Susan R. Schrepfer, Ph.D, U. of Cal, Riverside, 1971--

"A Conservative Reform: Saving the Redwoods, 1917-to 1940"

quote from John Campbell Merriam of Save the Redwoods League, 1943:

"Trees are streams of time flowing from the past."

--from Susan Schrepfer dissertation, ch. 1, "Awakening Appreciation of Nature," footnoted item #35:

quote from W.G. Bonner, "The Trail in the Redwoods," Overland Monthly, 37, #6, June 1901, 1062:

> "Surely the fog is clearing away--lifting or dissipating under the influence of the rising sun," I ventured to say...
> "The trees is drinkin' it," shouts John, from his place at the head of the caravan...."That's whut they live on mostly. When they git done breakfast you'll get warm enough."

Nature Conservancy, March 1, 2001

C-take on my time · content is rich - gestures @ Rising Speeches" dusk

PACE

One restless dusk I squinted across the land where I was growing up and saw that the prairie had TRANSLATED ITSELF ~~turned~~ into a seascape.

The wind was blowing, as it did day and night that summer, and the moving waves of rich-yellow wheat could just be seen in the settling dark. A harvesting combine cruised on the far side of the field. I had never been within a thousand miles of an ocean, but in the sudden shadow-play of my mind, I could see that the combine, with its running lights just flicked on, was a ship bound through the night. Bench hills rose to the north, surely a fair

coastline. The expanse of it all, hills and fields and wind in the wheat, ran out far beyond--oceanic--to where the sky and the flat horizon fitted together.

The magic of such remembered moments is indelible. I was seventeen, a restless kid-farmhand with my nose in a book whenever I wasn't atop a tractor or grain truck, there at that found sea which was both fictional and real, and now with my whiskers gone white I still write about both the rim-of-the-prairie along the Rockies there where I grew up and the green jigsawed Pacific Northwest coastline here where I live now.

So I come here tonight as a longtime self-unemployed practicioner of memory and the language of landscape. Written pages--mine now add up to nine books and an appalling number of shorter pieces--written pages are a form of word-memory that we call "literature." And many of my pages deal with what might be called world-memory--the earth's own memory, the topographical testimony of the planet's processes. I think it can be argued that nature is an ultimate form of memory--different from our human sort; it's the universe's sort, the cells of memory ticking away in tree rings and geological strata and glaciated valleys--and that, left to itself as best we can manage to do that, nature the

rememberer imitates art in finding ways to tell its story, again and again, over and over but never quite the same twice, in the long devotion of the seasons and the ground and the sky.

I've brought, tonight, ~~a pair of~~ TWO stories--around 15 minutes' worth apiece--a pair of stories about the nature of memory and the memory of nature, and the ways we translators who are called writers try to decipher the infinite dialects of the land around us. And I'd like to get to these stories by way of perhaps the oddest character I've ever written, which I hope is the same as saying the most imaginative. Tucked away within my novel **Dancing at the Rascal Fair** is another book, also authored by me,

anonymously--the book of stories that the children of a one-room school of a century ago ~~are allowed~~ GET to read aloud to each other on Friday afternoons, their reward for a week of good behavior: it's meant to be their **Treasure Island** or **My Friend Flicka** or **Harry Potter.** But in all honesty it's a jazz riff by me--a spot in the making of words where I wanted to turn imagination loose on memory, in the form of a forgetful king in a forgetful land:

work on deliberate pace

"One more sun," sighed the king at evening, "and now another darkness. This has to stop. The days fly past us as if they were racing pigeons. We may as well be pebbles, for all the notice life takes of us or we of it. No one holds in mind the blind harper

when he is gone. No one commemorates the girl who grains the geese. None of the deeds of our people leave the least tiny mark upon time. Where's the sense in running a kingdom if it all just piffles off into air? Tell me that, whoever can."



"If you will recall, sire--"

"Why is it that the moon keeps better track of itself than we manage to? And the seasons put us to shame, they always know which they are, who's been, whose turn now, who comes next, all that sort of thing. Why can't we have memories as nimble as those? Tell me that, whoever can."



