William Bevis, Ten Tough Trips: Montana Writers and the West

pp. 162-3:

"I was stunned when I read...the opening page of This House of Sky...

The style, tense and dynamic with strong verbs and nouns made into verbs, was dramatically imaginative and anti-'western,' following the lead not of John Wayne but of William Faulkner. Here was a child of homesteading and sheep ranching, a tight Scotsman at that, who poured heart and soul into a highly rhetorical, wordy, risk-taking prose.... Doig's (prose) declared that a Montanan could speak any way he or she pleased, that 'western' writing did not have to be silence, one-liners, and grunts.

last in seniority in squadron
"It's hard to be at the bottom of the list."

"It's rough to be low schmoe on the totem pole."

interior rhyme and half-rhymes

(What the hell, trying to write literature or at least entertainment here instead of just information...

The Sea Runners:

Palong! Palong!
Braaf was four running strides away from the frozen Melander and Wennberg before he, and they realized--Palong! Palong!--how cathedral bells resound to those who sneak about the streets at night. (iambic pentameter)

used Aug. 30 '73 Jensen ranch jnl entry as example of "excavating memory"

--also cited remembering of names--Diamon Tony et al.

Storytelling in a Family's Past

Richard White, Remembering Ahanagran, p. 6:

"Memory and identity are too powerful to go unquestioned and too important to be discarded as simply inventions and fabrications. They are the stuff from which we fashion our lives and our stories. History can interrogate these stories; it can complicate them, but it cannot kill them. And I have no desire to do so....

I want to interrogate and understand (my mother's) stories because I think that, at the close of an American century where cruel and idiot simplicities about memory, identity, and history can do so much damage in a country she has come to love, my mother's stories still have work to do in the world. Beneath these personal stories simmers an ongoing contest over what America is and means and who gets to define it."

Richard Maxwell Brown: Sept. 20 '92 letter--

"...what Simpson sees as folklore I see as history--that is, grassroots social history a la, in a loose way, what historians and anthorpologists call "thick description" (of course, the term and concept is that of Clifford Geertz)."

In the room the women came and went,

Talking of the House of Parliament.

Philip Howard, The Times of London
(pre-Murdochian)

T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock":

In the room the women come and go,

talking of Michaelangelo.

Dancing at the rascal fair,

devils and angels all were there,

heel and toe, pair by pair,

dancing at the rascal fair.

Dancing at the rascal fair,

show an ankle, show a pair,

show what'll make the lasses stare,

dancing at the rascal fair.

Bought the farm, bought the farm!

Crashing the plane leads to harm!

Linda Dec. 1

- parked / R Sq -
  can drive to entrance & elevator
  = Judith Kitchen

taking on too much?

- asked me for 20th
  80 ? 70
  < 5 - editing, writing

From: carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>
Subject: **Re: guest lecturer, who me?**
Date: December 1, 2014 3:59:19 PM PST
To: Linda Bierds <lbierds@u.washington.edu>



Linda. hi--

Loved your message, will fill you in on us soon. First, we need a phone conversation about me meeting with your class, from the sound of your schedule the sooner the better. Will also put this on your cell, and who knows, maybe even make contact!

Waiting to hear,
Ivan

On Dec 1, 2014, at 11:08 AM, Linda Bierds wrote:

> Hi, you two,
>
> Happy post-Thanksgiving week! I hope that your T-day gathering was as wonderful as we remember it being. We spent the day at Fred's--after a MAJOR ferry commute to Seattle, complete with three Bainbridge cops directing traffic so that no one could cut into the ferry-wait line, which stretched up highway 305 as far as the eye could see. We had plenty of reading material in the car, and the weather hadn't turned frigid yet, so we were comfortable waiting.
>
> Last night we saw the first play in Robert Shenken's (sp?) LBJ duo: "All the Way". It was an amazing production and I think that you'd really enjoy it. We're set to see the second part at the end of December. Can't wait.
>
> So, down to business. Professor Doig, could you offer your wonderful talk on dialogue (or any other topic you'd like) on Tuesday, January 20th? If you prefer, we can book you in for Tuesday, January 13th, but the quarter would have only been under way for one week and we wouldn't have had much time to whip the students into shape. Not much whipping required, though, so if you prefer January 13, just let me know. I'm meeting with the teaching assistants on Wednesday to finalize the schedule, so if you can let me know in the next few days, that would be great.
>
> Let's see, what else? Sydney is frantic because she has two classes next quarter and both have high enrollments: 40 for one class and 25 for the other. She gets glassy-eyed just thinking about all of the papers she will have to read. I, on the other hand, have only the Writers of Writing class and look forward to listening to Ivan!
>
> Must write to David Laskin right now. I've delayed because the grad students keep shifting the schedule.
>
> Much love,
>
> Linda
>
> On Mon, 3 Nov 2014, carol doig wrote:
>
> > Linda & Syd, hi--
> >
> > Well, some real catching up to do. We did not make it to the Skagit, partly because the weather didn't look that good from here and mainly because my back began hurting like hell. Am going in to Group Health this afternoon for probably a physical therapy referral. This has happened before, so it should get sorted out, but in the meantime I'm not very portable. Which brings me to Carol's suggestion, that we herewith invite you for a crockpot chicken-veggie soup supper whenever you could be available. So far, our schedule is clear except for tomorrow night and next Tues., the 10th.
> >
> > As to me as lecturer, my dear Prof. Bierds, let's proceed as if I'm capable--I should be. When do you need a definite date from me for your syllabus or whatever?

