Michael Malone President Montana State University 211 Montana Hall Bozeman MT 59717-2420

Dear Mike:

Well, that was a lot of fun, our time together in Bozeman with you and Kate. And with your Philadelphia congressman on hand, you outdid Billings and my Bair Theater appearance, where the biggest celebrity was the Secretary of Agriculture of Illinois.

The rest of our trip went fine, and my publisher is ecstatic that the booksignings in Montana sold over a thousand copies of *Mountain Time*. Carol and I are vowing to come back sometime when we can be leisurely. Meanwhile we've had a chance to wash our socks before we head for San Francisco Bay area bookstores the day after Labor Day, and to do the arithmetic on our Bozeman expenses. We calculate the Seattle-Bozeman round-trip to be 1,358 miles; if you can cover that at whatever MSU's mileage allowance is, and our room bill while we were in town (\$249.90, Sleep Inn receipt attached), we'll happily call it square. If it's possible in your bookkeeping, Mike, I would appreciate separate checks on the expenses and the speaking fee--otherwise, the IRS will gig me on all of it as income.

Come see us in Seattle, okay? And thanks immensely for showing us a good time again at MSU.

All best,

279 Sea-Spokene 33 Spo-Caller 105 Caller-Mizzo 202 MIZZOU-BOZEWAN 679 one way 1358 Name trip



Office of the President

211 Montana Hall P.O. Box 172420 Bozeman, MT 59717-2420

Telephone (406) 994-2341 Fax (406) 994-1893

E-mail malone@montana.edu

May 6, 1999

Mr. Ivan Doig 17021 10th Ave NW Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Ivan:

I was very pleased to learn yesterday that you are willing to accept our offer to make two presentations for us this August 20-21. I think you will have a lot of fun doing it, and I know that it will mean a great deal to all of us.

Once again, we would like you to present an informal talk to our President's Circle on the evening of August 20. Hopefully, the event will be in our backyard. The President's Circle is a gathering of our foremost donors, and they are very good people. I would think this presentation could be in the 30-40 minute range. We will probably post it on our invitations as "An Evening With Ivan Doig." Again as we discussed, this could be a combination of remarks and readings of your most recent book. It certainly can be informal.

The next evening, August 21, we are still planning. What we are thinking about is a public presentation, and it could be a fund-raising or friend-raising event for our Wallace Stegner Chair. I figured that would probably be more than agreeable to you, since I know that you are a fan of Stegner's. Again, this could be your usual presentation, perhaps with some reading and some presentation. I would think it might be in the 45-60 minute range, possibly with some questions.

For doing this, we offer you \$5,000 in remuneration and up to \$1,000 to cover travel expenses. I gather that this is satisfactory to you.

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Ivan, I really appreciate you doing this. I think it will be very productive and a lot of fun. We look forward to seeing you and Carol this August, if not sooner.

As Ever,

Michael Malone purposition of the property of

MM/rm

cc: mp Tom Gelder i bio capit sugar of our historia des es got macuras yairn yasu peake, when se and

Michael Malone President Montana State University Bozeman, MT

Dear Mike--

Yes, the terms in your May 6 letter about the pair of August presentations sound fine. Carol and I are looking forward to hanging out with you and Kate again on those evenings, although because of the bookstore gig and other hectic stuff we're going to hew to our original plan to stay at the Sleep Inn. A few other details:

--Please note our changed mailing address, in the letterhead above, due to this new house. Phone number is the same.

-- My Sociel Security # for when it's inevitably needed: 516-44-1410.

--I'm enclosing a current bio sheet and mug shot, and if your staff wants a more ample publicity kit regarding my new book, Mountain Time, they should contact Robin Tropiano in the publicity department at Scribner, (212)632-4951.

--Incidentally, my Bozeman booksigning at the Country Bookshelf, which Scribner will be working with Mary Jane to promote in the media, will be Saturday, Aug. 21, 1-3. We thought we'd try the Chronicle, KEMC public radio, and KMMS; naturally we'll try to incorporate mention of the Stegner Chair talk in any interviews I get. Any of your staff should feel free, of course, to get in touch with me directly about local media stuff.

See you in August, with fingers crossed for good weather in your back yard, right?

all best.



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E-mail malone@montana.edu

May 24, 1999

Dr. Ivan Doig 17277 15th Ave NW Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Ivan,

I am really delighted that this has all worked out, and we are of course eager to spend some time with you and Carol, as always.

Corky Brittan, who I think is a friend of yours, will be contacting you about the Stegner-related event of the Saturday of your two-day visit.

We look forward to seeing you then, and our best to Carol.

As Ever,

Michael Malone President

MM/rm

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Communications Services

416 Culbertson Hall MSU • Bozeman Bozeman, MT 59717-0222

Telephone (406) 994-2721 Fax (406) 994-4102

Joan - Joan with gw today.

great spoatery with gw today.

Look forward to visiting with gw

next week. That's again for fiting me. x.....

(406) 994-1966 585-931 Chm) CSchmidt @ montana. edu



Office of the President

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Telephone (406) 994-2341 Fax (406) 994-1893 E-mail malone@montana.edu

July 27, 1999

Dr. Ivan Doig 17277 15th Avenue NW Seattle, WA 98177

Dear Ivan:

Thanks for sending along the reprint from the San Francisco Chronicle.

Hooray for This House of Sky in fourth place! It should have been in first place!

We are very much looking forward to your visit. Thanks for thinking of us.

As Ever,

Michael Malone President

MM/rm

Mike asked me here to talk a bit about the writing life. The quick summary is that I spent quite a few years at it before a book called This House of Sky turned it into a writing living as well as a life. There've been eight books since, and they each took two to three years of work. Some twists and turns occur along the way, and if you're lucky-in the sense that Branch Rickey spoke of luck: "luck is the residue of design"--some of the things that happen to you as a writer can lend magic to your writing.

I have two stories to tell you. In one, art imitates life, and I come out of it with the makings of a novel. In the other, life imitates art--and let's see, when we get there, what's been gathered in by that second parenthesis of fate.

Tale number one begins at a campsite, as I say in the book, "in a mountain valley as old as the visit of glaciers," about 5:30 on the morning of the Fourth of July, 1977.

I say:

"Frost on the tent, huh?

My wife Carol, beside me in the sleeping bag, says:

"Nope. It's inside the tent."

That summer of 1977 I was trying to find a reconciliation with the Montana I had left, 15 years before. Economic propulsion had sent me out of the state, and then as my father's life dwindled into his long dying, Montana became for me a site of sickness, sadness, strain. But now I was back, trying to write about it--and determined, too, to do something none of us in our family had had time or freedom to do: to go deep into the Rocky Mountain Front, the neighboring family of mountains behind the little town of Dupuyer during our sheepherding years, my high-school years.

Carol and I backpacked into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, that start of July, along a little-used packhorse trail, which of course spells <u>un</u>bridged streams. Three fordings of Birch Creek in the first four hours, the water at the last crossing up toward our waists.

After we had earned our way onto some actual trail, everywhere around were the mountainsides, of colossal reefs and deeps like the ocean bottom tipped empty and left on its side. Day on day, dodging weather by the hour, we hiked, camped, fished, enjoyed--and I tucked away details in a pocket notebook that I always carry. Details such as these, in a scene I created twenty years later for my characters Mitch, Lexa and Mariah on their climactic journey into those same mountains:

IN MY NEWEST BOOK, MTN TIME Mtm. Time:

p. 249, "It was only midaffermoon" off
p. 250, " As soon as ...

to
p. 252, "Bobbsey Twins"

BACK to REAL LIFE, CAROL and IVAN IN the BOB-

The morning of that sparkling frost inside our tent, we started to hike out of the Bob with brilliant blue above. Before noon, on a section of trail where, behind us, below us, lay the Continental Divide, we were in a sleet squall. When the squall cleared, the view was waiting: the Rockies blading up in all directions, peak upon peak upon peak, with a notch of view eastward to the patterned farmland of the plains.

8

There at noon on our Fourth of July high, Carol asked:

"So where does the map say we are?"

I traced the contour lines with my finger and told her:

"On a place named Family Peak."

We aimed ourselves for that notch between the peaks and hiked out of the Bob with the wind thumping a farewell against the backs of our packs. As it had for five days, the trail remained empty except for us. We had, in our time in that wilderness area, seen not a living soul.

PACE

Something, though. By whatever token, the standard journalist that I was when I went into those mountains came out to not only complete the memoir This House of Sky, but to write novel after novel about a century of people on the hem of those mountains and those plains. The contemporary arc of this latest one, Mountain Time, takes place with a sense of the immense clock of earth--the patient witness of mountains as they look down as the briefer existences that are our human fate.

And I think it's more than a coincidence that the book's plot of family--of the Baby Boom generation reaching its time of reckoning, jelly-sandwiched between children who taking their own oft-times inexplicable routes in life/and aging parents who are losing command over their lives--is keyed to the view, back there in '77, from a place called Family Peak.

Now to that other story I have for you. Mountain Time is about divides of various kinds, not simply the geographically unarguable Continental Divide but the territory between individuals and segments of society, and since I live in the Seattle of the 1990's, one of those societal slices has money all over it. The latest cybernaire, as invented by me, is named Aaron Frelinghuysen and he's described this way:

Mtm TIME, p.64, 1st #

12

"...The guy had more money than most nations.

Frelinghuysen had piranhaed his way into the techieville food chain with a bit of wonderware called ZYX, and from Silicon Valley to Silicon Alley the deals had lined up for him."

No sooner had I finished having my characters encounter this latest computer bigfoot and sent the manuscript in to Scribner than life did a little imitation of art for me. I was plucked out of my orderly, ordinary routine of sitting there pecking out words and wafted to Alaska on the wings and keels of money.

THE
CO-FOUNDER
OF
MICROSOFT

thrown by Allen, and the guest list of Robin Williams,

Dan Ackroyd, Steven Spielberg, Carrie Fisher, Debbie
Reynolds, Penny Marshall, Terry Gilliam, George
Lourette And
Lucas, Francis Ford Coppola, Dennis Hopper, Bill
VERNON REID,

Gates, probably half a dozen future Nobel Laureates of
sciences, and four hundred or so others. Through some
toss of the godly dice I was one of two writers invited--

sort of like winning a lottery you didn't know you had a ticket ...

The days Carol and I spent with that shipload are in my diary under the heading, "Afloat with half the money in the known world." But the example I wanted to bring to you tonight is the heightening that a writer--I think--has to try to do when handed something like that.

Out of many, many scenes, let me give you just the final night potlatch, when the upper deck of one of the

most posh cruise ships in the world was transformed into a mammoth replica of a coastal Indian longhouse--with a rock band playing, and gorgeously caped performers of the Tsimshian tribe dancing, and Hollywood starlets slinking by in slinky gowns, it was like the Star Wars bar.