"Sire, you will recall--"

"Oblivion has been the rule too long. What this kingdom needs in the time to come is some, umm, some blivion. There, that's it, we need to become a more blivious people. Enough of this forgettery. But how to do it, it will take some doing. What's to be done? Tell me that, whoever can."

GESTURE 'If you will recall, sire, this morning you named a remembrancer."

"Eh? I did? I mean, I did. And what a good idea it was, too. For a change things are going to be fixed into mind around here. Send me this remembering fellow."

"Bring forth the king's remembrancer!"

In that role, here is the first of the pair of stories I promised you tonight.

Once there were two writers under one roof. It was a duplex, luckily--the promising young novelist Wright Morris and his wife Mary Ellen on the ground floor, and the young anthropology professor Loren Eiseley and his wife Mabel directly above, there in a Philadelphia suburb in the last summer of World War II. The two couples clicked, sat on the porch in the evenings of that last pre-Hiroshima summer drinking and talking, and myself having known Wright Morris slightly, I'm sure the talking was nimble. Most of my own conversations with Wright were of the written

sort, but they were always barn-burners, from his end. If ~~he~~ WRIGHT hadn't sent me one of his scrawled postcards in a while, one would arrive with the explanation that the Bay Area (where he lived the later part of his life) was short on ink, "due to an epidemic of fingerprinting." And his inscription in my copy of **Photographs and Words**, his remarkable photo-and-text ~~book~~ WORK reprising the farmhouse scenes he shot when he went back to his home places in Nebraska in 1940 reads this way:

-THAT, ALAS, THE BAY AREA

THAT INSCRIPTION

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I can personally testify that Wright was antic, quick-witted, mischievous, adventurous--he used every dab of his life and travels in his writing, and he wrote a lot: 33 books, among them 19 novels and 3 memoirs. Eiseley by all accounts was melancholy, not particularly good with people, never went anywhere, a "bleeder" as a writer and evidently as a soul--Wright Morris nicknamed him "Schmerzie," short for "Weltschmerz," world pain as we all learned back there in Philosophy 101.

Onward they went, in their careers, Wright Morris to literary prizes--the National Book Award in 1957 for **The Field of Vision**, a remarkable kaleidoscopic novel set in a bull ring in

Mexico--and to the cusp of major literary reputation. With that quicksilver mind and a compositional hand almost as fleet, Wright Morris could write like an angel. Here are the opening sentences of his novel, **The Works of Love**:

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DELIBERATE PACE

Under the prairie sky, Loren Eiseley stares down at that skull. The skull stares, sightless, up at him. And Eiseley writes of that

moment: "This creature had never lived to see a man--and I; what was it I was never going to see?"

It is going to be hard for any of us, ever, to sum up the immense story of humankind AND NATURE better than Loren Eiseley managed to in that single sentence.

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us. And I think Eiseley's words have lasted because he was willing to openly risk awe about nature, and to put it to use as a ~~finding~~ LOCATING device, for himself and us.

Now to that other story I have for you, a kind of show-and-tell of how nature gets hold of me in my writing and how I try to get hold of it enough to put some of it onto the page.

A few minutes of preface here, to try to take you behind the scenes a little bit--into the cave between my ears--and to indicate a couple of ways I go about a piece of writing.

One is a process I don't know what to call except seeing with the ear and hearing with the eye.

The eye starts to "listen," and remember, to register for good how the way a rancher cocks his hat says something about that man.

The ear starts to "see," and remember, how ordinary language can be made to glow, as if breathing on an ember in a cold-morning cookstove.

The registering--the getting it down so it can be found again and worked with--is of course the point,and for what my eyes overhear, I always have a pocket notebook, and ultimately file cards, which picture those moments for me in SCRAWLED words. For what my ears peek at, I also use the notebooks and file cards for

overheard bits of language, but beyond that I resort to a good deal of focusing the inner ear to how the language (LOOKS AND) sounds on the page. One little instance: I often warm up for the day's writing by reading ten pages of the **Dictionary of American Regional English**, just to tune up inside myself as to how the language gets put together in sayings and turns of phrase. If you read around this way in the histories of the spoken word, as a writer you find some wonderfully unlikely allies in what you're trying to create--(ONE) ~~a~~ source I used for the book you're about to (HEAR) ~~have~~ a sample of (although not this particular sample) (ONE SOURCE) is a scholarly quarterly

about how various nationalities and groups of society cuss: the magnificently and aptly named **Journal of Verbal Abuse.**

The other writerly method of trying to turn words into worlds is pretty much indescribable, so I won't try to describe it very much. I'll just give it a name, and hope you can catch a glimpse of it now and then.

