

I take it that the only conceivable reason for asking a writer to talk out loud is to try find out what he's up to. In-so-far as I know what I'm up to, I'll concentrate here--for the next ~~15~~ 20 minutes or so--I assume you all have homes ~~you're~~ to go to--I'll concentrate on a few of the ingredients of my work: how a writer, or at least this writer, tries to draw on "the West,"--and in my case that mostly means Montana,--tries to search out elements to make books of.

The makings of a book--and so far I have made five and two-thirds books, which are set either here in Montana or out along the coast where I now live--the makings of a book can be mystifying in more ways than one.

I think all of us who write--who spend our lives putting black on white--~~we all~~ ought to look at our effort every so often in the light of an incident told by a writer I have admired all of my own writing life--Isak Dinesen. As you ^{may} ~~book~~ ~~people~~ ~~doubtless~~ know, Isak Dinesen is the pen name of Karen Blixen, the Danish writer who died in 1962. She has received some much deserved attention in recent years, with the marvelous biography of her by Judith Thurman and, need I say, from the film of Out of Africa which starred Meryl Streep and ~~Sundance's own~~ Robert Redford. For once I felt the world had come around to my opinion, because I've long thought Out of Africa is one of the most lovely books of this century.

in the teens and twenties of this century,

On her coffee farm in Kenya, as Isak Dinesen worked into the nights on the manuscript which became Out of Africa, her Kikuyu houseboy Kamante ~~stood~~ would stand ^{along} at the wall, watching. One evening Kamante announced to her that he did not think her writing could ever amount to anything. Dinesen records:

~~"I had nobody else to discuss my book with,"~~ I laid down my paper and asked him, why not? I now found that he had ... prepared himself for this: ^{Kamante} he stood with the blue-bound book (a copy of) the Odyssey itself behind his back, and here he laid ~~it~~ on the table.

"Look, Msabu," he said, "this is a good book. It hangs together from the one end to the other. Even if you hold it up and shake it strongly, it does not come to pieces. The man who has written it is very clever. But what you write"--

Kamante

~~he~~ went on, both with scorn and with a sort of friendly compassion, ^{"what you write} is some here and some there. When the people forget to close the door it blows about, even down on the floor and you get angry. It will not be a good book."

Isak Dinesen continues:

I explained to him that in Europe the people would be able to fix it all up together.

"Will your book then be as heavy as this?" Kamante asked, weighing the Odyssey.

When he saw that I hesitated he handed the blue-bound book to me in order that I might judge for myself.

"No," I said, "it will not, but there are other books in the library... that are lighter."

"(Then will ^{*your book*} ~~it~~ be as hard as this one?)" ^{*Kamante*} ~~he~~ asked.

I said it was expensive to make a book so hard. ...

Dinesen concludes:

A few days later, I heard Kamante explain to the other houseboys that/in Europe, the book which I was writing could be made to stick together--and that with terrible expense it could even be made as hard as the Odyssey, which he again displayed. He himself, however, did not believe that it could be made blue."

So that's one method of diagnosing a book, and with more common sense behind it than other reviewers and critics sometimes can muster. Maybe more than I'll be able to, in trying to identify the ingredients of my own ~~and~~ other works.

~~First, though, I notice that when Elizabeth Beeler asked me to put a subtitle on this talk, so that ~~it~~ ^{the topic} wouldn't look quite so cryptic when she mentioned it in the OHS News, I desperately told her ~~it~~ something about "a voyage in search of Northwest lore." For scholarship's sake, I probably should nail down what I meant by "Northwest."~~

If I'm reading my own books right though, it is the working West that first of all interests me. The everyday craft of making a living out here.

~~Notionally~~ In the course of my first novel, The Sea Runners, I got in touch with a park ranger up at Sitka, Alaska, who's an expert on the carpentry and shipbuilding that went on there when Alaska still was Russian America.

