in the way a porcupine exists to feature quills. The devoutest admiring mutters about the Northwest forestscape--thick as hair on a dog's back...timber till you can't sleep--chant themselves when you gaze around this region. Yet an onlooker will see too what already is in his eyes, and as with nearly any other frontier site where white men could manage to whittle a clearing Shoalwater was declared by its earliest American inhabitants to have high <sup>o</sup>metropolitan prospects. Swan almost at once was prophesying Shoal water Bay, as a harbor, will be



of great importance to Washington Territory as soon as its advantages are known...

He was more specific about the glories of his own chosen site here: a fine level prairie, containing five or six acres of marsh, and as many more of elevated land above the reach of the highest tides...a fine grove of spruce trees sheltered the place from the north wind... Specific if overoptimistic, for his real estate hopes were ~~running~~ <sup>galloping</sup> away with him in those phrases. The meadow-like area is more bog than otherwise. Fen country, really, trying to decide whether to remain marsh or become something more. As for the spruce shield against the north wind, the benefit is moot; weather roars through here from the southwest or west, fresh off the Pacific. (Weather, that is to say, such as the southwester--great gusts would come sweeping over the cliff, and, descending on us with a whirl, seemed as if they would tear everything before them--which sluiced apart Swan's fireplace in his new riverside cabin in 1853.)

The weather today--the eighteenth of February--is only mildly fitful, an occasional shower rising in the hills east of the bay. Last night, however, brought in one of those whooping southwest ~~a whooping storm~~s. Wind screamed ~~around~~ <sup>through</sup> the door <sup>frame</sup> of my motel room until I folded lengthwise strips of newspaper and jammed every crack. Then sometime in the middle of the dark the door burst open, the newspaper strips flying through the room like white swords.

~~"What the Jesus...?" I shouted blearily.~~

~~"Security," intoned a voice outside. "You forgot to lock your door. Be sure to lock your door."~~

~~From security which flings open my door in the black stormy hours of the night, may I hereafter be preserved. I yawn and try to walk myself awake along the riverbank. Swan visited his empty land in 1868. (Indians glad to see me, he reported of the reunion with his Chinook and Chehalis neighbors of fifteen years before.) It is still empty. Empty, that is, except of the sounds of water. Here at Willapa water makes gradation upon gradation, exists in almost every conceivable form except iceberg. Tide, stream, current, seep, all are steadily at work, sometimes almost within touch of each other. Off the high clay cliffs on the south side of the river a few jets of water as big around as my arm, the Willapa Bay version of a trickle, dive loudly into the Bone.~~

~~A sharper sound: oyster shells clink <sup>under my boots.</sup> ~~as I walk across them~~~~  
~~Swan mentioned such heaps, left over from an Indian settlement, when he took claim on the land and probably there has been one such brittle midden or another on this riverbank since humanity arrived.~~

~~This oystery turf beside the Bone is Swan's western path not taken, which is why, after the <sup>P</sup>ast few days of <sup>to</sup>taling Swan, I have returned to have one more look at his very first Northwest site. Right here, or rather over there <sup>a</sup>few hundred yards where the river encounters the bay, he passed up his best commercial opportunity as if it was cold gravy. All those years ago Swan alit at Willapa nee Shoalwater with as much mercantile knowledge~~

as anyone on the coast north of San Francisco, connections in the Bay city, money in his family, understanding of the Indians, a temperament for the climate. The oysters beckoned for the taking, were said to lie like rich reefs, "in layers of two to three feet in thickness." They were more than palatable; Swan himself noted that they rivaled English Channel oysters, having the same strong, coppery taste. But when the fat beds of Willapa oysters eventually were systematically harvested and made an industry--which grew to the point where, between 1870 and 1876, well over a half million bushels were shipped to San Francisco--and furnished a few fortunes, Swan was years gone.