From: Linda Bierds <lbierds@u.washington.edu>
Subject: **Re: guest lecturer, who me?**
Date: December 1, 2014 11:08:21 AM PST
To: carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>

Hi, you two,

Happy post-Thanksgiving week! I hope that your T-day gathering was as wonderful as we remember it being. We spent the day at Fred's--after a MAJOR ferry commute to Seattle, complete with three Bainbridge cops directing traffic so that no one could cut into the ferry-wait line, which stretched up highway 305 as far as the eye could see. We had plenty of reading material in the car, and the weather hadn't turned frigid yet, so we were comfortable waiting.

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Must write to David Laskin right now. I've delayed because the grad students keep shifting the schedule.

Much love,

Linda

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>
> Am wondering if you attended Heather's Maxine Cushing Gray lecture. We had dinner at Mark & Lou's last night, they'd been at the lecture, and just between us, their kindest description of it was something like baffling.
>
> That's pretty much the news from here. We're hanging in there, don't worry. See you soon as we can.
>
> all affection,
>
> Ivan

From: carol doig <cddoig@comcast.net>
Subject: **Re: guest lecturer, who me?**
Date: November 3, 2014 10:12:18 AM PST
To: Linda Bierds <lbierds@u.washington.edu>



Linda & Syd, hi--

Well, some real catching up to do. We did not make it to the Skagit, partly because the weather did't look that good from here and mainly because my back is hurting like hell. Am going in to Group Health this afternoon for probably a physical therapy referral. This has happened before, so it should get sorted out, but in the meantime I'm not very portable. Which brings me to Carol's suggestion, that we herewith invite you for a crockpot chicken-veggie soup supper whenever you could be available. So far, our schedule is clear except for tomorrow night and next Tues., the 10th

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all affection,

Ivan

On Nov 2, 2014, at 10:50 AM, Linda Bierds wrote:

> Dears:
>
> Fabulous pictures! Thank you so much for sending them. And we love Chloe's, too--the dear French waiter/manager a BIG bonus. And speaking of big bonuses, Ivan, your visit to my class would be the highlight of the course, so you can come whenever you want! Tuesdays are faculty days, which works out just fine since Heather and Charles Johnson are retired and we come up with two or three empty Tuesdays each year. Last year I schedule "special" lecturers for those slots and you are the most special of all. If you're not feeling well, you can always cancel. Don't worry.
>
> By the way, when you have a chance could you forward David Laskin's email address to me? Thanks so much. See you soon, I hope. (By the way, we did have the power go out, but not for as long as usual.)
>
> Much love,
> Linda
>
> On Sun, 26 Oct 2014, carol doig wrote:
>
> > Linda & Syd, hi--
> >
> > So did you lose power in the windstorm? We did, just before supper, managed to eat a still-hot meal, and went to huddle under big comforters for the long duration. Which turned out to be an hour or so, lights came on and we were right back to watching the World Series as intended.
> >
> > What a great meal with you at Chloe's. That place really does well by us. I want to follow up, though, Lin, on possibly talking to your Writers class. Pencil me in on a Tuesday instead of a Thursday, please, to keep us out of the way

Sky talk

In the beginning is the language. That's what stories are ultimately about, whether they're in the form of a book, or television, or film, or now on computer. We live by stories--our own memories are the stories we tell ourselves--and what's magical about stories is the way they're told, about the language always trying to excel itself, say something in a new way, say "hey, listen to this!"

Looking back at the diary I kept during the writing of **This House of Sky**, I find that I was determined to make the language dance, in this book. In those diary pages are musings

and urgings to myself to always push the language toward unexpected beauty--as I said to myself at one point, to try to make each sentence of the book have "a trap of poetry" within it. The opening page of **This House of Sky**, not coincidentally, shows this-- and so, here is that page:

"Soon before daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped.

The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the

urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all.

It starts, early in the mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range of southwestern Montana. The single sound is hidden water--the south fork of Sixteenmile Creek diving down its willow-masked gulch. The stream flees north through this secret and peopleless land until, under the fir-dark flanks of Hatfield Mountain, a bow of meadow makes the riffled water curl wide to the west. At this interruption, a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully, and atop

it, like a sentry box over the frontier between the sly creek and the prodding meadow, perches our single-room herding cabin."