There at the edge of the dance floor sits Candace Bergen, watching injutter fascination as the greatest

BEING HERSELF RATHER
THAN MURPHY BROWN,

artist of the Tsimshians, Nathan Jackson, performs his raven dance.

There is Jeff Goldblum, not in Jurrasic Park of The Big Chill, but in the buffet line with roast buffalo on his plate.

And there on the rotunda next to the dance floor with the totem pole carved specially for this night is a man dancing alone—a man who in an earlier turn of his life had been a commercial fisherman in Alaska, and



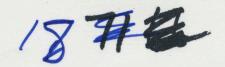
EMPHASIS

(INTENSE)

(DON)

survived the sinking of a crab boat that plunged him into these exact cold northern waters now cut by the keel of the cruise ship "Crystal Harmony." He dances and dances with the passion and privacy of a man who was handed his life back—and his movements on the rotunda set the thunderbird totem pole to nodding in rhythm with him.

And, over along the wall, unabashedly standing on top of a chair to see out into this scene, is a white-



bearded writer, on a ladder of life where he surely has never been--but up there writing, writing, into that pocket notebook that he always carries next to his heart.

(Show BOOK)

News from the Stegner Chair of Western American Studies, Montana State University

Spring, 1999

In This Issue

T.H. Watkins reflects on his two years at MSU.

The Students' perspective: Cora Lynn DeSantis says "We have hope."

Fundraising for the Chair: "We're nearing our mark."

Next Stegner Lecture this April: exerpt from Watkins' 1995 lecture.

"A chair in Western
American Studies at
MSU is a splendid way
to inform the West about
itself."

- Wallace Stegner



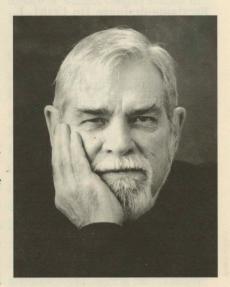
Wallace Stegner.

T.H. Watkins:

Blazing a Trail for the Stegner Chair

In Fall 1997, T.H. ("Tom") Watkins became the first Wallace Stegner Professor of Western American Studies.

To date, Watkins has taught the following courses at MSU: "Wallace Stegner and the Western Dream of Place" in the 1997 and 1998 fall semesters; and "The History of the Environmental Movement," in Spring of 1998. His current course offering is "Writing Nature." Watkins has given numerous lectures both in Montana and around the country, focusing on Wallace Stegner, Wilderness and Writing, and environmental issues. His own writings have included



"Natural America," a National Geographic book on public lands; columns and articles in Audubon, American Heritage, Sierra, the Washington Post, and the New York Times. "The Hungry Years," a history of the Great Depression, will be published in September, and Watkins is currently researching a book about his friend and mentor, Wallace Stegner. See page two for an interview with Tom about his experiences both as a new Montana resident, and as the first Distinguished Stegner Professor.

A Student's View of MSU's Chair in Western American Studies

One of the primary goals of the Stegner chair is teaching. Cora Lynn DeSantis, a graduate student in history at MSU, has been a student in Watkins' courses both this year and last, and says that Tom's presence here on campus has had a profound effect both on her own and others' experiences.

"It is truly a once in a lifetime opportunity," says DeSantis of her studying under Watkins. She says he has a rare ability to convey his tremendous knowledge and experience while maintaining an open and engaging classroom ambience. In terms of Watkins' influence over the other students, DeSantis says, "Tom's classes are making a lot of students aware of the natural world around us, and the importance that preserving it bears on all of us. We're a fortunate group of people, as Americans, to have the natural treasures that we do."

While Ms. DeSantis is originally from northern New York state, she believes that living in Montana and taking Watkins' courses has given her a better understanding of the problems facing the American West. One of those is that "we are saddled with laws that were written years ago during a different time in American history." She gives the example of the Mining Law of 1872: "Originally, it was meant for the small independent miner trying his luck for a strike. Now with the backing of all the mining interests, it enforces a 'right to mine'." This places mining, in the words of Charles Wilkinson, "as a highest and most preferred use of the public lands." "All that leaves the rest of us," says DeSantis, "is the largest Superfund site in the country just over the Continental Divide." (continued, back page)

From "A Gardener in Eden," Second Annual Wallace Stegner Memorial Lecture, by T.H. Watkins, April 13, 1995

"A few years ago, while hiking the Escalante drainage [in Utah], I stopped to rest for a moment. As I tilted my head back to take a drink from my canteen, my glance fixed on a huge slab of rock that had split off from the high redrock wall of the canyon at the apex of a talus slope overgrown with sage and brush. I have no idea why, but the urge suddenly came over me to climb up there to see what I could see. I scrambled up the slope and made my way around the big slab to see what was behind it.

What I found was a kind of prehistoric picture gallery -- petroglyphs and pictographs incised into or painted on the slickrock wall in the shadow of the slab -- coils and serpents, large talismanic figures with triangular bodies, handprints, an assortment of geometric patterns like the artful doodlings of an abstractionist. I did not know then and I do not know now what precise system of thought, society, cosmology, or artistic expression that hidden gallery represents. Its meaning probably is lost to me and my time forever.

But I do know this: On levels more deeply complex than I am presently equipped to comprehend, that gallery speaks of time, time trapped in stone, true time. And I know that I will return to this place again and again as something as central to my knowledge now as all the memories of my life and my family's life, all the history I have learned, all the books I may have read or all the word I may have written. When I do, I will touch the stone . . . and dream of stars."

An Interview with Stegner Professor T.H. Watkins

Why did you decide to come to MSU and assume the Stegner chair? The opportunity to share Stegner's work and ideas with students and others living in the region was irrestible. So was the idea of living in Montana.

What has been your biggest challenge in serving as the first Stegner professor? Developing curricula for the courses and learning how to present them. I'm a tyro at the teaching trade.

How have students responded to your courses on Wallace Stegner and the Environmental movement? Do they have preconceived notions about Stegner, the West, or environmentalism that you must dispel? My happiest surprise was the level of enthusiasm and understanding with which the students greeted their introduction to Stegner and the other writers they've been reading under my direction —particularly when they're meeting them for the first time. I think their worlds have been enlarged by that experience, but I haven't really had to dispel anyone's preconceptions. The students have been wonderfully perceptive about both the true nature of past and present life in the West and the problems the region faces.



One of Tom Watkins' Favorite Wild Places: North Escalante Canyons in Utah

You've given a number of lectures and meetings around the country while serving as the Stegner Professor. What themes resonate with your audiences? For the most part, I've been telling my audiences pretty much what they already know: that the West is changing rapidly and that if we're going to save the best of what remains, we'd better roll up our collective sleeves and get to work. They know it—and I think they respond to the fact that my own convictions in this regard may in some way help validate their own. It's always gratifying when you hear someone else articulate your own deepest concerns.

How have the past two years in Montana at MSU affected your own ideas about the West? I'm still learning about the interior West. Before, I was a visitor -- a frequent visitor, but still a visitor. Now I, too, have a direct personal stake in the place and it's intensified my hopes for it.

Where is your favorite wild place in Montana? For someone who lived in big cities for most of the past 38 years, oddly enough, I find myself most powerfully moved by the hugely empty grasslands of eastern Montana, particularly along the Missouri River. There's something wonderfully haunting about that landscape.

What do you hope to leave as your legacy here at Montana State University? Among my students, I hope I leave an abiding love of good writing and a sensitivity to the needs of the future. Come to think of it, that's what I'd like to leave everyone who's been kind enough to listen to me.

Our Sincere Appreciation to the Friends of the Stegner Chair in Western American Studies

Malcolm & Nancy Adams Mr. Warren R. Amole Dr. Jean Anderson Ms Louise S. Ansberry Ms. Susan Armitage Mr Don Bachman Mr. Gordon M. Bakken James & Anne Banks William & William Barnes Ms. R. Elisabeth Bell Mr. Todd I. Berens Edna & Llovd Berg Mr. Wendell Berry Don & Joan Bishop Francis & Sandra Blake Marshall & Dawn Bowen Mr. Christopher Boyd Ms. Helen M. Bradford Charles & Nina Bradley Ms. Dorothy M. Bradley Ernest & Barbara Brinkley Gordon & Vanessa Brittan Ms. Margery H. Brown Alan & Mary Brutger Mr. H.B. Buck Fredrick & Katharine Cady Fidelity Investments Charitable Liz Claiborne & Art Ortenberg Fndn Hobart & Martha Collins John & Anne Collins Willis Monroe Conover, Ir. Emmett & Julia Coon Mr. Tim Crawford Eugene & Barbara Croisant John & Debbie Crowther John & Ellen Curtis D A Davidson & Co. Nicholas & Brenda Davis Russell & Ilona Deremer Ms. Betsyann Duval Mark & Carol Engebretson Mr. John C. Ewers First Interstate BancSystem Fndn Gilbert & June Fite Cornelia K. Francis Gallatin Valley Land Trust Debra & Michael Gill Ms. Gretchen Long Glickman Gary & Jodi Goodheart A & Joyce Grande William & Janet Greever Patricia & Raymond Gustafson Milly & Joseph Gutkoski William & Charlotte Hagan Jim & Marilyn Hamilton H. Duane & Suzanne Hampton John & Jean Hansen

Mrs. Margaret M. Hausser Jane & Robert Hawks David & Jenny Heuck John & Susan Heyneman Mr. William D. Hill Ms. Sara Stewart Hinckley Patrick & Kris Holland David & Sarah Hollier Homer A. & Mildred S. Scott Fndn Mr. Francis Houghton Houghton Mifflin Co. Mr. Christopher J. Huggard Clark & Aylett Irving Peter & Kaaren Iverson Ms. Kristen G. Juras Alan & Jean Kahn Mr. Kenneth R. Kay Robert & Patricia Keller Mr. Robert H. Keller, Jr. Kern & Patty Kemmerer Robert S. & Grayce B. Kerr Fndt Ms. Margaret C. Kingsland Herbert & Eleanor Kirk Mr. Jake Kittle Ms. Faye Kommers Stuart & Beverly Knapp Dr. David R. Lewis Ms. Patricia N. Limerick Mr. Gray G. Mackay Whitney & Elizabeth MacMillan Mr. Tom MacNamee Harold & Caroline Malde Adrian & Joan Malone Michael & Kathleen Malone Mr. Robert J. Manning Mrs. Virginia U. Martin Lee & Carol Mather Mr. Ronald Mattox Ms. Blair McElroy Mrs. Annie J. McGreevy Mr. Larry McMurtry Ms. Sarah McNelis Mr. William Robert Mellen Clyde & Carol Milner Dwight & Marian Minton John & Phoebe Montagne Montana Community Foundation Ms. Barbara M. Mueller Dr. Hugh O. Nichols Kenneth & Sally Owens Zeese Papanikolas John & Margaret Parker Duncan & Eva Patten Ms. Louise B. Plank Mr. Raymond N. Plank

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Glen & Barbara Reed Mrs. Mary W. Renne Mr. Robert W. Righter Theodore & Connie Roosevelt Ms. Pleasant T. Rowland Ms. Ruth Rudner Leonard & Sandy Sargent Jerome & Ann Scanlan Fred & Lucille Schilling James & Christine Scott Ms. Patricia L. Scott Frank & Hope Scrogin Ms. Marian Jean Setter Gary & Susan Skaar Farwell & Linda Smith Emmett & Judy Stallcop Mr. Edmund A. Stanley Jr. Ms. Connie Staudohar Mrs. Mary P. Stegner Ms. Emily F. Stevens Dr. Ray E. Stevens David & Wanda Stratton Tim & Karen Swanson Dr. Robert L. Swinth Mr. Charles D. Thompson Mr. Albert Tilt III Robert & Melody Utley Mr David Page Vaughan Marilyn & Loren Vranish **WEM Foundation** Mr. Carroll L. Wainwright, Jr. Doris & Edward Ward Thompson & Diana Webb Thompson & Joan Webb James & Valerie Webster Albert & Susan Wells Richard & Paula Wenham Peter & Susan Werner Marilyn & Thomas Wessel Mr. Melville C. Williams John & Tish Winsor Arthur & Holly Wolf 3M Company We apologize for any accidental omissions from this list.