It's what I call "the crocodile factor," and like so much else that has to do with the heart and soul of our end of the country, I owe this bit of writerly psyche to the late Richard Hugo, the bigger-than-life poet of Washington and Montana. In teaching

aspiring poets, Dick Hugo used to advise: "When in doubt, throw in a crocodile."

Among the things he meant by that are a list of pretended assumptions that he would use when he set out to write a poem--as he told it in his terrific book on writing, **The Triggering Town**, "Whenever I see a town that triggers whatever it is inside me that wants to write a poem, I assume at least one of the following"--and I'll give you just a couple of the beasties he makes himself imagine, from his long list:

"I am an outcast returned. Years ago the police told me to never come back but after all this time I assume that either I'll be forgiven or I will not be recognized."

Another--this is one of my favorites because it sounds so wonderfully woebegone, as Dick Hugo himself could be:

"On Saturday nights IN THIS TOWN everyone has fun but me. I sit home alone and listen to the radio. I wish I could join the others though I enjoy feeling left out."

Hugo's kind of adjuration to the imagination is said many ways, probably in all forms of art--when the great carver Bill Reed was asked why his tribe, the Haidas, were the pre-eminent

artists of the Northwest coastal tribes, BILL REED said the Haidas simply out-crazied everybody else.

But I've always liked Hugo's crocodile prescription, and I think it covers a lot of otherwise unexplainable wonders of prose, too--the go-for-broke elements that come right up off the page and get you.

Well, enough about this none too tidy writerly process of sitting around in my own head, trying to tell a truth by making things up--or as a classier writer, Shirley Hazzard, once defined the task of literature: to relieve the soul of incoherence. Let me take you as coherently as I'm able to a written result. This

-WHICH IS TO SAY, OF FINDING THE LANGUAGE OF THE LANDSCAPE-

example of the process of gathering impressions and ideas is from my first novel, **The Sea Runners**, of twenty years ago now. It is, I suppose, [redacted] the story of [redacted] two Januaries in one year.

In the January on the calendar, the model with the guarantee that it would last only 31 days, I flew to Alaska--Sitka first, then on to Juneau. I was carrying along my own storyline. It was of the other January, the one back in 1853: four men, Swedish workmen indentured for seven years to the Russian-American Company at New Archangel (the once-and-future Sitka), decide the hell with fetching fur for the Tsar; they steal a Tlingit canoe and aim downcoast for Astoria, twelve hundred miles. That plot

existed as a five hundred-word newspaper account from the time. Round it out with sixty, seventy thousand more words, I figured, and there's my novel.

Most of those words needed to be got, of course, from the source: the Northwest Coast, the surf-moat and timber palisade where the Pacific and the continent contend along Southeast Alaska and British Columbia and the state of Washington. Captain Cook's coast, and the Nootka Chief Maquinna's -- and imminently the Alpha Helix's, which was going to be my ticket to ride. An oceanographic ship of the University of Alaska's Institute of Marine Sciences, the Alpha Helix was 133 feet long,

painted a winsome baby-blue, and bound to Puget Sound for a winter of refitting. I was to go aboard at Juneau and coastwatch my way home to Seattle.

(THIS WAS 1984, INCIDENTALLY.)

Alaska seemed just the moody sort of place to begin a year. Both on this trip and in the time I had spent there the previous summer on the historical track of my Swedes, Alaska struck me as at once wonder-filled and edgy. Paul Bunyan, but with alimony and a hangover.