It can be seen now that he spent his few years here on exactly the wrong shore of Willapa Bay. On this eastern side, there is no longer a trace of Bruceport, the erstwhile "settlement" of Swan and Russell and the other earliest oystermen, except for a commemorative highway plaque. But across the water is quite another matter. There the Long Beach Peninsula, another of the geographic whimsies of the Washington coastline, stretches between the Pacific and Willapa Bay like a narrow but tremendously long and crowded picnic table. Modern pushy members of the family, the motel towns, Long Beach, Ocean Park, Oceanside, are gathered along the coastal side with their belly buttons out to the sun and their neon trinkets glinting wildly off one another, while away at the north inland end drowns the gray-gowned maiden aunt of the mob, Oysterville.

Had Swan poled across the bay from Bruceport to settle at Oysterville and work the oyster business from there, he might

~~well have made it to prosperity. The village--it actually is less than that, simply a handful of handsome rangy houses of the last century, on wide lots opening out to Willapa Bay and the dark bristling ridges beyond--seems these days to exist solely on memory and cozy isolation, but it had its era of oyster bonanza.~~

~~The site, I suppose, was too far from activity for Swan; in the end, he always was drawn to a busy port. Yet <sup>H</sup>Oysterville encapsulates exactly the sort of frontier gentility Swan seems suited for. I can see him there in one of the toplofty houses, spending an hour each morning on the accounts ledger of his oystering enterprise and two hours on a monograph about the local Indians, his second wife--a sea captain's widow, say, from Astoria, and bearing more than incidental resemblance to Matilda--summoning him to noontime dinner of clam chowder and lightly baked salmon and wild strawberry shortcake, then in the afternoon a long-bearded crony or two from the Bruceport days dropping by to spin tales. (Perhaps the single most comfortable line in Swan's thousands of diary entries is an evening he records simply as telling stories and eating apples.)~~

But I also see him, this time in actuality here on his fortuneless side of the bay in 1868, <sup>briefly</sup> mulling whether to veer his life this direction again (a jot in the diary about the nearest sawmill's price on lumber for a cabin) and then dropping the notion like one more empty oyster shell. Men and women are hard ore. We do not change composition in momentary fires.

Being Swan--being, that is, like any of us who do not go through life as if it were a footstep wide--he must have considered any Willapa Bay site, Oysterville or the riverland, as finally too far from activity for him. <sup>in the end</sup> he always is drawn to a busy port. Drawn as well to the uppermost rim of the American Northwest, to that specificity, magnetism of geography, operating so strongly on some of us along the shoreline of the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound. Which in turn is to say, drawn to the several Port Townsend years just told by the diaries.

There is a limit to how much you can admit about your future at any one time, however, and Swan now does a little ritual of just-in-case. He concludes his <sup>1868</sup> visit to the claim by penning an absentee owner's fussy plaint--

Notice

All persons are hereby cautioned against trespassing upon my donation claim on the Querquellin or Bone River, either by cutting or removing timber or any other property or by pasturing stock or building residences.

All such persons will hereafter be dealt with according to law.

Mr Wm H Clark will attend to any business connected with my claim during my absence from the bay...

--and in his saunter away from the posted piece of paper, for the last time sets foot here beside the Bone.

Day sixty-eight

Two dawns for the price of one this morning, and Swan will have to fend without me at Masset. <sup>4</sup> I have clambered from bed early for the cosmic bargain.

*mod* At first daybreak I am atop the eastern rim of our valley, scouting the viewpoints at Carol's campus, and in minutes am shivering like a sentry who has had to walk the high ground all night. The eclipse, a total one, the rare magical blot of moon precisely across sun, will occur above the southeast horizon. People are reported flocking to the Columbia River and the high passes of Idaho and Montana to watch from amid the swath of totality.

Among the college's terraces of walkways, I finally find and settle to the most direct parapet.

The sky is an impassive gray. I like it that the veil of cloud will add second mystery to the eclipse, the kiss of sun and moon will take place beyond our range and yet somehow invisibly pull light up out of our eyes. Like owls, we will be made to go more dim-sighted as the day rises.

A hundred and seventeen winters ago, Swan stepped into a December night at Cape Flattery to spectate the reverse of this, an eclipse of the moon. There was a large party gathered that evening at the house of a chief who was giving a feast. I had informed some of the Indians during the day that there would be an eclipse that evening, but they paid no regard to what I said, and kept on with their feasting and dancing till nearly ten o'clock, at which time the eclipse had commenced.