Sixth Stegner Lecture To Be Held April 15th

The Sixth Annual Stegner Lecture will be held April 15, 1999 in the Hager Auditorium at the Museum of the Rockies on the MSU campus at 8 p.m. The lecture is held to coincide with the anniversary of Wallace Stegner's death in 1993.

Tom Watkins, the current Stegner Professor, will talk on "The Utterance of an American Isaiah: Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic." Professor Watkins' recent speaking engagements include the A. Starker Leopold Lecture in Yellowstone Park, The Center for the American West Conference in Denver, the Environmental Film Festival at the Smithstonian Institution, the "River or Dreams" conference in Minneapolis, and the Symposium for the Wallace Stegner Center for Land, Resources, and the Environment at the University of Utah.

The lecture is free and open to the public. A reception for Friends of the Chair will be held preceding the lecture from 7 - 8 p.m. at the Museum. A voluntary contribution of \$25 towards the Chair Endowment is requested for the reception.

For more information on the reception and Lecture, or for copies of past Stegner Lectures, please call Tracy Velazquez at the Montana State University Foundation at 1-800-457-1696, or Betsy Gaines at (406) 994-7805.

"We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope."

- Wallace Stegner

T.H. Watkins and his Spring 1999 class.

A Student's View

continued from first page

DeSantis believes that the "money first" ethos is beginning to change here in Montana. She sees evidence for that in the recent passage of Inititative 137 to ban cyanide leach mining for gold, and in strong grassroots organizations such as the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. "Due to the work of T.H. Watkins and those like him," states DeSantis, "we have hope."

Despite the many generous donations we have already received, additional support is still needed in order to complete the endowment for the Wallace Stegner Chair in Western American Studies. Please consider making a gift this Spring to help ensure the success of this important endeavor.

If you can help us to build awareness of the Stegner Chair at MSU, through hosting an event, making calls or visits, or writing letters, please call Tracy Velazquez at the Montana State University Foundation at (406) 994-6465, or Betsy Gaines in the MSU College of Letters and Sciences at (406) 994-7805.

Funding Update: Closing the Gap

When MSU Professor Gordon "Corky" Brittan came up with the idea of creating an endowed chair in Western American Studies at Montana State, there were plenty of folks who weren't sure this was an idea whose time had come. At the time, MSU didn't have (and still doesn't have) any fully-endowed professorships, and was about to embark upon its "Second Century" capital campaign, whose goal was to raise \$25 million. The Stegner Chair of Western American Studies became part of the Humanities Challenge portion of the Campaign, and received its first major gift in the form of a Challenge Grant of \$250,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1993.

Since then, over \$1 million has been raised. A minimum of \$1.5 million is needed to provide sufficient investment income to fund the salary and expenses of the chair. In order to bring in T.H. Watkins as the first Stegner Distinguished Professor, the university administration has contributed money from its general fund toward the Chair. With the end of the University's commitment to interim funding fast approaching, it is imperative that the \$1.5 million endowment be completed so that the chair does not sit vacant. The MSU Foundation and the College of Letters and Sciences are embarking on an ambitious effort to finish funding the endowment in the next eighteen months.

"So many people have had faith in our ability to make this chair happen," said Professor Brittan. "We owe it to them, to the Stegner family and to ourselves, to ensure that this endowment is completed. The Stegner Chair is critical to Montana State's becoming a leader in the study of the American West, and critical to the future of the West that it be given the scholarly study that it needs and deserves."

Wallace Stegner Chair in Western American Studies Montana State University Foundation P.O. Box 172750 Bozeman, MT 59717





A Gardener in Eden

One Writer's Journey from a History of Place to a Sense of Time

by T.H. Watkins

. . .

April 13, 1995





(-)



A GARDENER IN EDEN

One Writer's Journey from a History of Place to a Sense of Time

by T.H. Watkins

Wallace Stegner Memorial Lecture Montana State University Bozeman, Montana April 13, 1995 There's an awakening in the rest of the country to the West and what it's about. A Chair in Western American Studies at MSU is a splendid way to inform the West about itself.

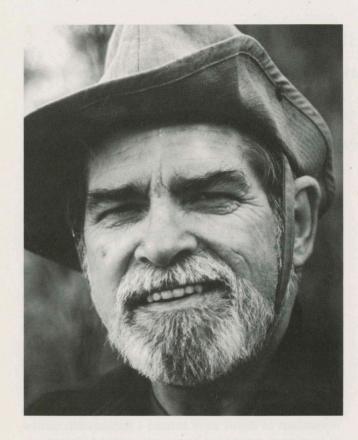
WALLACE STEGNER

Wallace Stegner was the leading American man of letters of his generation. But his work was especially prized in the West, where it provided not only a rich and varied sense of place and of the past, but a series of firm guideposts for the future.

To continue Wallace Stegner's legacy as writer, teacher, and conservationist, a Chair of Western American Studies is being established at Montana State University–Bozeman. The National Endowment for the Humanities has provided a Challenge Grant of \$275,000. It must be matched 3 to 1, with \$825,000 in private contributions. We have so far raised about half of the total. We need the help of those who want to honor Wallace Stegner, who care in the same way about the preservation of the West and the creation of a history and a literature worthy of its scenery, to raise the rest.

Wallace Stegner died on April 13, 1993. Every year a distinguished writer and scholar who has been inspired by his work will come to Bozeman to give a memorial lecture. We hope that in future years you will be able to attend. In the meantime, share this copy of the second lecture with your friends.

For more information, please call the MSU History and Philosophy Department, (406) 994-5208.



T.H. WATKINS

Since 1982 T.H. Watkins has been the editor of *Wilderness*, the quarterly magazine of The Wilderness Society. He is a former editor of *The American West* magazine (1966-1970), at that time sponsored by the Western History Association, and for six years (1976-1982) he was a senior editor at *American Heritage*, the magazine of American history.

He is the author of twenty-five books. His 1990 biography of FDR's Interior Secretary—Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold L. Ickes—was winner of The Los Angeles Times Book Award and a finalist for both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. His most recent book is Stone Time: Southern Utah, a Portrait and a Meditation, a volume of his black-and-white photographs and descriptive text. He is currently at work on By Chaos Out of Dream: A Portrait of the United States in the Age of the Great Depression, to be published by Henry Holt in the spring of 1997.

A GARDENER IN EDEN

One Writer's Journey from a History of Place to a Sense of Time

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T.H. Watkins

To be in Bozeman again—since it is rapidly becoming one of the homes of my heart—is a delight. I know that it is fashionable among Bozemanians these days to lament the fact that the town of today ain't nothin' compared to what it was before all the high-rent people moved in, but I have to tell you, my last two homes have been on the Upper West Side of New York and then in the heart of Washington D.C. at just high enough an elevation (about 38 feet) to escape the worst of the miasmas that rise off Foggy Bottom, and to me, by God, Bozeman looks pretty damned good. I promise not to move in and raise the rents even higher—not for a while, anyway.

To be speaking to you this evening under the sponsorship of the Stegner fellowship program is an honor whose dimensions I cannot even begin to measure—not merely because the act of appearing anywhere in connection with Stegner's name is an honor, but because—as you will learn if you hang on for the duration—Stegner was one of the principal forces helping bend my career toward the course it is presently following. I was just lucky enough to have encountered him early in my professional life. I was just smart enough to listen to what he had to tell me. And I was just blessed enough, finally, to have been given the privilege of calling him friend.

I recently spent some time gathering up various bits and pieces of my writing from more than thirty years of work in the vineyards of the word. I am here to tell you that the experience can be both exhilarating and appalling. It is exhilarating to discover how much you think is worthy to take along, but just as appalling to discover how much you think deserves to be carried out with the trash and burned so that your descendants will not find out to what depths you were willing to sink in order to make a living.

There were, I blushingly admit, a few moments during this archeological dig when I was tempted to echo Oscar Wilde—"God, what genius I had then!" he is said

to have exclaimed upon rereading one of his early efforts. Such moments were few and far between, however, and it soon became clear to me that if I had written anything that was worth anyone's attention at all, it was in the realms of history and conservation, and that most of that had to do with the people and the land of the American West-in spite of the fact that I have now been living east of the Mississippi for more than eighteen years. It is easier to understand my interest in things western than how I entered upon my trade, though. I was born and raised in the San Bernardino Valley of Southern California seventy miles east of downtown Los Angeles, surrounded by orange groves, mountains, and deserts. That made me at least a marginal westerner, since the semi-arid climate of our valley satisfied Walter Prescott Webb's definition of the West as a semi-desert with a desert heart.

It was a western place, this long valley, and as an environment, close to Edenic. That, at least, is how I remember it, my memories speaking to me with the voice of a ten-year-old boy. There was still plenty of water to satisfy a population whose housing and shopping requirements had not yet begun to consume the spreading orange groves that gave the valley its character and the bulk of its income. Smog did not become anything more substantial than an ugly rumor until after World War II even in Los Angeles, and it would be more than another decade before there would be mornings when you could see an ocher-colored smudge on the western horizon slowly begin to creep eastward to engulf our space. There was space—and light, and air, the mountains rising in a long blue line above us, the constant smell of oranges an essence that sometimes made our senses swim.