He gave me not only the working details I needed, but he also wrote out for me a quote from the English poet William Blake: "Art ^{and science} cannot exist but in minutely organized particulars."

When I'd finished blinking over the ^{literary &} philosophical bent of park rangers these days -- probably something ^{he had} needed to get through the era of James Watt -- it occurred to me that the quote explains much of what I like about certain books set in the west. ~~A 1944 novel by Mildred Walker, called Winter Wheat, I think deserves a much greater reputation than it seems to have. Likely the reason I think so is how instantly I can identify with the book's central character, a young Montana woman named Ellen Webb --~~

There's the line in Jim Welch's immortal novel, *Winter in the Blood*--the description of a lazy bale piler the narrator is working with in a hay field: "He had learned to give the illusion of work, even to the point of sweating as soon as he put his gloves on."

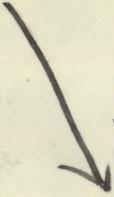
Now, I've worked with that guy, ~~up in the Dupuyer country~~. Anybody who's ever been on a haying job probably has. The truth in that, the artistic exactness--the minutely organized particulars--radiates right out.

In my own case as a writer I find an oxygen, a breath of life, when I get involved in gathering lore from the working people of the West. Quite a lot of it has been gathered here at the Mansfield Library--much of the Forest Service lore, for instance, that went into the forest fire scene in English Crick, I found in Dale Johnson's domain of archives. And Missoula and this university make some appearances in the book I'm finishing up now, the last novel of the trilogy that began with ~~English Crick and~~ Dancing at the Rascal Fair and English Crick. A quick world ^{premiere} ~~preview~~ here, about a paragraph's worth--

My narrator, Jick McCaskill, went to ^{forestry} school here on the GI Bill ^{after} ~~in~~ World War II, and here he tells of meeting another ^{my} student--whose name was Shirley.

"She was a Theta and a theater major and ordinarily our paths would not have crossed in a hundred years, but Shirley had a taste for life on the edge of campus. As did I, in those afterwar years. I hung around with some of the married veterans ^{and partied} who lived in prefab housing called Splinterville and at one Saturday night party there, the two of us found ourselves at the keg of Highlander beer at the same time and Shirley tested me out in a voice as frisky as the rest of her, "You're the smokejumper, aren't you." I surprised myself by smiling a smile as old as creation and ^{giving her} ~~cracking back to her~~, "Yeah, but that ain't all." ^{I'm up to} It happened fast after that."

I try to blend library resources with actuality that perhaps hasn't reached the library shelves ~~yet~~ ^{books} yet. For instance, English Crick has in it a haying season-- probably the only novel published in recent time that



In my own case as a writer, I find an oxygen, a breath of life, when I get ~~involved~~ ^{revisit} involved in gathering lore from the working people of the West. My novel, English ~~which has just been published~~ ^{in recent decades} Greek, ~~has in it a haying season~~ probably the only novel published ~~this fall~~ that can make that claim--a haying season of the late 1930's when the haying machinery still was run mostly by horses instead of horsepower. When I was a kid in ~~Montana~~ just after World War Two, my dad was a haying contractor every summer, and his crews largely put up hay in that old workhorse way. So I did have my own memories to bring in and use. But, I had to admit to myself, those days when I was a red-headed kid in a hayfield are getting to be a long time ago, in a galaxy far away. So to add other memories to my own, I ran little classified ads in ^{some} ~~the~~ weekly newspapers ^{out here -} of ~~southwestern Montana--~~