So far this morning, only the birds have commenced, the weet weet weet of sparrows blithely insistent in tree and bush. Yet the day in some way does seem stalled, slipping cogs. At 7:18, an exact hour before the eclipse and some twenty minutes after sunrise, the morning remains wan enough that the breast of a seagull atop a light pole shines out white as a pearl on mud.

A third of an hour more and Carol joins me, having sent her class out to write about the double-yolked dawn. We sip coffee out of styrofoam and wait for the day's half<sup>light</sup> to swoop away.

Swan cherished the sorcery of foretelling--of harkening to <sup>an</sup> ~~the tiny~~ almanac calendar ~~in the front of his 1862 diary~~

while the Makahs preferred to use the logic of the moment for their divinations. The moon they believe is composed of a jelly-like substance, such as fishes eat...They think that eclipses are occasioned by a fish like the "cultus" cod, or Toosh-kow, which attempts to eat the sun or moon, and which they strive to drive away by shouting, firing guns, and pounding with sticks upon the tops of their houses.

A few minutes before eight, a helicopter buzzes across the southeast, a blacker bug now than in its pass a half hour ago.

Swan was rubbernecking interestedly up at the vanishing moon when the fact of eclipse began to terrify the Makahs.

Some of them coming out of the lodge at the time, observed it

and set up a howl, which soon called out all the rest...They told me that the toosh-kow were eating the moon, and if we did not drive them away they would eat it all up, and we should have no more....

Minutes past eight, a breeze restlessly tosses the dim colors atop the campus flagpole. The loophole beneath the clouds to a few bottom slopes of the Cascades is losing light. Students begin to shoal in front of all the campus buildings. One calls across to another, "Why do you wanna watch it get dark? It does it every day."

Swan eyeing the Makahs: As the moon became more and more obscure, they increased their clamor, and finally, when totally obscured, they were in great excitement and fear....There was a most infernal din, and to help it out Jones and myself got out the swivel and fired it off...

By 8:14, the sparrows nearest our parapet are scrunching as far back into the middle of a tree as they can get, and muttering an apprehensive t-t-t-t.

In the next minute, a flight of them whirls high overhead, flinging themselves over the forested fringe of the campus and evidently back to their night's refuge.

A minute again, and the college's automatic lights flick on, like blue-white flares struck against the dimness. The clouds go a deeper, more glowering gray.



At 8:18 a.m., totality, it is deepest evening.

Swan with his gunfire chased the eclipse from the Makah's moon.

The noise, which was so much louder than any they could make,  
seemed to appease them, and as we shortly saw the slivery edge  
of the moon make its appearance after its obscuration, they  
were convinced that the swivel had driven off the toosh-kow  
before they had swallowed the last mouthful.

Within three minutes, we stand in a quickening dawn. The birds pick up their day again. At 8:30, on the stroke, the campus's sensor lamps dowse out around us.

cut

~~Shopping done at Skedans, at the top of the afternoon the canoe party pushes on. The next village, Laskeek, is one Swan has been keen to see. The previous chief of the place was Kitkune, the Haida whose tattoos of whalewolves and double-tailed codfish Swan had copied off ten years earlier for the Smithsonian Contributions article. Now young Kitkune who married the widow of the one I knew and is heir to his name and property, accompanied us from Skedans village...~~

After the days of burial caves and ghostly lodges on the western shore of the islands, here at Laskeek was the living face of the Haida culture. It was mighty. Kitkune's home, Swan records, measured 57 feet long by 51 feet wide with a great fire pit in the center and two successive broad platforms of plank around the width and length of the structure. Everything about this building is of the same massive proportions, even the latch of the door is made of a piece of old iron which must weigh 3 or 4 pounds.

Nor did the wonder of the Laskeek house stop there. Young Kitkune opened a secret door skillfully framed into one side of the house so as to be unnoticed even by careful search and disclosed a chamber or building place where were stowed away for safe keeping the sacred emblems of the old Chief. These are the finest of any I have seen...