Above all, right over the mountains, was the desert, the Mojave. My mother and father loved desert country, and during intermittant weeks of any given year, the family would pile into our bulbous 1939 nine-passenger

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Buick—the six children packed into the back like puppies in a box—and climb up and over the mountains to the desert. In those yearly expeditions, I learned to take the desert for my own country. Crawling to the top of some unnamed rocky eminence, I could see spread out below me beneath an indigo sky more land than I ever thought existed in the world. Scrambling around in gullies, some of them deep enough to be dignified by the term "canyon," I made the sudden discovery of tiny springs surrounded by ferns and mosses, their pools swimming with pollywogs and minnows and swept over by the bright punctuation of dragonflies. I saw deer browsing in the chapparal and jackrabbits scampering into the creosote bushes, all of which, I am happy to report, escaped the careless predation of me and my trusty .22 rifle. I collected rocks and explored abandoned mines, both worthless to anything but a boy's imagination. In wet springtimes I would marvel at the carpets of tiny desert flowers whose colors would challenge spectographic analysis, slept in cottonwood groves by chattering little seasonal creeks and shuddered at the poetry of coyotes.

50 I knew where I was from the beginning. What I was, or could become, was another matter. On the face of it, there was no reason on earth to expect that I would ever want to be a writer, or could become one if I did. My people—all of them, as far back as anyone could remember—had managed to make a living in the world without any lasting drive for self-expression. Nevertheless, some vagrant gene from some vagrant ancestor apparently caused me to want to write stories, so I started writing stories—though some of my earliest efforts were drawn stories, since at one point in my preadolescence I decided I wanted to be a comic strip artist. That impulse ended the day I did a strip featuring a hungry, mean-spirited cat in pursuit of a speedy and clever mouse (my biographer, I am sure, will be interested to learn of the influence of Tom & Jerry on my early work). In the interests of accuracy, I had been anatomically precise in one of the strip's panels when I depicted a rear view of the cat of my creation. My father, who patiently read the strip when I proudly offered it to him for his opinion, thought that my rendition of the cat's little rectum was about the funniest thing he had ever seen. Unfortunately, he did not laugh at any of the rest of the thing, and while I was not the most sophisticated kid you ever heard of, I soon enough concluded that cartoon humor was not my metier.

Surviving this early wound from your typically dense and insensitive critic, I went back to written stories and poems of an epic stripe. Even these secret efforts nearly stopped when I reached high school, where I discovered football and sex. The high school was Catholic, so what I managed to do anything about was football, of course, not sex. Sex was relegated to the fevered imaginings of a Catholic boyhood, than which there was no more finely-tuned a combination of lubricity and guilt. Alternating between football practice and the squalid emotional steambath of the confessional, then, left me little time to think, much less write, during most of my high school career, and my early inclinations might well have guttered out entirely had it not been for Sister Jerome.

Sister Jerome was one of the biggest human beings I had ever known—big and sensitive and utterly in love with literature, which she spent her days attempting to share with roomsful of acned troglodytes, the girls mooning over the thought of being crushed in the manly arms of Marlon Brando and the boys trying to look up the skirts of the girls by dropping their pencils to the floor—though what we expected to see, that being the age of the below-the-knee dress and the chain-mail girdle, I have no idea.

Oblivious to the sea of lust before her, Sister Jerome taught big-L literature with implacable devotion. She loved to recite, and could read with astonishing eloquence and projection. She was especially fond of MacBeth, and even if it was a little unseemly—indeed, alarming—to witness so large a nun given over to such emotion, we always looked forward to that passage in one of Lady MacBeth's soliloquies in which she cries, 'Unsex me!' We thought this was pretty hot stuff, nun or no nun. Her readings from the original Chaucer were less popular, particularly among those in the front row directly below the podium from which she did her recitations. Sister Jerome had a problem with saliva, and 'Whanne that Aprille with his shoures sote' tended to fall upon these unfortunates like a fine literary mist. There was not much they could do about it. Holding their books up as shields would have been a little obvious, and there was not a Catholic teenager alive anywhere in the land who would have had the nerve to inform any nun any time of any kind of personal problem she might have.

I first encountered Sister Jerome in my senior year and because of her untrammeled enthusiasms was rescued from ignorance. She introduced me to the magic of words that rang on the ear and echoed in the mind and heart. Furthermore, she insisted that we learn how to compose real English sentences, and to that end assigned us the task of actually writing brief scenes from potential short stories once a week. My first attempt—

concerning a sensitive but thoroughly misunderstood football player, predictably enough—came back with a grade of 'A.' That alone was astonishing; I had never gotten an 'A' for anything except for what was called "Phys Ed." But there was more: at one point in my story where I had left one paragraph and lurched into another, she had written in the margin, "Good transition." "Good transition." "Good transition"! The words rang like a benediction. For the first time in my life I had achieved an intellectual plane. I had written a good transition! Perhaps I could write more of them if I gave it a shot. And so I did.

In spite of Sister Jerome's encouragement, however, I had no real talent for fiction. I lacked what some call the gift of ventriloquism. I could never sound like anyone but myself. It took me a long time to learn this, however, and, having learned it, even longer to accept it. Fortunately, there was something else for me by then. It began with a dapper man called Ellis Spackman, who taught just about every history course there was at San Bernardino Valley College, where I was allowed to pursue higher learning because my prowess on the high school gridiron had overcome the liability of my high school grades (all my life I have thanked God for the thick head and strong legs of my youth; I have retained, unhappily, only the head). Spackman was as small, quiet, and wryly funny as Sister Jerome was large, exuberant, and innocent of much humor. He loved history as she loved literature, though, and taught it with as much passion as his temperament would allow him. From him, I learned that history was a living presence in the land all around me, and in my own people. I learned why my best friend, Terry, for example, had been forced to move to our neck of the high desert from Oklahoma in the middle of the Thirties, that he and his family had been one with that tide of humanity whom drought and dust and the raw brutality of a crippled economic system had driven out of the land of its ancestry, the same kind of people whom I had seen rattling down Mount Vernon Avenue—our little segment of Route 66—with all they owned roped and wired to their flivvers.

It was Ellis Spackman who inspired me to pull the stories out of Ira, my paternal grandfather, who as a child had been a mucker in an Iowa coal mine, had run away from home to become a cowboy in Texas and Wyoming, then in more or less chronological order a hard-rock miner, a mining town gambler, a teamster, a railroad tramp, a migrant farm laborer, a semi-pro baseball player, a professional boxer, and a conducter on the cars of the 'Big Red Line' of the Los Angeles Interurban Railway System before settling down in San

Bernardino in 1913. Beyond all this, I discovered, he had worked on one of the biggest engineering marvels of its day, the Owens Valley Aqueduct, which upon its completion just before World War I brought water 450 miles across deserts and mountains to nourish the gardens and fill the pools of Los Angeles—helping to build a civilization where no civilization had any business being. His had been an interesting and vigorous passage through the West, but hard. On his arms and neck were large white patches of skin. These, he explained one day, were the result of one of his train rides. Ira, together with dozens of other hobos, had hopped a freight out of Salt Lake one summer near the turn of the century. Somewhere at the shallow southern end of the Great Salt Lake where the railroad causeway cut across the water, the train stopped, sitting there in heat that shut down on them like a stove lid for hour after hour. When the train finally started up, it did not stop again until Sparks, Nevada, where railroad bulls threw every hobo off the cars. Some of them, my grandfather said, were dead. The patches of skin on his arms and neck, he always claimed, had been bleached in place by the action of sun and salt as he and his companions lay on the rails of the cars, steeped in the moist, evaporative heat coming off the surface of the lake.

From Grandfather Henry, on my mother's side, I learned that he had practiced another kind of pioneering, joining up with the great middle-class rush to California of the 1920s, one of the most startling mass migrations in American history, hauling his family west from Minnesota in his La Salle sedan when most of the transcontinental highway system was a joke, setting up as a service station owner in the bustling little hamlet of Colton— 'Roll into Roller's,' proclaimed the motto under the sign of the Flying A—going on to live out in his unquestioning way some of the more modest dreams of Babbittry. He became a city councilman, an active member of the San Bernardino County Historical Society, a bustling, harried, productive, and successful businessman—and died of a heart attack at the age of 54.

LOWLY, then, I was acquiring the history of my place and my people. But it took another teacher to make it clear to me that the history I was learning was also stories. Ralph Hone, a gentle-mannered former minister and biographer of mystery novelist Dorothy Sayre, was a Miltonian scholar of great reputation at the University of Redlands. He was hardly a history buff, but he had a tremendous regard for the revelations of human character that could be discovered in the materials of history. He not only encouraged me in my

fevered pursuit of the word, but one day suggested that I take a look at the work of one of the great storytellers of our century, the novelist Kenneth Roberts. I plunged into Arundel, then Rabble in Arms, then everything else I could get my hands on, up through and beyond Northwest Passage and Oliver Wiswell. I was hooked and immediately began a historical novel of my own, based on the life of John Charles Fremont, the colorful peripatetic explorer of the West. It was, as they say, derivative. It also was awful. This failure did not keep me from the seductions of fiction. After graduation from Redlands I wrote and wrote and wrote between shifts at my night job as a pressman's apprentice at Acme Colorprint Company in San Bernardino—two more novels and mounds of short stories were ripped a page at a time from my sturdy old Underwood Goldentouch and shipped off to oblivion, first class, SASE enclosed. When I reached the age of reason—in my case, twenty-four—I, with a wife, two children, and one dog by now, packed up and moved north, where I continued to pound on my helpless typewriter between shifts in the mailroom of the San Francisco Chronicle, producing vet another novel and even more short stories, all of them unpublishable by any known standards.

Over time, I began to suspect that the rejection slips I received even more regularly than the monthly bills might become a lifetime collection. I sprang into action immediately: I went back to school, taking graduate work in history at San Francisco State College (as it was then known) on the theory that if I could not acquire fame I could possibly achieve tenure.

But one of the guest professors during a summer course I was taking turned out to be W. H. Hutchinson, even then one of the best-known and respected western historians in the trade, a former cowhand himself, as well as a prolific writer, and author of a regular column called "One Man's West" that had appeared in the *Chronicle's* Sunday "Book World" section ever since Joseph Henry Jackson had ruled over that territory in the 1940s.

Hutch, as he was known to one and all until the day of his death, took a liking to some writing I did for his course. On the strength of this, I asked him to recommend me as a book reviewer to William Hogan, Jackson's successor as Book Editor for the *Chronicle*. Hutch did so, Hogan took a chance, and I was given an obscure biography for review. My piece was a pretty puerile effort, but I will never willingly forget that epiphanous moment when on page 4 of the Sunday "Book World" on a morning in October 1963 my name leaped from the page and struck me between the eyes. I spent the rest of my shift in the mailroom of the

Chronicle that night in the kind of daze that in modern times would cause a person to be forced to take a drug test.