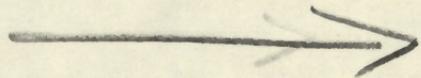
(Wisdom) 111
Denver 5
Eburg 40

asking to hear from anybody who had worked on a haying crew in the late 1930's in the Big Hole ~~Basin—the most famous hay area of Montana.~~ I heard from about a dozen people, from mower men and scatter rakers, to a woman who took in laundry from the hay crews. ^{in Wisdom} I wanted details, did I? ^{The laundry lady} ~~She~~ had them. She wrote me: "~~A change of clean clothes cost 50 cents.~~ I charged 15 cents for shirts (washed, ironed, mended and loose buttons sewed on), 10 cents for a pair of shorts, 10 cents for an undervest, 5 cents for a handkerchief, and 10 cents for a pair of socks. Any kind of pants was 25 cents for washing and pressing." And with the ^{laundry} details come the larger memories, the stories of the people and their times. ^{The washerlady} ~~She~~ ^{to me} went on: "I think of Joe, ~~the retired banker, who never had much to say.~~ When I shrunk his expensive woolen underwear, I thought he would never come back--but every Saturday,

Williams 12
Denver 6
E. Long 41

of laundry

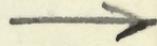
he would bring me his fifty cents worth anyway. I think of Charlie Williams, an old-time cowboy who brought me a green silk shirt with the request I embroider a horseshoe on the back. That, too, was a disaster, but he still came. I think of the two shady ladies who came to town for the haying season. They, too, brought me their laundry, and I ~~hardly remember to think~~ remember one of them, on a beautiful summer day, asking me how-I could smile." (low)



~~Plainly enough, then, I'm interested in writing about the everyday craft of~~

making a living in the American west. The west behind the cowboy myth. The west of Craig Lesley & Gretel Ehrlich, of James and Leslie Marmon Silko, of Bill of Wallace Stegner, and Norman Maclean, and Jim Welch. I think it's past time ~~to~~ Kiltredge.

~~that writers of reputation do this, because...~~



7 min to have

Plainly enough, then, I'm interested in writing about the everyday craft of making a living in the American west. Not just on farms and ranches, for the novel I'm writing now has a couple of characters who are newspaper people--from Missoula--going about their jobs, and there's even a brief appearance by a librarian. But in any case, whatever the occupations, I'm trying to get at the west behind the cowboy myth. The west of Wallace Stegner, and Norman Maclean, and Mary Clearman Blew and Louise Erdrich, of Craig Lesley and Gretel Ehrlich, of Bill Kittredge, of James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko.

~~If you hear noises from the north that year, you'll know what's going on.~~

(Wm W. Savage)
The Cowboy Hero

Books set here ^{on} ~~in~~ the west ^{side} of America haven't always given attention to the workaday life and the valid voices of ^{our} ~~the~~ region. A romantic version that one scholar has called "the cowboys without the cows" got underway about eighty ^{five} years ago with The Virginian, Owen Wister's famous novel. The Virginian began a lineage of books that might be called Wisterns. In a Wistern, a bad guy insults a good guy--in The Virginian, the actual insult is "you son of a blank"--and the good guy dangerously drawls back, ~~and~~ "When you call me that--smile." But that's about all that does go on in a Wistern. None of the guys, good or bad, seems ever to do a lick of everyday work--milk a cow, churn butter, plant a potato. You get the impression that somewhere just out of sight, there must be a catering service, maybe someplace around Omaha.

(pauze)

(pauze)

Donner 14
E'burg 10

that comes out ^{west} and feeds everybody, and does the chores.

western half of America

Nonsensical as that sort of portrait of the ~~west~~ is, it does have consequences:

complicated

it fudges the terms of life in much of the actual American west--that this is a big, ~~big~~, fragile, contentious part of the country which requires a lot of work to make a living from its land. That is the west behind the cowboy myth. ~~The west of writers~~

~~H. L. Davis and~~
~~such as Wallace Stegner and Norman Maclean, of James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko~~
~~and Rudolfo Anaya.~~ The west I'm trying to work toward in my own writing.