Problem. The young man was not willing to part with many of

them and for these he asked a large price. I purchased a few rare and curious masks. One of these represents the Oolalla, a demon who used to come from the mountains and devour the Indians. This mask was a head piece representing a skull from which descended a perfect jointed skeleton of wood arranged by means of strings so that the teeth would gnash, and an arm would stretch out and point a bony finger to an intended victim.

Swan decides (with a familiar vote from the weather: Much rain, which continued...) to stay on at Laskeek for a few days to see whether further Haida marvels will be brought out, and his waiting strategy works. On the eighth of September in this era of good feeling, after dinner young Kitkune showed me the place where the remains of his Uncle Kitkune lie...The remains are in a box elaborately carved, and decorated with abalone shell. This box which appeared to be four feet long, three feet wide and three feet high, is placed on the back of a carving representing a beaver of enormous dimensions...On a sort of a table at the right of the beaver as we looked at it... two old guns, ammunition boxes and various paraphernalia of the old Chief among which was his Taska or carved stick which he held in his

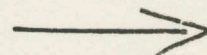
hand when distributing presents...

Swan is not easily startled, but here in the burial house <sup>even he</sup> is taken aback by some singular carvings representing a person with the eyes pulled out and resting on the knees and connected with the eye sockets by a ligature painted red and presenting a revolting appearance.

Eyes sitting out on knees: the first carving of the kind I have noticed...On asking Ellswarsh the meaning he told me that it represents the sea anemone or Se-eap which is supposed to be the eye of the mythical marine being who has the power of extending its eyes and withdrawing them at pleasure. A sort of argus eyed monster with millions of eyes all over the coast...

"The same winds blow spring on all men's dreams." Swan, I wish I could cross time to say that sentence into your ear and whisper further that to the Haidas' scalp-tingling line of wilderness devils such as the Oolalla and the Se-eap, our white tribe has added the modern Northwest version, the sasquatch. Gorilla-like and big, big: nine of them would make a dozen. Eyes like obsidian set in coconut shells, breath heavy and dank as swampsmell. Legend lives yet in these coastal woods, we lack only the Haida genius for fashioning awe and fear into carved anthems of art.

# ————— A sudden favorable turn of weather decides the storm-wary expedition



to return up the coast to Skedans. Suppertime there finds Swan  
pensive, willing to have passed several days at Laskeek as there  
is more of interest there than at any village I have seen. But  
the people are not anxious to sell their curiosities, as they have  
not yet come under missionary influence, but keep up their tomanawas  
ceremonies in ancient style which I would much like to witness.

# —————  
Ninth of September, Sunday. Gale of wind and torrents of rain  
all night and this morning. The sabbath produces an odd little sectarian


—————→

wrangle. Old Ellswarsh thought I ought to trade, but I told him I did not trade on Sundays. I was anxious to get back to Skidegate and although it rained the wind was fair and if we had started at 6 o'clock as I wanted to we could have made the distance easily, but he said he would not travel on Sunday as the missionary had told him not to work on the Sabbath, so we remained in the dismal old house all day.

# ———  
 The tug of wills between the collector who wouldn't collect and the canoeist ~~who~~ wouldn't canoe is forgotten the next morning as Swan and Ellswarsh ready to return to Skidegate. The Skedans Haidas take it as the moment to bargain, began to bring their things for sale, and I bought quite a lot. This would seem to be quick understatement, because much of the Haida magic of knifestroke-onto-wood-or-stone--the total trove to the Smithsonian, together with the fish specimens, was an eventual 29 freight boxes' worth--seems to have been procured at this farewell session. Think of <sup>Swan</sup>~~him~~ by now as a person who has shopped cautiously through the supermarket and at the end of the last row decides to fill the basket as reward to himself.

## ———  
 At ten in the morning closed my trade and got off in my canoe from Skedans village. The day was pleasant but the wind was ahead and the Indians had to row which they did with a will.