■ WENTY-FOUR books and no one wants to know how many book reviews and articles later, I have no reason to regret the direction my life has taken. From graduate school, through a process of luck, circumstance, and friendship too complicated for sane description, I ended up the managing editor, then editor, of a little magazine called The American West, at that time sponsored by the Western History Association. The American West attempted to do for western history what American Heritage was doing for American history in general—bring literary respectability to the telling of popular history. This goal was enhanced immeasurably by the presence of Wallace Stegner as editor in chief of the magazine. Stegner, whose writing I already venerated and imitated slavishly—and ineptly swiftly became yet another of the teachers who guided me as I finally abandoned the shaky raft of fiction and used the pages of The American West magazine to tell and help others tell the lives and stories that had flourished in the several million square miles of geography we called the Great West.

I am not talking here about myths, or even legends, however necessary they may be to a people, no matter how deeply they may satisfy unspoken dreams. I am speaking about real lives acted out in a real landscape whose challenge and complexity and beauty has had no equal in human history. I am talking about all the First Peoples, from the Anasazi, the vanished ones, whose story we can only imagine, to the Plains Indians, whose story the white-eyes tried to end at Wounded Knee, and failed.

I am talking of the mountain men, those first American antiheroes, free market specialists in the taking and trading of furs, following and learning the twists of all the hidden rivers, testing their strength against the beckoning sky, turning their faces into the wind that came down off the Front Range of the Rockies crying, "Come and find me, come and find me." I am talking about the 70 or 80 thousand crazy young men-with a few crazy young women among them—who staggered across all the rocks and hard places of the transMississippi West or survived the ghastly sea journey around the Horn during the California Gold Rush of 1849, exercising simpleminded greed with such frenzied enthusiasm that the whole adventure acquired a kind of innocent charm. And if virtually all of them failed in their greedy quest, the dream of possibility they both reflected and

perpetuated became a permanent part of the Western legacy.

I am talking about the families who came after the goldseekers, following the same dusty highways and crossing the same rivers and mountains—but this time to settle and civilize the land with farms and towns and schools and churches, building islands of dullness, normality, and endurance. I am talking about the bankers and promoters and entrepreneurs who turned the Great West into an enormous chessboard of unfettered capitalism, building railroads and cattle kingdoms and mining empires and farms the size of small European countries—and of those working men and women who did all the real building: the Chinese and Irish and Mexican immigrant laborers who laid the track, the hardrock miners from all quarters of the globe-Italians and Cornishmen and Welshmen and Hungarians—who went down into those dangerous pits, the Mexican-American and Anglo American migrant workers who did—and still do—make agribusiness possible, and, ves. the cowboy, black, white, and brown (for he was all of these), the hired man on horseback. The real critter, now, not the pallid joke our legends have created, but rather a man of grit and gumption, of a quiet, sweaty competence, of humor and stoicism and a species of bravery that had nothing to do with six-guns and saloon fights, but everything to do with how one conducted his life in that difficult arena where human character is tested.

And I am talking, finally, about things we don't like to talk about much when we talk about the West. I mean, for example, what we did to all those First Peoples when we chose conquest over comprehension, when we rejected the gift of understanding they might have given us-and gave them in turn the gifts of chicanery, shame, poverty, and death. Or the unremittingly brutal clash between Capital and Labor in all the industrialized mining towns—the Cripple Creeks and Leadvilles, Goldfields and Couer d'Alenes-where men were shot and dynamited, where martial law shredded the Bill of Rights for the sake of expedience and the profit margin, in all as ugly an expression of class warfare as anything the degenerate old American East could offer. Or the Chinatowns, Mexicantowns, and Niggertowns to which we relegated those whom we decided were just not worthy to participate in the West's dream of possibility, of the grisly lynchings and riots that erupted too often and with too much terror from Brownsville, Texas, to Seattle, Washington, for the West to be entirely comfortable in its self-assumed role as the heartland of democracy.

All of this, all of the shame and glory, adventure and

degradation, heroism and cowardice, provided the stuff out of which I learned to build my own life as a writer. and from my first book—a tiny history of San Francisco—to my latest few—including the enormous thing called Righteous Pilgrim and the more manageable histories, These American Lands and The Great Depression—I have traded on it shamelessly. That is what writers do. And along the way I learned, I think, some measure of wisdom about some important things. Things like why history itself should have importance to us. It's a question worth thinking about. We live in accelerated times, when the witchery of bytes and bits and megabits and all the other paraphernalia of electronic communication enable us to make mistakes faster than we can correct them. Fashions in clothing, music, books, theatre, diets, and psychotherapy come and go at a dizzying pace.

Politicians erect careers on the assumption that the attention span of the electorate has been reduced to the few minutes required to read an airline magazine article. Nations are convulsed overnight, ideologies die in hours and others rise up to take their places, walls come down and walls are built in the space of time it takes to write about it.

In such a world, it might well be asked, of what earthly use is history? How can we indulge the luxury of time and thought it takes to comprehend the weft of any past more distant than yesterday afternoon when it often seems that all the psychic and intellectual energy we possess must be reserved just to maintain our present equilibrium—especially when we continue to live in so dangerous a world that the future may never arrive at all?

In answer, I would dip into the memory of how my old teachers might have explained it, what I learned from them still echoing in my mind: From the unrecorded eons of its beginnings to the overrecorded moments of its present living, they might have said, humankind has been sustained not merely by its intelligence, but by its capacity to hope. It was hope that drove the first neolithic peoples to follow the climate south from the bitter descending edge of the last Ice Age, hope that brought the first settlers to the brave new world of the North American continent, hope that enabled thousands to survive even the Holocaust, surely the most fetid demonstration we have yet been given that savagery is as singular a human characteristic as charity—or hope.

Unlike intelligence, however, the quality of hope is not genetically programmed into the species; it is a learned characteristic. Like any acquired trait, it can be lost, and without hope we are left with the arid

uselessness of nihilism, the darkest corner of an existential state that sees neither value nor possibility in the future. In these days when the shadow of ruin falls on us, it is good to remember that ours is not the first generation to face the omens of economic uncertainty and potential war or the constant testing of the strengths that were designed to make ours the first nation in history to be truly "of the people." In that history there is hope, and in that hope there is a shield against fate and its consequences that can serve us now just as faithfully as it has in the past. So they might have said, my teachers.

Perhaps I did gain a hint of wisdom, then, in my long walk with history and my teachers. But there was something more, something else that we don't much like to talk about when we talk about the West. And that is what we have done to the land and all the life within it with our careless enthusiasms, with our dams and mines and sheep and cattle and roads and logging and the kind of untrammeled growth that is born in the fevered dreams of real estate speculators, the kind of growth, as Edward Abbey reminded us, that is the etiology of the cancer cell. Bernard DeVoto, almost certainly the greatest historian of the West since Francis Parkman, called the region the Plundered Province, and what I learned at the same time I was learning all the stories of the West is that the plunder has never really stopped.

For the most part, it was novelist and historian Wallace Stegner, the last and best of my teachers, who gave me that understanding, whose personal commitment and professional skills enlightened me as they did a whole generation. Not that Wally would have suffered that accolade silently. When I accused him once of being one of the most important figures in the modern conservation movement, he refused to let me put him on a pedestal with such activists as Howard Zahniser of The Wilderness Society or David Brower of the Sierra Club. "I am a paper tiger, Watkins," he wrote, "typewritten on both sides."

That, though he was reluctant to admit it, was exactly the point. It is quite impossible to think of the long struggle for conservation without conjuring up a pantheon of names, from Henry David Thoreau to Edward Abbey, whose illumination has provided the very light by which we work. Wally was not only firmly fixed at the highest level of this tradition, he became one of the most eloquent and intelligent voices in defense of the voiceless that our literature has ever produced.

From the wind-blasted plains of Saskatchewan to the glorious canyon country of southern Utah, from the alpine lakes and meadows of the Rockies to the basin-

and-range deserts of Nevada, from California's Coast Range to Vermont's hills and hollows, Stegner celebrated the land and its great community of life. From that abundant well of experience and love he gave us not merely the taste and look and feel of the land he wrote about so wonderfully, but in both fiction and non-fiction he kept reminding us, over and over with quiet, eloquent insistence, branding it into our minds with unforgettable language, that without the land and the wild creatures in it, we were nothing—ciphers with brains, clever stick-people without a future.

And so, inspired by my guru, I began to write about this, too, angry polemics that earned me a very small but I hope fully deserved—reputation as a gadfly, or, as some might put it, that of a skunk at a garden party. The anger, I believe, was and is necessary, for its passion comes out of the bitter truth suggested by a question every bit as valid as my belief that there is hope in history: Is it true that what we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history? Much of this story has been played out in the public lands of the United States. That is still where the struggle takes place, and I am priviliged to be both participant and spectator as a card-carrying extreme environmentalist for the Wilderness Society. We were founded just a little over sixty years ago one evening in a little room in the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C., where Robert Marshall, Bernard Frank, Benton MacKaye, Aldo Leopold, and a handful of other men hammered out the details of the organization. Ever since, the Society has been fiercely devoted to the protection and preservation of the wild country of those public lands—the national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and Bureau of Land Management lands that are the common property of all our citizens. They embrace 623 million acres, nearly a million square miles of plains and deserts and mountains and rivers and lakes and seashores and all the wildlife they contain. This is all we have left of the wild continent that presented itself to the first Europeans half a millenium ago.

However little is left, there still is no legacy like it anywhere else on the planet. We have managed to save a wondrous large portion of it—with passage of the California Desert Protection Act last year, the National Wilderness Preservation System, the dream that began in the Cosmos Club sixty years ago, surpassed one hundred million acres. I celebrate that, as we all should, but there is too much that has not yet been saved, and even as I continue to honor our history on this land, I now spend most of my time asking us to turn our backs on much of it—to reject that portion of it that would have us continue the old dangerous game of killing the future

for the sake of present gain. We must learn, finally, that wilderness is not, as our history has insisted, a threat to be conquered but in fact a protection to be embraced.

And a lesson to be learned. We know now that in even the most compellingly "pristine" wilderness that remains there really is no such thing as a "closed" and static ecosystem—that even the tiniest island is subject to constant change, both from within and from without—and even if the world of wilderness that the European invaders found when they arrived at the cusp of the sixteenth century had been completely unoccupied by humans, it would by no stretch of the imagination still have been "original" landscape, some museum-like relic from a golden age. It was occupied, of course, by anywhere from 10 to 15 million people, and William Cronon in Changes on the Land and Nature's Metropolis and William MacLeish in his more recent The Day Before America and other authors in other works have shown how long and widely and not always wisely the First Peoples of the continent had been at work on the land.

And this is the lesson we conservationists—we skunks at the garden party-must learn from that: Just like natural systems, whose interdependent parts function in a dynamic of change, the arguments for wilderness preservation must also evolve or die. It is no longer enough to identify a landscape, draw a line around it, call it primitive or scenically unique or even biologically invaluable, and expect it to be added to the National Wilderness Preservation System without increasing resistance—certainly from most of the present members of the Congress. Among other good and sufficient reasons for going beyond such arguments is the fact that wilderness areas so conceived cannot long survive the pressures of the world all around them—they cannot function as islands in a sea of development. We must learn to demonstrate that wilderness areas—those few remaining portions of the continent in which natural systems still function in a dynamic not yet significantly trammelled by human intervention—can only be truly preserved if they are made the core of a larger bioregional system of protected land and human communities whose overall function is the sustainability of all life within them-including human life.