~~And thank you for inviting me down here to your part of that west,~~
~~tonight to talk about that.~~

→
E'burg
11-12
follows
→

So, those are at least a handful of the makings of books such as mine, and doubtless of some other writers out here as well. It is my utter belief that writers of caliber can ground their work in specific land and lingo and yet be writing of that larger country, life. Specific geographies, but galaxies of imaginative expression-- we've seen them both exist in William Faulkner's postage-stamp size Yoknapatawpha County, and in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's nowhere village of Macondo, dreaming in its Hundred Years of Solitude. This big western end of our country being the worthwhile place it still is, there seems to be incentive for writers to use their local earth as a mighty base. I think we're at least trying, as Isak Dinesen's

houseboy Kamante wanted, to make our pages hang together from one end
to the other. With a little luck, maybe some of them will even
turn out to be good enough we can bind them in blue.

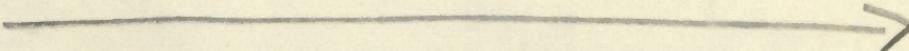
Thanks for ~~listening today.~~ ^{coming out tonight.}

The Virginian's ^{memorable} ~~remarkable~~ way with words reminds me that the language of the West is another fuel for the writer.

In my own case, the talk of people I knew contributed powerfully to my wish my first book, This to write House of Sky, and to the way I did it. The book in a sense had its start at a tape recorder--a couple of years before I had any clue it was going to be a book. In the summer of 1968, Carol and I were visiting my father and grandmother in White Sulphur ^{my hometown in Montana} Springs, and hanging around for a few extra days for the sake of my grandmother's 75th birthday.

(pp. 5-6 of House of Sky speech follows) →

I prompted my father into the stories I'd heard from him, about life in the Sixteen country ^{in Montana} where he was born and grew up. One memory would lead to ~~talked into my tape recorder--~~ another, ~~the winter of 1929--going off to Chicago on a cattle train--horses and their consequences to young Sunday bronc riders such as he'd been.~~

Then the same with my grandmother--the memories of living on the Moss Agate ranch--of wintering in a tent in the Crazy Mountains ^{her first winter in Montana} of whichever disorderly neighbor went around "lookin' like she'd been drawn through a knothole backwards." 

~~The next day, I did manage to talk with Taylor Gordon, for most of an afternoon, but ironically, nothing much ever came of my notion of writing about him. So out of that pair of July afternoons of 1968 in White Sulphur, the real gain~~

The real gain of that afternoon,

proved to be the session with my father, which ~~was~~ turned out to be the last time that he was vigorous enough for his storying to go onto tape.

There were other opportunities to take down my grandmother's stories. Characteristically, sometimes what she didn't say was as helpful as what she did. I'd ask her something, and if she felt she didn't have the full particulars on it, she'd say--"Well, I don't just know about that, you better go talk to so-and-so." And I would. There came to be a couple of dozen further voices in the tape recorder that way.

12/4 follows →

The talk of the west's people--people we've known, or grown up around, or are around every day--that talk seems to me a kind of necessary seasoning in writing about this region. It enhances, brings out the flavors, of the other elements in a book. A quick example I'll read, of how I tried to follow this notion in House of Sky.

~~(Incidentally, I tried once at a talk like this to play excerpts from the actual taped voices of House of Sky--and it was an audio-visual disaster. Nobody could hear the voices clearly enough, and I looked like an idiot standing up here mute in the midst of it all. So, while I can't convey someone else's voice with the fidelity that technology theoretically can, I maybe won't garble it quite as much, either.)~~

This is a passage from my father's lifelong friend, Clifford Shearer,
 telling of the time the two of them ~~went out~~ ^{went out} to Aberdeen, Washington, one winter
 looking for work. What this pair of ~~young~~ ^{sagebrush} cowboys were offered ~~there~~ ^{out on Grays Harbor} was a chance
 to pile lumber. Clifford's voice from the book:

"Charlie and I didn't know what a stick of lumber was, hardly. We thought
 everything was made out of logs, y'know. But they asked us if we knew anything
 about lumber, and we said, 'Well, sure.'"