# ———  
 Soon before dark the canoe scrapes ashore at the village of Skidegate.



ONE  
Day two

His name was James Gilchrist Swan, and I have felt my pull toward him ever since some forgotten frontier pursuit or another landed me into the coastal region of history where he presides, meticulous as a usurer's clerk, diarying and diarying that life of his, four generations and as many lightyears from my own. You have met him yourself in some other form--the remembered neighbor or family member, full of years while you just had begun to grow into them, who had been in a war or to a far place and could confide to you how such vanished matters were. The tale-bringer sent to each of us by the past.

That day, whenever it was, when I made the sidetrip into archival box after box of Swan's diaries and began to realize that they held four full decades of his life and at least 2,500,000 handwritten words. And what life, what sketching words.

This morning we discovered a large wolf in the brook dead from the effects of some strychnine we had put out. It was a she wolf very large and evidently had five whelps. Maggs and myself skinned her and I boiled the head to get the skull... . Mr. Fitzgerald of Sequim Prairie better known as "Skip," walked off the wharf near the Custom House last night and broke his neck. The night was very dark and he mistook the way... . Jimmy had the night mare last night and made a great howling. This morning he told me that the memelose were after him and made him crazy. I told him the memelose were dead squid which he ate for supper very heartily....Mr Tucker very ill with his eye, his face is badly swelled. This evening got Kichook's Cowitchan squaw to milk her breast into a cup, and I then bathed Mr Tucker's eye with it....

I recall that soon I gave up jotting notes and simply thumbed and read. At closing hour, Swan got up from the research table with me. I would write of him sometime, I had decided. Do a magazine piece or two, for I was in the business then of making those smooth packets of a few thousand words. Just use this queer indefatigable diarist Swan some small rapid way as a figurine of the Pacific Northwest past.

Swan refused to stay small, and rapid was the one word that never visited his pencils and pens. When, eight, ten years ago, I took one segment of his frontier life and tried to lop it into magazine article length, loose ends hung everywhere. As well write about Samuel Pepys solely in terms of his office hours at the British admiralty. Another, later try, I set out merely to summarize Swan-- oyster entrepreneur, schoolteacher, railroad speculator, amateur ethnologist, lawyer, judge, homesteader, linguist, ship's outfitter, explorer, customs collector, author, small-town bureaucrat, artist, clerk--and surrendered in dizziness, none of the spectrum having shown his true and lasting occupation, diarist. This, I at last told myself, wants more time than I can ever give it.

Until now. This winter will be the season of Swan; rather, of Swan and me and those constant diaries. Day by day, a logbook of what is uppermost in any of the three of us.

It is a three-month venture that I have mulled these past years of my becoming less headlong and more ~~and more~~ aware that I dwell



in a community of time as well as of people. That I should know more than I do about this other mysterious citizenship, how far it goes, where it touches.

And the twin whys: why it has me invest my life in one place instead of another, and why for me that place happens to be western. More and more it seems to me that the westernness of my existence in this land is some consequence which has to do with that community of time, one of the terms of my particular citizenship in it. America began as west, the direction off the ends of the docks of Europe. Then the first comer from the east of this continent to its west, advance parties of the American quest for place (position too, maybe, but that is a pilgrimage that interests me less), imprinted our many contour lines of frontier. And next, it still is happening, the spread of national civilization absorbed those lines. Except that markings, streaks and whorls of the west and the past, are left in some of us.

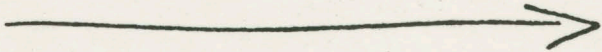
Because, then, of this western pattern so stubbornly within my life I am interested now in Swan as a west comer, and stayer. Early, among the very earliest, in stepping the paths of impulse that pull across America's girth of plains and over its continental summit and at last reluctantly nip off at the surf from the Pacific, Swan has gone before me through this matter of siting oneself specifically here: west.

The companion then, I feel an urgency to spend this winter with; meet day by day on the broad seasonal ground of time, here along the continental edge that drew us both.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
 If Swan attracts me in the way ~~that~~ an oracle such as the  
 Makahs' Captain John attracted him--that here flashes the bard of a  
 vivid tribe--it is the diaries <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ throw Swan's particular glints.