And then we must turn the argument around and make it clear with all the evidence at our command that such bioregions and all the lives they hold cannot themselves prosper socially, economically, or spiritually without the wilderness that lies at their heart.

Easier conceptualized than realized, obviously, but clearly the face of the future, and while The Wilderness

Society, for one, continues to advocate the preservation of as much wilderness as possible, from the Coastal Plain of Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the crags and forests and meadows of the Northern Rockies, we do so now within the context of a larger vision of interrelationships in which human beings assume their roles as equal citizens in the great community of life, understanding that their connection to the natural world begins at the threshold of every home and extends in all directions through neighborhoods, towns, cities, and beyond to the fields, forests, mountains, deserts, and rivers that are the common inheritance of all.

AND in that inheritance there is another history, a history my teachers could not know, a history all my own diligent gardening in the Edens of my past and present could not discover, a history we humans so far can only guess at. As I write in my latest book, *Stone Time*, this history begins beyond human time, somewhere out on that distant curve where the universe bends.

I would like to tell this story, too, but I cannot. I cannot know the story, cannot tell it. But sometimes I think I can feel it and take strength from it. More than a thousand miles northeast of the place where I grew up and began to know one history, there is a narrow secret place in southern Utah called the Escalante Canyons. I first encountered the canyons several years ago, and have come to love them as I once loved the Mojave of my youth. Carved out of the Colorado Plateau's Navajo Sandstone, Wingate Shale, and all the other layered, twisted rocks of that country by the Escalante River and its tributaries big and small, the canyons are a place whose complex beauty and sudden surprises of life can only be discovered after sweat and patience. I have made that effort and have found much of that beauty, but the history of the place remains hidden from me or at least hidden from my present ability to comprehend it. The history is there, I know, time written in a library of stone, whispered by the wind that trembles the glimmering leaves of a summer cottonwood tree, caroled in the tumbling notes of a canyon wren's song, recited by the laughter of the river.

And sometimes told in other ways. A few years ago, while hiking the Escalante drainage, I stopped to rest for a moment. As I tilted my head back to take a drink from my canteen, my glance fixed on a huge slab of rock that had split off from the high redrock wall of the canyon at the apex of a talus slope overgrown with sage and brush. I have no idea why, but the urge suddenly came over me to climb up there to see what I

could see. I scrambled up the slope and made my way around the big slab to see what was behind it. What I found was a kind of prehistoric gallery—petroglyphs and pictographs incised into or painted on the slickrock wall in the shadow of the slab—coils and serpents, large talismanic figures with triangular bodies, handprints, an assortment of geometric patterns like the artful doodlings of an abstractionist. I did not know then and I do not know now what precise system of thought, society, cosmology, or artistic expression that hidden

gallery represents. Its meaning probably is lost to me and my time forever. But I do know this: On levels more deeply complex than I am presently equipped to comprehend, that gallery speaks of time, time trapped in stone, true time. And I know that I will return to this place again and again as something as central to my knowledge now as all the memories of my life and my family's life, all the history I have learned, all the books I may have read or all the words I may have written. When I do, I will touch the stone ... and dream of stars.



Wallace Stegner memorial lecture

Writing the Wild: Landscape in Fiction and Non-Fiction

by
Ann H. Zwinger
University of Colorado

April 16, 1998





WRITING THE WILD: LANDSCAPE IN FICTION AND NON-FICTION

by Ann H. Zwinger University of Colorado

Wallace Stegner Memorial Lecture Montana State University Bozeman, Montana April 6, 1998 There's an awakening in the rest of the country to the West and what it's about. A Chair in Western American Studies at MSU is a splendid way to inform the West about itself.

WALLACE STEGNER



Wallace Stegner was the leading American man of letters of his generation. But his work was especially prized in the West, where it provided not only a rich and varied sense of place and of the past, but a series of firm guideposts for the future.

To continue Wallace Stegner's legacy as writer, teacher, and conservationist, a Chair of Western American Studies is being established at Montana State University-Bozeman. We have so far raised \$1,000,000 of the endowment goal of \$1,500,000. We need the help of those who want to honor Wallace Stegner, who care in the same way about the preservation of the West and the creation of a history and a literature worthy of its scenery, to raise the rest.

Wallace Stegner died on April 13, 1993. Every year a distinguished writer and scholar who has been inspired by his work will come to Bozeman to give a memorial lecture. We hope that in future years you will be able to attend. In the meantime, share this copy of the fourth lecture with your friends.

For more information, please call the MSU History and Philosophy Department, (406) 994-5208.

Ann Haymond Zwinger is the author of 17 books about the West, among them her much-loved first, *Beyond the Aspen Grove*. She unites in her work the training and experience of a perceptive naturalist with the insight and grace of a superb writer. No one in our time has brought us closer, in particular, to understanding the Grand Canyon or the great river that runs through it. She has been nominated for a National Book Award and received the John Burroughs Medal and the John Hay Award of the Orion Society for "achievement in writing, conservation, and education," the three poles of her long career. Her most recent book is a collection of essays, *The Near-Sighted Naturalist*.

WRITING THE WILD: LANDSCAPE IN FICTION AND NON-FICTION By Ann H. Zwinger

I'm one of those malcontents who turn up in every generation feeling they've missed important events in their lives, events that, with a little better luck, they might well have participated in and enjoyed. We lament the just-missed moments, bemoan getting to the party too late, feel we just failed having some of the really good things in life that, frankly, we think we deserve. My particular complaints are, one, I never saw Glen Canyon, and two, I never got to meet or become a student of Wallace Stegner.

Wallace Stegner was certainly a powerful presence. He marked the lives of those who knew him, both in the work of his contemporaries who admired him and in the style of his students who studied with him. Stegner was the diacritical mark above all our lettered heads; he changed the pronunciation of how many of us in the West write.

Even if you can't meet someone as prolific and versatile as Stegner, you can read the words. The first book of Stegner's that I read was *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*. As all of you know, Stegner wrote about the journey of John Wesley Powell from his launch at Green River, Wyoming, to the end of his trip beyond the Grand Canyon. I read *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* because I was absorbed in building background for a book about the Green River that eventually became *Run*, *River*, *Run*. Stegner's magnificent book was an eye-opener for me, not only for the obvious historical back-

ground and bibliographical reasons, but in a much broader sense, and that remark requires some explanation.

I am a carpet-bagger westerner. I came West thirty-plus years ago, having lived in the Midwest and East all of my life. Until then, I came from places where you just wanted to keep the water out of the basement, to a place where—and I didn't realize this until I read Stegner—the norm was not enough water. I'd never seen a dry arroyo nor heard it pound with swift runoff, never wished it would rain, never seen a desert or the landscape engendered by a big absence of water.

I am trained as an art historian-marvelous, visual training for a future naturalist. Not that there was anything in my background to suggest that I'd end up as a naturalist. As a child, my first literary attempts were trying to persuade my parents to rescue me from camp—I described in graphic detail the danger of contracting galloping beri-beri and the threat of giant child-eating mosquitoes, always ending with the heartfelt, "PLEEESE come get me!" Utterly ineffective, of course.

As an art history student, I saw the natural world through slides projected on a big screen in a clammy New England lecture hall. The land-scapes I saw were filtered through the eyes of artists: how a Monet saw his gardens at Giverny,

how a Turner saw the Thames at sunset, how a Leonardo invented his grottos and fanciful apses of rock. I learned to look for and respond to composition and color, treatment and style. In a way, style most of all—that numinous quality that was difficult to explain in words but which so buried itself in the mind that when you saw a Cézanne painting, you KNEW it was a Cézanne—and then struggled to verbalize why. An art historian does a lot of subliminal learning, connecting eye and brain and gestalt, an awareness of pattern that I have appreciated more and more over the years, for it taught me how to observe carefully and well, the prime requirement for a naturalist.

Years later, as I literally stumbled into becoming a field naturalist, I found I applied the same disciplined observation, the same search for relationship and meaning, in learning the mountains and rivers around me.

At this fairly crucial juncture in my adult learning process, I discovered Stegner's book, at a pivotal moment, just as I was about to embark on writing a book about a river that would turn a meek housewife into an avid seeker of the rivers of the mind and the vitality of risk. When I read *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*, I was enthralled. I had just come back from a trip in Cataract Canyon where our triple-rigged raft pancaked, throwing me upside down so quickly I did not realize what had happened, and sending me home with an incipient detached retina. When I read

The rivers are not 'treacherous.' They are only forever dangerous. One who has not tried it finds it hard to believe the instant and terrible force that such a current exerts on a broadside boat out of control on a sandbar or rock.'

I was hooked. I could trust a writer who knew what he was writing about. In the current (excuse the pun) vernacular, he'd been there, seen it, done it. And written about it in telling prose. The establishment of that kind of trust with a reader is something that every natural history writer worth his salt has to create. It underlies everything you write and

without it, you cannot communicate.

Because of such a confirmed trust, Stegner may well have been the first writer who made me stop and look at the REAL landscape, the one with gritty, sandy emptiness shimmering under a desert sun, the one with a river galloping through and making its own laws of fluvial dynamics, the one with the vortex of space spinning with clouds, the one with leaves torqued with dryness, the one with a glory of butterfly wings on a seepwillow bush. Stegner nudged me to look at landscapes in a very particular and focused way. He stretched a whole landscape as a painter stretches a canvas on a wooden frame, and depicted a grandiose scene in five dimensions-not only what it looked like and how you read it, but where it came from and where it was going, what was its history, what were its gifts and perils, and best of all, what it felt like to be there, really there. The idea of landscape as entity, as persona, as active reality, was new to me.

And Stegner's landscapes often had people in them, a concept quite different from a peopleless wilderness and, I was to discover, quite in line with what the word "landscape" means. "Landscape" is one of those simple everyday words you never think about, but since I'm curious about word derivation, I finally looked it up. Landschaft was the Germanic word for a "unit of human occupation." It slipped into the Dutch language as landschap; it must have had intensified meaning to the Dutch who were actively reclaiming from the sea and creating these landscape units by impressive and ingenious engineering. When it slid over into English at the end of the 16th century, it became *landskip*, very close to our current "landscape."

Of couse people were writing about landscape long before it had a name, and they've been writing about it ever since. I suspect all of us treasure memorable passages of landscape description: the river in *Wind in the Willows*, the sheep barn and farmland in Thomas Hardy's *Far* from the Madding Crowd, the moors in Conan

Doyle's *Hound of the Baskerville*, Rachel Carson's impeccable and elegant portrayal of a little cave at sea's edge in *The Edge of the Sea*.