Those three sentences from Clifford are at least my notion of a writer's dream. They compress the background my father and Clifford came out of--the era of log homestead cabins--and they capture the bravado of those young men--
 sure, ^{you let} hell, they knew all about lumber--and at the same time, they ~~enhance the~~
~~previous topic of the work of the west, by~~ reminding us that there was a time
 in this country when you could get away with something like that, be hired on
 your word and then let to prove yourself. It would have taken me immensely more
 words than Clifford's to portray all that he did, just by telling me how things
 seemed to him.

BA follows →

If I am trying to use ingredients such as these--"some here and some there," as Kamante said of Isak Dinesen's manuscript pages--to write about what I see as the reality of Western rural and small-town life, I am also trying to do it, in the trio of novels I'm spending the 1980's on, in the ^{literary} voice of a Westerner. Specifically, in English Creek, in the voice of my narrator, fifteen-year-old Jick McCaskill, who says to himself as he watches his older brother become involved with the local dazzling young person of the opposite sex: "If I ever get old enough to have brains, I will work on the question of man and woman."

And in Dancing at the Rascal Fair, the voice of Jick's grandfather, Angus McCaskill, who in the course of the thirty years of life in that novel is modulated from his native Scottish burr--"Man, man, what I would give to know. Under the stream of words by which you talked the two of us into our long step to America, what were your deep reasons? I am late about asking, yes. Years and years and years late. But when was such asking ~~not~~ ever not?"--to a Montana Scotchman's voice akin to those in my own forebears--"At once, everybody in the corral voted with their pockets. All the young riders wanted a turn at the bucking steer, or said they did. But the Fort Benton man shook his head ~~and~~ and informed the throng that was not how steer ~~h~~iding worked, it was

strictly a one-shot proposition. One steer per afternoon, one rider per afternoon: what could be more fair?"

And in the next and last novel of the trilogy--which I ~~hope~~ intend will be on your shelves two years from ^{today} ~~tonight~~--Jick McCaskill returns, this time aged 65 instead of 15. He is still a westerner, still talking out loud on my pages, and still in the sheep business. Here's an excerpt from the manuscript--I guess this is the world premiere, of the return of Jick:

Jick is camptending, sometime next summer, the summer of 1989:

"As I drove closer, the sight of the sheep sent my spirits up and up. In a nice scatter along the saddleback ridge between Breed Butte and the foothills, their noses down in the business of grazing, the ewes were a thousand daubs of soft gray against the tan grass and beside them their lambs were their smaller disorderly shadows. I looked forward to strolling over and slowly sifting through the band, estimating the lambs' gain and listening to the clonking sound of the bell wether's bell, always a pleasure. But the iron etiquette between camptender and shepherd dictated that I had to go visit with my herder first. I climbed out of the pickup and started up the slope ^{words} to her.

1

"Helen Ramplinger was my herder this summer and the past two. Tall for a woman, kind of gawky, really; somewhere well into her thirties, with not a bad face but strands of her long hair constantly blew across it like lines of a web. ~~I'll be honest, but I~~ ^{admit to} I was somewhat bothered about having so skinny a sheepherder, for fear people would blame it on the way I fed. But I honestly did provide her whatever groceries she ordered; it was just that Helen was a strict vegetarian. She had come into the Two Medicine country to join up with some back-to-the-earth health-foody types,--granolas, as they were locally known--out of a background of drugs and who knew what else. I admit, it stopped me in my tracks when Helen heard I needed

a herder and came and asked for the job. My wife Marcella, too; as Marce said, she thought that as Dode Withrow's daughter she'd listened to every issue involving shepherders that was possible, but how here was gender. It ended up that Marce and I agreed that although Helen's past of drugs had turned her into a bit of a space case, she seemed an earnest ~~rough~~ soul and maybe was just drifty enough to be in tune with the sheep. So it had proved out, and I was feeling retroactively clever now as I drew near enough to begin conversation with her.