The diaries dazzle and dazzle me, first simply by their  
 total and variety: out of their gray archival boxes at the University  
 of Washington library, they could be the ~~entire~~ <sup>version</sup> secondhand wares of an  
 eccentric stationer dreamed up by Charles Dickens. Some are mere notebooks  
 with cheap marbled covers, and occasionally even a school exercise book  
 will sidle into the collection, but most are formal annual volumes (for  
the purpose of registering events of past, present, and future occurrence,  
 announces the opening page of the 1860 ~~diary~~ <sup>version</sup>) and a good number of them  
~~display~~ have deft clasps to snug themselves closed from outsiders' eyes. It  
~~marginally~~ <sup>marginally</sup> Swan diaries look closer alike than cousins,  
 exaggerates to say no two are alike, but I haven't yet turned up three  
~~any one~~ <sup>any one</sup> of ~~a~~ kind. Black-covered and green, tan and faded maroon, what ~~the~~ <sup>they</sup> diaries  
 do have in common is that nearly all are small enough to fit into the  
 palm of a hand, or a busy pocket. Those that won't are ~~great tomes~~ <sup>actual ledgers</sup>, such  
 as the aristocrat of the congregation, 1866, ~~A fat tan ledger~~ some nine  
 inches wide and twelve high, ~~it weighs~~ <sup>weighing</sup> four and a quarter pounds and  
~~displaying~~ <sup>displaying</sup> an elaborately hinged and embossed spine and a cover panel of leather  
 into the middle of which has been tooled in rich half inch letters  
 J.G. Swan. I can scarcely wait for 1866--lay it open to the first of its  
~~lordly~~ <sup>lordly</sup> 380 pages and handwriting neat as small embroidery <sup>instantly</sup> begins to recite:  
Diary and private journal of James G. Swan, being a continuation  
of daily record commencing July 1862 at the Makah Indian Agency Neah Bay, #  
Washington Territory--but what browsing I have done into any of the diaries

has been seductive. Opening the pages of Swan's years is like entering a room filled with jugglers and tumblers and swallows of flame, performance crowding performance. Went to see John this morning, found him better. All the Indians except his squaws and children have left the lodge. John is alone in one corner, surrounded by a mat screen. He tells me that the small pox will collect in his head and when it leaves him it will come out of the top of his head like a puff of smoke. To prevent it spreading he has a large hole left open in the roof directly over his head, through which the sickness is expected to escape....Last evening when the gentlemen from the Cutter were here, Capt Williams asked me for a drink of water. I handed him a dipper full from my pail, and he found a live toad in it which I had dipped up from the brook....Bricktop the blacksmith and some other roughs got on a spree & took Hernandez the loony shoemaker to Hunt's Hotel and made him treat. John Cornish was there and stripped himself to his drawers to fight....Swan records the weather morning-afternoon-night; notes down when salmonberry has popped into spring bloom, when autumn's geese begin to aim past to the southern horizon; logs all ships that sail past his eyes and on along the Strait of Juan de Fuca or Puget Sound; remarks his off days (Severe attack of



neuralgia today Dr. Minn tried to cure it injecting morphine or something  
of the sort under the skin on my left cheek--This checked the pain but made  
me feel dizzy & sick at the stomach--the remedy was worse than the disease)  
 and the other coastal days that shone as doubloon-bright as the most exhilarating hours anywhere; keeps account of letters written and received, and books borrowed and lent, and of his exceedingly ramshackle finances. His jottings overflow the day-by-day pages onto the inside covers of the diaries: mailing addresses <sup>of relatives in his native New England,</sup> ~~(including Matilda's and those of Swan's two brothers in the East),~~

Indian words and their definitions, sketches. On one back page a little

Indian girl on the wharf at Seattle, the child prettily prone on the planks

as she <sup>directs</sup> ~~holds~~ a tiny fishing <sup>stick-and-string</sup> ~~pole~~ to the water and ~~directs~~ a level stare at

the pencilman creating her. Elsewhere the unmistakable pyramidal outline

of Mount Baker, <sup>the</sup> dominant peak of the Strait country; how many thousand

times Swan saw its <sup>wide</sup> ~~white~~ cone. On an inside cover inspira-

tion of one more sort, a pasted-in clipping of a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier:

Though dim as yet in tint and line/We trace Thy picture's wise design/And

thank Thee that our age supplies/The dark relief of sacrifice/Thy will be done!