So from the beginning, landscape was not considered an untouched entity unto itself, it was not total wilderness without humans. It was inhabited, it was used, it was productive for the people who lived in it. "Landscape" did not imply a vacuum to be left as a wild, untouched, unreachable area—a modern concept that in itself has some interesting ramifications. Simon Schama, in his stunning book *Landscape and Memory*, points out that while "we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock."³

The idea of a hundredth meridian, a vertical line looped between two poles, is a strictly human concept, even though Stegner was writing about a quintessential wilderness when he wrote about Powell's trip across the last great empty spot on the map of the United States. Stegner gave that landscape a persona: the river, the cliffs, those units of landscape that confined Powell's journey, that were the telling power behind every numbing terror of a rapid run in a heavy, awkward, open boat, behind every exhilaration of a safe passage. Stegner used landscape to guide the story of Powell's journey; without that specific red rock/grey rock/river landscape there could have been no exploration, and most of all, no book. As Stegner wrote in a passage that, after all these years of writing about rivers, still tugs at my heart:

There is something ominous about a swift river, and something thrilling about a river of any kind. The nearest upstream bend is a gate out of mystery, the nearest downstream bend a door to further mystery.⁴

Of course I read more Stegner, this time Stegner the novelist: *All the Little Live Things, Angle of Repose, Big Rock Candy Mountain, The Spectator Bird* – and

another landscape emerged. If you were looking at Stegner's work, as I evidently was in my own search for understanding the Green River, it would be immediately obvious that the novelist was using landscape in quite different ways from the non-fiction writer, even if they were the same writer. Now that's the kind of callithump that piques a pedantic mind like mine that likes to have everything all neat and tidy.

It seemed to me that it would be of interest to contrast how the novelist uses landscape vis á vis the non-fiction writer, particularly since Stegner encapsulated both in his own work. And of course there *are* clear-cut differences, especially when they are chosen by a speaker who is looking for them.

I've touched on the veracity of Stegner's landscape description in non-fiction. Let me read to you a passage from *The Spectator Bird*, a work of fiction with the same devotion to naturalistic detail but with a very different slant:

> On a February morning, when a weather front is moving in off the Pacific but has not quite arrived, and the winds are changeable and gusty and clouds drive over and an occasional flurry of fine rain darkens the terrace bricks, this place conforms to none of the clichés about California with which they advertise the Sunshine Cities for the Sunset Years. No bland sky, no cool morning overcast, no placid afternoons fading into chilly evenings. This is North Sea weather. The sky boils with cloud, the sun glares out now and then like the opening eye of a doped patient, and the brief beam of intelligence it shoots forth lights on the hills and turns a distant subdivision into a view of Toledo.

On the surface this is a fine and accurate rendition of a clammy California day, of betrayal weather, down to the art historical reference to

El Greco. But it also reflects the personality of the main character who, by his own description, is a "traveler in the lives of others." The main character knows that when his papers "are in order, they are dead, and so am I." And so he procrastinates, unsatisfied and dissatisfied, and watches the unreliable, trickster clouds come in off the Pacific, blurring his life as clouds blur the landscape.

Forgive me for reading a passage from one of my own books, *The Mysterious Land*, but it's as close a comparison as I could find about the brooding, winter skies of California. Also, I'm only guessing at Stegner's way of work, but I know the author of this book very well and know exactly what went on in her head:

The winter rains that nourish these annuals come from Pacific storms and a winter change in air circulation, known locally as the 'Nevada high' and the 'Mojave low.' During the winter the usual high over the Pacific slides eastward, allowing moist Pacific air to flow inland, often bringing gentle soaking rains. Occasionally, true winter storms sweep across the desert, laden with heavy winds as well as water, absolutely essential to desert survival, not only for plants but also for animals. The most common plants are annuals whose seeds germinate only following autumn rains, then bloom the following spring, the socalled 'winter annuals.' . . . Their seeds sprout only when they register that there has been enough rain to complete their life cycle without depending upon unreliable follow-up rains. I pick up one of those anonymous round brown seeds and roll it across my palm; smaller by far than a peppercorn, it carries within it all these codes and messages and triggers aligned in precise sequence and responds only when the time is right. I drop it on the ground, scuffle it into the sandy soil with my toe, and wish it well.

The surface resemblances between the two passages are a) unsunny California weather, and b) first person narrator. The variance lies in the sharp change of focus. The novelist uses land-scape as a mirror to reflect one man's attitude toward a life at its frayed end and a mind searching for meaning in a untrustworthy world. The naturalist uses those same winter rains as a springboard to describe their necessity to California desert plants, how seeds are adapted to this state of affairs, in other words, what the landscape itself reveals to a devoted observer.

One more short comparison to stress the point, the first from *The Big Rock Candy Mountain*:

Out the window she saw a summer whirlwind spinning across the level fields beyond the flanks of the town. The funnel of dust lifted, dropped again, whirled forward across a road, stopped and spun, moved off in jerky rushes like a top spinning on an irregular surface. It hit a mound of dumped refuse, and tin cans rolled, papers sailed flatly, slid back groundward. Beyond the whirlwind was the prairie running smoothly, the planed horizon broken by two far homesteads, ships on the calm green-bronze sea . . 8

Stegner's description of the whirlwind comes close to the beginning of the book and serves to catalogue, by its presence, the sparse landscape of North Dakota into which Elsa, Stegner's heroine, has moved from the green and rolling farmlands of Minnesota. That astonishing sight makes her realize that her rebellious decision to leave home because of an abusive father was like a wind that swept through her life, a vortex of air that agitates the landscape as her decision has disrupted her life. The spinning whirlwind is a perfect echo of Elsa's unrest and disquiet. This is more a portrait of a personality perceiving a landscape than it is of the natural world itself.

Again from Mysterious Lands:

Dust devils rise off the lake bed, smoke upward and disappear. Any obstacle that interrupts the wind's flow can start it swirling and spinning. As it rises a dust devil forms a vacuum into which more air rushes, fueling itself with velocities of up to fifty miles per hour within its cone. Several dust devils wander off across the playa, blithe spirits of the desert. The Gosiute Indians believed that they themselves came from these windblown dusts and that their ancestors' spirits were embodied in these whirlwinds. The wind orchestrates the dust devils that sweep up the seeds that salt the playa that grow in the desert that bloom in the spring. The soil rolls up heat I can smell, and through it, wisps of sagebrush perfume the air.

The naturalist takes this amazing sight of wind whipping up a serene view and just gives us the facts, ma'am. There is wonder in that description, and curiosity of find out what makes whirlwinds whirl, salted with a little mythology.

Stegner's short, precise, telling descriptions are emotion-setting devices that novelists use frequently enough to emphasize the importance of good landscape observation and description as a literary tool to dramatize their characters' stage-set.

Stegner's landscape descriptions are so good because he is such a fine observer. I suspect there is no device more powerful or more eloquent or more compelling than that observed, pungent description of a landscape that a novelist uses to forecast or echo or emphasize character, time, emotion. Such acute landscape description can set the tone, or tones, of a novel or a story. Only *landscape* can do this–fashion the shell in which human action evolves, because we ourselves are framed and caged by landscape, and often our surroundings influence our outlook. And our outlook influences our surroundings.

The natural history writer seldom uses land-

scape simply as a scene-setter. A natural history writer works differently because he/she tries to let landscape speak for *itself*, does not impose another layer of meaning. Landscape IS the prime character, the first voice, the entity out of which all else evolves. The nature writer's task is to observe landscape, to let it be the instructor, to let it suggest ideas to be explored, research to be followed, sequences to be recognized.

Now, I could badger you with dozens of these clean and antithetical judgments, but along about this time I began to have some other questions that kept niddling in the back of my mind, and frankly, for which I have no answers. So I'm going to give them to you for consideration. One question that I found myself trying to deal with is: does putting landscape (for landscape, read nature) eternally second in line in widely-read fiction, lead to a subtle denigration of the natural world?

Landscape, in a novelist's eye, is merely backdrop, never an active participant. Always a bridesmaid, never a bride. Always a supporting actor, never the star. I found myself becoming exercised when I felt landscape was being 'used,' not for its magnificent self but for what it could do in the way of delineating character, et cetera. In so doing, does the novelist rob the natural world of its most precious facets? I'm reminded of a rule of engagement: what do you do when you're ready to make war? You denigrate the enemy.

Please don't forget that this is a natural history writer speaking, who takes landscape very seriously. Observing a landscape at work is one of the most worthwhile things I do. The business of discovering what's to be learned from a landscape is, to me, a fascinating odyssey. Landscape literally dictates what I'm going to write about. There is no way I can forecast, outline, list, propose what I'm going to write about until I AM there, seeing what's there in detail.

Case in point: standing in Redwall Cavern in the Grand Canyon, looking up into an irides-

cent, shimmery ceiling, goaded me into finding out what was going on up there out of my immediate vision—what were the spiders, what were the shreds of webs all over the sand, what were those bits and pieces woven into them, why were they so sticky? And to imagine what it must look like at night if you could shine a flashlight across a thousand gleaming eyes.

Or when I stood with my hands placed on either side of the Great Unconformity that cuts across a wall of Blacktail Canyon at eye level, my hands separated by a quarter of the earth's known history—a sense of wonder that I could only express in a very proper geological discussion and a very unliterary, "WOW!" I couldn't know that wash of absolute amazement until I put my hands, just so, onto that provocative rock. And that experience dictated that I find out about the geology involved, the difference in the two rock types, the different strata of the mind. These messages from other worlds are so endlessly enchanting to me that I guess I resent it when landscape is only window dressing.

And I wondered, too, does this different view of landscape for a fiction writer happen because he or she is more likely to be an observer of landscape through the clear safety of his window pane? No natural history writer could ever write without becoming an active participant in the out-of-doors, getting cold, wet, tired, and hungry, literally being a part of the unthinking, uncaring environment and trying to understand what makes it work as it does. None of us enjoys freezing our tails off in an unheated tent, but natural history writers are aware of the irony that discomfort sharpens observation and reactions. In effect, it sands the finger-tips so you can open the safe containing the desert's treasures.

So to re-pose my unanswered question: Is there a pervasive ignoring and therefore ignorance of, the REAL landscape in fiction, fostered by treating it as secondary? And does this have any bearing on how we recognize and honor landscape? Are we being subtly contaminated by the charm and disin-

formation and attitude about landscape by the fiction we all love?

I work as a hired-gun naturalist on a lot of river trips, and I am appalled at most people's lack of knowledge about the natural world, the dazzling misconceptions, the Old Wives' Tales. And next to that, the lack of *accurate* information easily available. And next to that, an educational system that gives too little attention to the natural world.