The send-off for the Alpha Helix was characteristically mixed that way: Juneau folk were celebrating the birthday of Robert Burns. Well, not the Scottish poet's 222nd natal day so much, as

that somebody had come up with the idea that it would pass THE WINTER improvingly for Juneau to have a bagpipe band. I was blood-bound to attend. So a pipe band there was, and haggis, and a large ruddy kilted fellow pouring the lead piper a splash of the auld pure stuff and asking, "Piper, wha'll ye have in your whiskey?" and the piper giving proper Caledonian response, "More whiskey!" and probably the skirls of the pipes were still echoing through the mountains and terrifying the moose the next day when the Alpha Helix cast off.

I expected that shipboard life had to be calmer than Alaska ashore, and by and large this was so. Its Three Commandments proved to be the ones I'd learned on Montana ranches:

--Say fewer words than anybody else on the crew.

--Work as long hours as anybody else and longer if you can.

--And never rile the cook.

INTENSE

But the coast: this long labyrinth of pastscape that my Swedish quartet -- Karlsson, Melander, Wennberg and Braaf I knew them as now -- need to paddle through, muddle through, winter day on winter day of that far January: the Northwest coast was agitation a thousand new ways. Arithmetic of the Alpha

Helix's voyage was plain enough. Eight hundred and eighty miles, Juneau to Seattle, at about 10 1/2 knots. But arithmetic isn't always trustable dimension, so here was a kind of sovereign galaxy of the coast; more moods of water than I had seen in 15 years of hiking Washington and Oregon shores, a brinking spruce forest so thick it seemed to be thatched, islands islands islands...a commotion of landscape which I strained to put down in my journal.

Nor did the coast let go of me, even once the Alpha Helix was berthed snug in the Duwamish waterway and I had traipsed off to HOME my Seattle suburb. I walked into my house and found that the

floor had caught the exact lurch-and-roll of the ship. Three days, it took to coax my inner ear out of that slosh.

But nature's Januaryness, the temblors from the coast, refused to leave at all. As soon as I sat down to resume day-to-day writing on **The Sea Runners**, I knew there had to be a fifth character: the Northwest Coast itself. From then on I quite purposely wove into a work of fiction the presence of the coast as a living thing. This often was feathered in with just a phrase or a few sentences, but I didn't hesitate to simply bring the coast and its mood--its voice, as heard by the eye; the language of its landscape--to the foreground of the story every so often. In other

words, to throw in a particular kind of crocodile--non-fiction specificity of detail, done at length, in a work of fiction. I'll just read one of those passages:

"Sometime in these days the canoe had slid them out of winter into not-winter.

No calendar can quite catch the time, and the cluster of moments themselves is as little possible to single out as the family of atoms of air that pushes against the next and has begun a breeze. Yet the happening is unmissable. Out of their winter rust, ferns unroll green. Up from the low dampnesses of the forest the blooms of skunk cabbage lick, a butter-gold flame and scent

like burnt sugar....Seals bob forth in the offshore swells. Salmon far out in the Pacific reverse compass, start their instinctual trace back from under-ocean pastures toward the rivers where they were spawned and must now seed spawn in turn.... Geese and ducks and whistling swans write first strokes of the calligraphy of flight northward. To the north too, glaciers creak with the earliest of the strains which at last will calve icebergs into the azure bays. Within the white rivers...currents begin to pry at their winter roofs of ice.

In stirrings tiny and mighty, the restive great coast was engendering spring."

I think there, in those magical stirrings of the earth which began for me in that long ago prairie dusk, is as good a closing note as any. For it is my belief that a writer must ground his or her work in such specific gifts of earth in order to write of that larger country--life.

Thank you.

"Language of Landscape," Boulder Valley teachers, Oct. 21, '03

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geological strata and the beaks of finches and glaciated valleys--and that, left to itself as best we can manage to do that, nature the rememberer imitates art in finding ways to tell its story, again and again, over and over but never quite the same twice, in the long devotion of the seasons and the ground and the sky.

I've brought, today, two stories about the nature of memory and the memory of nature. The first of the pair is about a couple of other wordsmiths whom I think are worth our attention, and then I'll try to do a bit of show-and-tell about what I'm up to, myself.