"Jick, I'm quitting," Helen greeted me.

I blanched, inside as well as out. Across the years I had been met with that pronouncement from shepherders frequently, and a

significant proportion of the time they meant it. If they burned supper or got a pebble in their shoe or the sky wasn't blue enough to suit them, by shepherd logic it was automatically the boss's fault, and I as boss had tried to talk sweetness to sour herders on more occasions than I cared to count. Here and now, I most definitely did not want to lose this one--what in the name of Christ was I going to do with this band of sheep if Helen walked off the job?

"Aw, hell, Helen. You don't want to do that. Let's ^{just} ~~kind of~~ talk this over, okay?" I made myself swallow away the usual alphabet of shepherd negotiation--fancier food, a pair of binoculars, a new dog--and go directly to Z:

"If it's a matter of wages, times are awful tough right now, but I guess maybe I could--"

"Hey, I didn't mean now." Helen gave me an offended look. "I mean next summer. I've had some time"--she gestured vaguely around us, as if the minutes and hours of her thinking season were here in a herd like the sheep--"to get my head straight, and I've decided I'm not going to be a herder any more. I'll miss it, though," she assured me.

Momentarily relieved but still apprehensive, I asked: "What is it you're going to do, then?"

"Work with rocks."

"Huh?"

"Sure, you know--rocks. These." She reached down between the bunchgrass and picked up a specimen the size of a grapefruit. "Don't you ever wonder what's in them? Their colors and stuff? You can polish them up and really have something, you know." Helen peered at me through flying threads of her hair. "Gemology," she stated. "That's what I want to do. Get a job as a rock person, polishing them up and fitting them into rings and belt buckles and bolo ties. I heard about a business out in Oregon where they do that. So I'm gonna go there. Not until after we ship the lambs this fall, though."

Helen gently put the young boulder down on the ground between her inquisitive sheepdog and me, straightened to her full height, then gazed around in wistful fashion, down into the valley of the North Fork,

and north toward Noon Creek, and up toward the dark-timbered climb of Breed Butte that divided the two drainages, and at last around to me again. "This is real good country for rocks, Jick," she said hopefully.

It was my turn to gesture grandly. "Helen, any rocks in my possession"--and on the land we stood on I had millions of them--"you are more than welcome to."

adjust mine of distance

Ballerne

1

"I will tell you a story--of a young man who let a great anger be born ^{in him} ~~inside~~
against the ~~sea~~, ^{ocean} and what happened by reason of that."
an 81-year-old

The storyteller was ~~a~~ man, named ~~O'Connor~~, in County Kerry in Ireland, and his
listener was a writer for The New Yorker--one of the great writers ever for that
magazine, John McNulty. McNulty, born and raised in America, had never been to
the country of his parents, and in ~~his mid-life~~ ^{mid-life} he decided to go--To go, as
he said, "back where I had never been." And so, ~~was~~ in an Irish afternoon in
the late 1940's, ^{John McNulty} ~~he~~ sat listening to the story of the young man who became angry
at the ^{ocean} sea.

(low
voice)

^{the young man}
"The young man," the storyteller went on, "was strong and bold, and there was a great deal of goodness in him, even though he did have the mischief that has to go with sailing on the sea--which he did, for he was a fisherman.

"In time, the young fisherman married the most handsome young woman of his village. I will not tell you of their courtship, because that was a matter between the two of them and not for us at all. But it is enough to say, they married and God sent them a lovely child, and the two of them were happy with the little one, and the father, home from his fishing, would carry the baby in his arms, with his wife walking beside, on the two streets of the village--back and forth, back and forth, on the two streets, of a Sunday, and in the twilight on the other days."

rhythm

"The young fisherman went to sea in his boat, and his comrades with him. And his beautiful wife and his dear child were down by the water's edge to watch the boat go farther and farther away, and at last they could see it no more.