Terrific as all the expended diary energy is, page upon page and volume after volume, the simple stubborn dailiness of Swan's achievement seems to me even more dazing. It compares, say, to that of a carpenter whanging an hour's hammerstrokes on the same framework each morning for forty years, or a monk or nun spending <sup>that span of time tending the same vineyard,</sup> ~~the same span in recitation of missals.~~ Or to put it more closely, a penman who a page or so a day writes out a manuscript the <sup>equivalent length</sup> ~~span~~ of five copies of War and Peace, accomplishing the masterwork in frontier town and Indian village and sometimes no community at all.

# \_\_\_\_\_  
 ¶ For example, this:

This is the 18th day since Swell was shot and there is no offensive smell from the corpse. It may be accounted for in this manner. He was shot through the body & afterwards washed in the breakers--consequently all the blood in him must have run out. He was then rolled up tight in 2 new blankets and put into a new box nailed up strong.

Like Captain John, Swell was a chieftain of the Makah tribe of Cape Flattery, that westmost prow of this coast. Swell also was Swan's best-regarded friend among the coastal tribes of Washington Territory, a man he had voyaged with, learned legends from. The diary pages show them steadily swapping favors: ~~Now~~ Swell detailing for Swan the Makahs' skill at hunting whales, now Swan painting for Swell in red and black his name and a horse on his canoe sail. Swell said he always went faster in his canoe than the other Indians...like a horse, so he wanted to have one painted... On yet another diary end-page there is the roughed outline of a galloping horse and above it in block letters the name SWELL, with five-pointed stars fore and aft. If Swan carried out ~~the design~~, Swell sailed under the gaudiest canvas in the North Pacific.

I know the beach at Crescent Bay where Swell's life was snapped off. Across on the Canadian

—————→

shore of the Strait of Juan de Fuca the lights of modern Victoria now spread as white embers atop the burn-dark rim of coastline, and west from the city occasional lighthouses make blinks against the black as the Strait seeks toward the Pacific. But on Swell's final winter night in 1861 only a beach campfire at Crescent on our southern shore flashed bright enough to attract the eye, and Swell misread the marker of flame as an encampment of traveling members of his own tribe. Instead, he stepped from his canoe to find that the overnighers were ~~of the Elwha~~ <sup>from a nearby</sup> village of ~~the Clallam~~ <sup>Elwha Indians,</sup> tribe, among them chanced to be a particular rival of Swell, and his bullet spun the Makah dead into the cold quick surf.

~~It was~~ <sup>The</sup> a killing <sup>was</sup> less casual than the downtown deaths my morning newspaper brings me three or four times a week--the Elwhas and the Makahs at least had the excuse of lifetimes of quarrel--or that I might go see in aftermath, eligible as I am for all manner of intrusion because of being a writer, were I to accompany the Seattle homicide squad. James G. Swan did go hurrying to be beside Swell's corpse, and there the first of our differences is marked.

A morning soon after learning of Swell's death Swan strolled into the Elwha village. Charley, the murderer, then got up and made a speech. He said that he shot Swell for two reasons, one of which was, that the Mackahs had killed two of the Elwha's a few months previous, and they were determined to kill a Mackah chief to pay for it. And the other reason was, that Swell had taken his squaw away, and would not return either the woman or the fifty blankets he had paid for her.

Swan was not swerved. I could not help feeling while standing up alongside this murderer. . . that I would gladly give a pull at the rope that should hang him. . . The day's chastisement was administered with vocal cords rather than hemp, however. My object was not to punish or kill Indians, but to recover property. Swan haggled out of Charley Swell had been carrying as cargo for a trader, the potwear <sup>ware</sup> several blankets and a dozen yards of calico, and as I had no authority to make them disgorge any other plunder called it sufficient.