Once there were two writers under one roof. Fortunately it was a duplex--the promising young novelist Wright Morris and his wife Mary Ellen on the ground floor, and the young anthropology professor Loren Eiseley and his wife Mabel directly above, there in a Philadelphia suburb in the last summer of World War II. The two couples clicked, sat on the porch in the evenings of that last pre-Hiroshima summer drinking and talking, and myself having known Wright Morris slightly, I'm sure the talking was nimble. Most of my own conversations with Wright were of the written sort, but they were always barn-burners, from his end. If Wright hadn't sent me one of his scrawled postcards in a while, one

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It's what I call "the crocodile factor," and like so much else that has to do with the heart and soul of our WESTERN end of the country, I owe this bit of writerly psyche to the late Richard Hugo, the bigger-than-life poet of Washington and Montana. In teaching

aspiring poets, Dick Hugo used to advise: "When in doubt, throw in a crocodile."

Among the things he meant by that are a list of pretended assumptions that he would use when he set out to write a poem--as he told it in his terrific book on writing, **The Triggering Town**, "Whenever I see a town that triggers whatever it is inside me that wants to write a poem, I assume at least one of the following"--and I'll give you just a couple of the beasties he makes himself imagine, from his long list:

"I am an outcast returned. Years ago the police told me to never come back but after all this time I assume that either I'll be forgiven or I will not be recognized."

Another--this is one of my favorites because it sounds so wonderfully woebegone, as Dick Hugo himself could be:

"On Saturday nights everyone has fun but me. I sit home alone and listen to the radio. I wish I could join the others though I enjoy feeling left out."

For your purposes, of scoping out landscape as an inspiration for literature, Hugo speaking as a poet says something I entirely agree with as a novelist but which I would never apply to non-

fiction. In essence, he says, violate the facts of the landscape if your piece of art needs that done. "For example," Hugo writes, "if the poem needs the word 'black" at some point and the grain elevator is yellow, the grain elevator may have to be black in the poem. You owe reality nothing and the truth about your feelings everything." As I say, I'm all for that as a novelist and a closet poet myself, but in non-fiction--as I'm utterly sure Dick Hugo would have agreed--you have to stick to the facts before your eyes.

Hugo's kind of adjuration to the imagination is said many ways, probably in all forms of art--when the great native

American carver Bill Reed was asked why his tribe, the Haidas, were the pre-eminent artists of the Northwest coastal tribes, Bill Reed said the Haidas simply out-crazied everybody else.

But I've always liked Hugo's crocodile prescription, and I think it covers a lot of otherwise unexplainable wonders of prose, too--the go-for-broke elements that come right up off the page and get you.

Well, enough about this none too tidy writerly process of sitting around in my own head, trying to tell a truth by making things up--or as a classier writer than the one in front of you, Shirley Hazzard, once defined the task of literature: to relieve the

soul of incoherence. Let me take you as coherently as I'm able to a written result. This example of the process of gathering impressions and ideas--which is to say, of finding the language of the landscape--is from my first novel, **The Sea Runners**, of more than twenty years ago now. I chose this book deliberately because it doesn't have the Rocky Mountains in it, there's no way a supposed affinity--a sense of place, as we western writers are always assumed to have--there's no way my native high plains-and-mountain surroundings can account for the crafting of this particular scene. It is instead, I suppose, the story of two Januaries in one year.

In the January on the calendar, the model with the guarantee that it would last only 31 days, I flew to Alaska--Sitka first, then on to Juneau. I was carrying along my own storyline. It was of the other January, the one back in 1853: four men, Swedish workmen indentured for seven years to the Russian-American Company at New Archangel (the once-and-future Sitka), decide the hell with fetching fur for the Tsar; they steal a Tlingit INDIAN canoe and aim downcoast for Astoria, twelve hundred miles. That plot existed as a five hundred-word newspaper account from the time. Round it out with sixty, seventy thousand more words, I figured, and there's my novel.

Most of those words needed to be got, of course, from the source: the Northwest Coast, the surf-moat and timber palisade where the Pacific and the continent contend along Southeast Alaska and British Columbia and the state of Washington. Captain Cook's coast, and the Nootka Chief Maquinna's -- and imminently the Alpha Helix, which was going to be my ticket to ride. An oceanographic ship of the University of Alaska's Institute of Marine Sciences, the Alpha Helix was 133 feet long, painted a winsome baby-blue, and bound to Puget Sound for a winter of refitting. I was to go aboard at Juneau and coastwatch my way home to Seattle.