How can you make wise environmental decisions if you think that spiders are bugs? If you think bats want to tangle in your hair? How can you make wise long-term decisions when you live your life based on short-term choices, build your house at the edge of an ocean cliff or smack-dab in a flood plain?

Well, clearly my mental meanderings were getting quite far afield, so I'm going to let you tussle with that one and go on to the second question.

And the second question is, does the lack of vivid character or fast-moving plot forever doom natural history writing to being a lesser loved member of the literary family? Because natural history writers are, by definition, writing about landscape and NOT about people, does this dull our writing, cut us off from the fascination of character?

It sure seems to me, when faced with the challenge of writing a whole book based on landscape, that fiction writers have an easier time of it. They've plugged into the eternal enchantment of story telling, the eternal fascination of people's interest in other people. Jane, one of my daughters, wrote, when I whined about the problems of being a natural history writer, "Dickens probably sold better than Darwin. There is nothing wrong with this at all, mother-it's a species thing. Human beings are pretty riveting items, you must admit, and hard to compete with." Well, she's right. But it leaves natural history writers with a conundrum: can you write a book about the natural world that has the enchantment of a good novel? I'd have to

say, probably not.

For what natural history writers do is inform, not about the human condition but about the natural condition. We think it no less important to look at the landscape, the true landscape, around us, than it is to look at the psychological landscape of the head and heart. But in our zealousness to inform, there's a very real danger of slipping into pedanticism. On top of that, we're saddled with accuracy.

Stegner, quite up front, wrote in the foreword to a volume of his collected stories,

I hate the restrictiveness of facts; I can't control my impulse to rearrange, suppress, add, heighten, invent, and improve. Accuracy means less to me than suggestiveness; my memory is as much an inventor as a recorder . . .

Ironically, it was Stegner's insistence on accuracy in the impressive and superb documentation in the backnotes of *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* that led me to use backnotes for the first time in *Run*, *River*, *Run*, a practice I have continued to the present

One of the things natural history must be is accurate and honest. You can't play fast and loose with facts; they'll come back like a swarm of piranhas and chew you to bits. An interesting case in point is John Van Dyke who wrote, among others, books about the California Desert and the Grand Canyon. Van Dyke, an art historian who came West for his health and specialized in luscious landscape descriptions about solitary treks into the desert with his trusty dog, did not see all the places he wrote about visiting. In short he perpetrated a magnificent literary scam. Case in point: in *Grand Canyon* he identifies trilliums blooming on the canyon trail. Hardly!

So he's been down-graded, probably as much for his overblown prose as his lack of landscape accuracy: we demand of our natural history writers that if they ain't seen it, they can't/musn't NEVER ever EVER write about it. What you write about MUST come from YOUR firsthand experience.

I didn't realize how strongly I felt about the duty to accuracy until I began writing this lecture. Accuracy may be as constricting as a 19th century corset but it's also the Holy Grail of natural history writing.

Novelists don't have to observe anything other than the accuracy of their *own* vision. They don't get dragged into Purgatory if they write about trilliums blooming in the Grand Canyon. I'll give you that good descriptions of landscape can take a novel from fair to spectacular, and have a great deal to do with the success of books like Charles Frazer's *Cold Mountain* or James Galvin's *The Meadow*, and that may largely be because we respond to the beauty of their observation. But there's no rule that says "Thou shalt be accurate."

For the natural history writer, though, the commandment THOU MUST BE ACCURATE is writ large in the sky. And does this doom us to being lugubrious interpreters of highly scientific data, re-digested for the layman?

The wake-up call and the synthesis came, of course, from the master writer, Stegner himself. With great skill and great love of the landscape of the West, he puts it all together in a marvelous passage like this:

Even at Green River the waters of the Green in flood move swiftly. Powell's men watched the river pour by, and felt with their hands the powerful push of the current, and reflected that this was quiet water, perhaps as quiet as any they would have all the way except in Brown's Hole and at the mouth of the White. They looked southward at the badlands that hid the river's course, and sometimes climbed to the bluffs and looked across the broken, yellow and ocher and brown barrens, across an expanse of sage that in August would be purple with bloom, but was now faintly green with spring. Beyond the broken land

and the tortuous, disguised cut of the river came up the blue roll of the Uintas, whose east end they had skirted on their trip from the White River, and into whose flaming canyons, threaded by the thin green line of the stream, they had peered from high cliffs. They would soon be looking up at those cliffs; they would be shooting on the river's back through the mountains.

Stegner is using the novelist's device to imagine us the explorers' shoes, seeing what they saw, stepping us back in time to watch non-river men reading a river for the first time, a privilege and a terror most of us will know only through a keen-eyed writer's vision. Landscape is at the same time lyrical and evocative, and, accurately described, it forms more than the framework of an epic journey; in this book it dictates the journey. In Stegner's writing, landscape is the prime mover, Powell is the supporting actor albeit close to the starring role. Stegner's description is accurate, dead accurate.

Although I found it annoying to be decoyed away from a great conflict in which to sink my teeth-make no mistake, the novelist fared poorly at my hands-it's much more reassuring to perceive that fiction and nonfiction can support and enhance the other. I'd like to think that natural history writers today have made novelists more aware of the depth and detail of the real natural world, while novelists have taught us how to portray landscape in rich and hopeful ways, how not to be ashamed to put our own fingerprint in the fine silt of a damp arroyo manuscript, how not to be afraid to find personal identity there. A natural history writer need not be afraid of having a voice of one's own for clearly, we all see the landscape through the filter of our own eyes and experience and thought patterns.

And that freedom gives a much broader range to natural history writing today, from blending the intensely personal with excellent knowledge of the natural world, as Terry Tempest Williams did so spectacularly in *Refuge*, to David Quammen's near-scholarly treatise on island biogeography in the erudite and absolutely charming *Song of the Dodo*. If novelists *may* provide us with enlightenment and entertainment, then natural history writers *can* provide us with enlightenment and education.

The aim of natural history writing is to inform and enchant, to involve and invoke the necessity of the natural world, doubly necessary in this age of ignorance. We need the insights that novelists can teach us, such as how to be good storytellers, within the purview of our own canon of accuracy, and that's exactly what Stegner's work does. As he writes in *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*,

You take something that is important to you, something you have brooded about. You try to see it as clearly as you can, and to fix it in a transferable equivalent. All you want in the finished print is the clean statement of the lens, which is yourself, on the subject that has been absorbing your attention. Sure, it's autobiography. Sure, it's fiction. Either way, if you have done it right, it's true.

As a natural history writer, I would add a fervent and grateful, "Amen." For what Stegner is telling me is that there may be an element of autobiography in writing natural history, and there may also be a skim of fiction, for no natural history writer sees the same landscape in the same way as any other natural history writer. To recognize that "doing it right" is the same for us all, is a chillingly important message.

And for that I am grateful to Stegner, and grateful to you for being here. Thank you..

Ann H. Zwinger 2/7/99

ENDNOTES

- 1. Wallace Stegner, *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1954), 58.
- 2. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Random House/Vintage Books, 1995), 10.
- 3. Schama, 6-7.
- 4. Stegner, Hundredth Meridian, 47.
- 5. Wallace Stenger, *The Spectator Bird* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), 6.
- 6. Stegner, Spectator, 6-7.
- 7. Ann H. Zwinger, *The Mysterious Land* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), 190-91.
- 8. Wallace Stegner, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 8.

- 9. Zwinger, 281.
- 10. Wallace Stegner, *Collected Stories of Wallace Stegner* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), ix.
- 11. John Van Dyke, *The Grand Canyon of the Colorado* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, reprint 1992), 66. See also Peter Wild, "A New Look at Our Foremost Desert Classic," *North Dakota Quarterly* 63(1)(1996):116-127, and "John C. Van Dyke," *American Nature Writers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996, ed. John Elder), 2:951-962.
- 12. Stegner, Hundredth Meridian, 47-48.
- 13. Wallace Stegner, Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs (New York: Random House, 1992), 227.

By which Wallace Stegner, square-cut kid off a homestead, gave us book after book, decade after decade, in his passionate lover's quarrel with the American West.

A personal note for a moment, since this is the university which has commemorated Wallace Stegner with an endowed chair of history and brought me here for this occasion:

these po. were substituted into "Makings" speech on MSU, and 199

If I could ever stand on a passing comet and watch the clock of earth below, a moment I would choose is in the summer of 1921. A boxy, spoked-wheel vehicle called a Hudson Super Six is trying to make time on the indifferent dirt road down through the Smith River Valley. There in the middle of not much but sagebrush, that car passes a rickety small dairy farm called Moss Agate, and the twelve-yearold boy named Wallace there in the carload of the Stegner family heading for Salt Lake City and yet another new try at life, crosses paths--for an instantwith the asthmatic eight-year-old girl there at Mosats Agate who will live long enough to become my mother, and that stout, much-put-upon, durable ranchwoman who became my grandmother and ultimately, that river of proverbs to me.

Destinies, outlined against the basic earth. That is the story Wallace Stegner, with his magnificent literary hunger, wrote from the inks of his own bloodstream time after time.

I tried to write about that hunger in the blood-another term for it might be "the imagination" -- a bit in **Heart Earth**, the memoir about the short life of my mother, out here in the Bridgers and the other mountains of this part of Montana. Here's a brief section, about my most notorious habit as a small kid, and my mother taking many, many deep breaths and letting that imagination run free:

Many bloodline is a carving river and parents are its nearest shores. At the Faulkner Creek ranch (in Montana) I had learned to try out my mother's limits by running as fast as I could down the sharp shale slope of the ridge next to the ranch house. How I ever found it out without cartwheeling myself to multiple fractures is a mystery, but the avalanche angle of that

slope was precisely as much plunge as I could handle as a headlong four- and fiveyear-old. The first time my visiting grandmother saw one of my races with the law of gravity, she refused ever to watch again. Even my father, with his survivor'seye view from all the times life had bunged him up, even he was given pause by those

vertical dashes of mine, tyke roaring drunk But my mother let me risk. on momentum. Watched out her kitchen window my every wild downhiller, hugged herself to bruises while doing so, but let me. Because she knew something of what was ahead? Can it have been that clear to her, that reasoned? The way I would grow up, after, was contained in those freefall moments down

that shale-bladed slope. In such plunge if you use your ricochets right, you steal a kind of balance for yourself; you make equilibrium moment by moment because you have to. Amid the people and places I was to live with, I practiced that bouncing equilibrium and carried it on into a life of writing, freefalling through the language.

72A Jollows >

The matter of pushing yourself as a writer, beyond your known boundaries, is easily said but hard to describe, on a day-to-day basis, and so I thought I would resort to a bit of show-and-tell, for the next six or eight minutes, here, as a kind of finale in trying to tour you through the makings of books. Tell you what I, as a professional writer, am trying to do in this stretch of writing, and then let you hear it.

This little scene--again, from what I've written most recently, Mountain Time--involves MARIAH