Swan next carried the matter of Swan's death to the federal Indian agent for Washington Territory. Met inconclusion there. Sent a seething letter to the newspaper in the territorial capital of Olympia. . . an Indian peaceably passing on his way home in his canoe, laden with white men's goods. . . foully murdered. . . too good an Indian and too valuable a man. . . to have his murder go unavenged. . . agents of our munificent government have not the means at their disposal to defray the expenses of going to arrest the murderer. . . And at last canoed once more along the Strait to accompany Swell, still nailed up strong, to burial at the Makah village of Neah Bay.

At Neah, Swell's brother Peter came and wished me to go with him and select a suitable spot to bury Swell. . .

I did as he desired--marked out the spot and dug out the first sand.

And this further: <sup>Peter</sup> ~~He~~ also brought up the large Tomanawas boards, the Makahs' cedar tableaux of magic which would <sup>stand as</sup> ~~be~~ the grave's monument, of Swell's for me to paint anew. . .

There then is Swan, or at least a shinnying start on him. A penman from Boston asked to trace afresh the sacred designs of a murdered Northwest chieftain. I can think of few circumstances less likely, unless they are my own. <sup>The</sup> ~~an~~ onlooker who has set himself <sup>this</sup> ~~a~~ winter's appointment back <sup>into the last century</sup> ~~so many dozens of years~~ and across geography to the Olympic Peninsula and elsewhere along the coastal tracery of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and indeed into the life of a person born <sup>ten dozen</sup> ~~ten~~ years before him.



Two  
Day one

. . . Capt John was here today, Swan writes from a century ago, and I related to him a dream I had last night, in which I saw several Indians I formerly knew who are dead. John said it was a sign the "memelose" or dead people are my friends and I would soon see that they would do something to show their friendship. . . .

Fifteen past nine. Out in the dark the Sound wind visits favorite trees, is shaken off, hankers along the valley in stubborn search. The gusting started up hours ago, during the wink-like pause of daylight that is December evening, and by now seems paced to try to last the night. Until the wind arrived the day was nordic: sunless but silent and dry. The neighborhood's lion colored cat, inspector general of such weather, all morning tucked himself atop the board fence outside the north window as I began to read Swan. Out of his furry doze each several minutes a sharp cat ear would twitch; give the air a tan flick just to be certain it still could. Then the self-hug into snooze again.

too much detail

The breakers, now Swan the third day after his dream, tore up the beach and rooted out immense numbers of clams which were thrown up by the surf. I gathered a few buckets full and soon the squaws and Indians came flocking up like so many gulls and gathered at least fifty bushels. . . .

Nine eighteen. I see, by leaning to hear into the wind, that the night black window which faces west off the end of my desk collects the half of me above the desktop and its spread sheaf of copied diary pages into quiet of my own. I think of another set of Swan's words in the untold lode I am starting on. The time he tells of a canoe crew of Makahs, Captain John's coastal tribe, stopping for the night at the cabin of an Olympic Peninsula settler; of

TOD Confusing here

how they swung the canoe mast wrong while stowing it and crashed an end through the hard-bought one window of the homestead cabin; of the settler's highest fury, as if they had shattered a diamond. This suburban house of mine glints with thirteen more windows besides the glass my reflection occupies, windows to every direction and inclination. Wobbly mast bearers could pass none of my walls without creating crystal.

Nine twenty. Capt John told me, this the morning following the beach bonanza, that the cause of the great quantity of clams on the beach yesterday was the dead people I dreamed about the other night and they put the clams there to show their friendship. . . .

Nine twenty-one, and now winter. I notice the numbered throb of the moment--this arrival of season at precisely 2121 hours of December 21--which takes us through solstice as if we too, the wind and I and the fencetop cat and yes, Swan and the restless memories of departed Makahs, are being delivered by a special surf. The lot of us, now auspiciously into the coastal time of beginnings. Perhaps I need a Captain John to pronounce full meaning from that.

No, better. I am going to have Swan's measuring sentences, winterlong.

} good