Alaska seemed just the moody sort of place to begin a year. (This was 1981, incidentally.) Both on this trip and in the time I had spent there the previous summer on the historical track of my Swedes, Alaska struck me as at once wonder-filled and edgy. Paul Bunyan, but with alimony and a hangover.

The send-off for the Alpha Helix was characteristically mixed that way: Juneau folk were celebrating the birthday of Robert Burns. Well, not the Scottish poet's 222nd natal day so much, as that somebody had come up with the idea that it would pass the winter improvingly for Juneau to have a bagpipe band. I was blood-bound to attend. So a pipe band there was, and haggis, and

a large ruddy kilted fellow pouring the lead piper a splash of the auld pure stuff and asking, "Piper, wha'll ye have in your whiskey?" and the piper giving proper Caledonian response, "More whiskey!" and probably the skirls of the pipes were still echoing through the mountains and terrifying the moose the next day when the Alpha Helix cast off.

I expected that shipboard life had to be calmer than Alaska ashore, and by and large this was so. Its Three Commandments proved to be the ones I'd learned on Montana ranches:

--Say fewer words than anybody else on the crew.

--Work as long hours as anybody else and longer if you can.

--And never rile the cook.

INTENSE

But the coast: this long labyrinth of pastscape that my Swedish quartet -- Karlsson, Melander, Wennberg and Braaf I knew them as now -- need to paddle through, muddle through, winter day on winter day of that far January: the Northwest coast was agitation a thousand new ways. Arithmetic of the Alpha Helix's voyage was plain enough. Eight hundred and eighty miles, Juneau to Seattle, at about 10 1/2 knots. But arithmetic isn't always trustable dimension, so here was a kind of sovereign galaxy of the coast; more moods of water than I had seen in 15

years of hiking Washington and Oregon shores, a brinking spruce forest so thick it seemed to be thatched, islands islands islands...a commotion of landscape which I strained to put down in my journal.

Nor did the coast let go of me, even once the Alpha Helix was berthed snug in the Duwamish waterway and I had traipsed off home to my Seattle suburb. I walked into my house and found that the floor had caught the exact lurch-and-roll of the ship. Three days, it took to coax my inner ear out of that slosh.

But nature's Januaryness, the temblors from the coast, refused to leave at all. As soon as I sat down to resume day-to-day

writing on **The Sea Runners**, I knew there had to be a fifth character: the Northwest Coast itself. From then on I quite purposely wove into a work of fiction the presence of the coast as a living thing. This often was feathered in with just a phrase or a few sentences, but I didn't hesitate to simply bring the coast and its mood to the foreground of the story every so often. To throw in a particular kind of crocodile--non-fiction specificity of detail, done at length, in a work of fiction. I'll just read one of those passages:

"Sometime in these days the canoe had slid them out of winter into not-winter.

No calendar can quite catch the time, and the cluster of moments themselves is as little possible to single out as the family of atoms of air that pushes against the next and has begun a breeze. Yet the happening is unmissable. Out of their winter rust, ferns unroll green. Up from the low dampnesses of the forest the blooms of skunk cabbage lick, a butter-gold flame and scent like burnt sugar....Seals bob forth in the offshore swells now. Salmon far out in the Pacific reverse compass, start their instinctual trace back from under-ocean pastures toward the rivers where they were spawned and must now seed spawn in turn.... Geese and ducks and whistling swans write first strokes of the

calligraphy of flight northward. To the north too, glaciers creak with the earliest of the strains which at last will calve icebergs into the azure bays. Within the white rivers...currents begin to pry at their winter roofs of ice.

In stirrings tiny and mighty, the restive great coast was engendering spring."

I think there, in those magical stirrings of the earth which began for me in that long ago prairie dusk, is as good a closing note as any. For it it my belief that a writer must ground his or her work in such specific gifts of earth in order to write of that larger country--life. (Thank you.)