Okay, a few of the things that I hope are going on in those ~~seven~~ EIGHT sentences:

--In the opening sentence, I am of course drawing on the appalling power of coincidence, of birthday and deathday. That's the kind of arresting fact that brings a gulp to the eyes, and SO the side of me that is a professional writer--and was even back then--know to work with that. But I also wanted the book off to a fast stylistic start--after all, that opening sentence could have been "On my sixth birthday, my mother died" and there is a kind of

power to that but it's a cold forensic power--and so I chose a sentence with some beats of rhythm in it and a pair of opposing action-catching verbs: "wheezed," and then "quieted." Extreme labor of breathing, and then lull--the sentence ~~conveying~~ PORTRAYING that sequence ~~IN ITS VERB CHOICE~~.

--Which sets the stage for the next sentence, not even a sentence but a snapped-off one, a phrase: "And then stopped." With the verb there a surprise final emotional jolt on the breathing sequence of the opening sentence, and the verb itself emulating what I'm setting out to convey, when it stops that sentence and that paragraph.

the ordinary. Way out. "The stream flees... the meadow makes the riffled water curl wide...

And then a little innovation which has won me a lot of admiration and condemnation, the use of a noun as a verb: "A low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up..." As if the mountain terrain itself were a living part of this story, as I wanted to imply.

A couple of other things that aren't there by accident: The modifiers, the adjectives in particular, aren't bashful. "...willow-masked gulch..." "fir-dark flanks..." "...the riffled water..." "the sly creek and the prodding meadow..." This is not your stripped-down Hemingway style which was the expected mode in writing

The next pair of sentences I would say are atmospheric, invoking the mood of memory with words such as "remembering," "tellings," "urgings," and again the conclusive word choice emulating what I'm seeking to convey, "the first sudden edge of it all" and then the immediate lead into the next paragraph, the first bit of physical setting, "It starts--early in the mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range."

--Now we come to the immediate description of the creek, a tighter focus of the physical setting. And there the verbs are out of

about the American West back in the 1970's, when I was putting this book together. (Bevis notecard)

Finally, let me mention a dab of rhythm, there on the page: "The single sound is hidden water..." I can't remember how deliberate that was, but certainly semi-consciously there's a familiar rhythm from poetry: "The single sound is hidden water..." Of a certain generation, we probably all learned something like that rhythm best from Robert Frost: "Whose woods these are I think I know."

So that's one page, out of 314, and while I can't say all the rest got worked over identically to that, they all did get worked

over. I'd like to turn things over to Margaret now, with her knack of expanding our horizons of Montana and ourselves.

What I thought I'd do, aside from your questions and our conversation about things literary, is a pair of presentations, from my latest book and my earliest book, to show you how an opening scene of a novel is designed to get the story underway--that will be **Sweet Thunder**--and how the first page of a nonfiction book --**This House of Sky**--is put together to immediately establish the style and the voice.

So, first the reading from the opening of **Sweet Thunder**, as recently done in San Francisco and elsewhere, to get us underway. And I'll be glad to take any questions about that book and its topic before we move along to the shorter **House of Sky material**.

Aug. 21, '72 -- Conrad Richter, THE WATERS OF KRONOS:

p. 161 -- It was the great deception practiced by man on himself and his fellows, the legend of hate against the father so the son need not face the real and ultimate abomination, might conceal the actual nature of the monster who haunted the shadows of childhood, whose name only the soul knew and who never revealed himself before the end when it was found that all those disturbing things seen and felt in the father, which as a boy had given him an uncomprehending sense of dread and hostility, were only intimations of his older self to come, a self marked with the inescapable dissolution and decay of his youth.

Sept. 14, '72 -- Belated notes on trip to Montana in August: scenery was spectacular, with great white clouds accenting the sweep of sky and horizon.

Aug. 30, '73 -- The Jensen ranch: sullen brute of a place. Now that I have been out in world and learned what odds are, I despair that we ever tried to make a go of that ranch. Bleak; needed shelter belt. View of the great mountains from the ridge road in, but buildings were situated below horizon, down hill slope near bottom of coulee. Perhaps location was supposed to be down out of wind, but wind whipped down hill anyway. Everything was on a slant, but not enough of a slant to drain runoff which made the yard a spring quagmire. Everything was ungainly. The road in came along a high ridge, then down a hill impossible to climb when muddy. Hayfields were at far corner of ranch, folks were forever hauling hay. Bog holes on the place like elephant traps; time and again the jeep pickup would go down in one, needing a pull to get out. The grass wasn't much good, apparently lacking some minerals. Housing was dismal. Jensens had kept the front half of the house to store their stuff, so we had the back half: big kitchen-dining room, with a pantry, and with bedrooms off both ends. No place to get away from each other, I see now. No view, no protection from wind, no amenities. Not even satisfaction of trying to make anything better, because it wasn't ours.

Sept. 21

Margaret / → ground rules & referee qns
opening 10 min. /

- Why depart into fiction?
- fic & non-fic enhance
- process of writing memoir / bring exs of file cds
  - diary
  - research: phone bk
  - names of old guys
- race / Stegner etc. didn't
- voice for working West ~~#~~ intimations of obsol'ce
  - now in jail
- women in my life, & women characters
  - resonance /
- eloquence of · edge of · world:
  suggest a few writers

655 Evans Mus ~~59041~~
~~58~~
59801

Tim Winton
Ismail Kadare