(pause) "Now, that was the time an evil sickness put its cold hand on that village.

(slow) One after another of the people died, young and old alike. It was only four days the young fisherman was away on the sea. All the same, in that short time what happened was so bad there was nobody in that village had the courage to meet the young fisherman when at last his boat came in, and tell him." (slow)

(pause) There are a couple more installments, of the story of the young man who grew angry at the ~~sea~~^{ocean}, which I'll get to as this talk goes along.

I've been asked here

Today ~~I want~~ to think out loud a little--instead of sitting staring at my typewriter and waiting for it to tell me what to think, as I do on other mornings--to think out loud about stories, and what they mean to us.

Myself,

I'm in the business of catching stories. Hunting them, corralling them, looking them over--trying to pick out the next likely one, the best of the ~~bunch~~ ^{hard}.
 It's a strange occupation, ^{I suppose -}pre-occupation, some people would say--but at least it deals in one of humankind's best urges instead of the wide market of humanity's worst urges. The urge to know all the shapes and sizes and colors life comes in; that, I think, is why stories are told, and get listened to.

We know that stories become vital to us, very early.

Eudora Welty recalls, as a small child in Mississippi she would plant herself between the grownups in the living room and urge them, "Now, talk." (emphasis) (Klein)

Looking back on that, she thinks her hunger ~~to hear~~ to hear those grownups talk was her origin as a writer. "Children, like animals, use all their senses to discover the world," ^{Eudora Welty} ~~she~~ says. "Then artists come along and discover it the same way, all over again."

The best description of stories as handled by writers--that I've been able to find--
is the one

by the poet Randall Jarrell--whose poem, The Woman at the Washington Zoo, is in itself one of the most magnificently done American stories. Randall Jarrell said,

"A story is a chain of events. Since the stories that we know are told by humans, the events of the story happen to human or anthropomorphic beings--gods, beasts, and devils, and are related in such a way that the story seems to begin at one place and to end at a very different place, without any essential interruption to its progress. The poet or storyteller, so to speak, writes numbers on a blackboard, draws a line under them, and adds them into their true but unsuspected sum."

Those "true but unsuspected sums" occur not only on the blackboards of literature and poetry and drama, of speech and folklore. They are writ large in other great areas of learning as well. Tracy Kidder's tale of cybernetic competition, *The Soul of a New Machine*, is an absorbing story of the computer age which richly deserved the Pulitzer Prize it won in 1982. In medicine, we hear regularly from the exquisitely eloquent doctors, Lewis Thomas and Richard Selzer--storytellers who in the tradition of RAB-uh-lay

and Chekhov and William Carlos Williams can work miracles with a pen as well as a scalpel. / And one ultimate name, which I can only say in envy, as I think any so-called "writer" has to: one of the best workers of story in this century, an anthropologist--the late Loren Eiseley. The opening story in Eiseley's book, The Immense Journey, tells of a day on the long-grass prairie of the middle of America when he went down into a crack in the earth--a narrow limestone slit which, he realized when he had inserted himself into it, "was a perfect cross section through perhaps ten million years of time." An anthropologist being an anthropologist, Eiseley writes next: "I hoped to find at least a bone." What he found instead was a skull, embedded in the ^{lime} sandstone. It was not human--some creature pre-human: with, Eiseley says, "a low, pinched brain case...and the face of a creature who had spent his days following his nose, and whose power of choice was very small. →

Though he was not a man, nor a direct human ancestor, there was yet about him, some trace of that low, snuffling world out of which our forebears had so recently emerged." Under the prairie sky, Loren Eiseley stares down at ^{that} ~~the~~ skull. The skull ~~stares~~, sightless, up at ~~Eiseley~~ him. And Eiseley writes of that moment: "This creature had never lived to see a man--and I; what was it I was never going to see?"

It seems to me that in that single sentence, Loren Eiseley managed to write the immense story of humankind. (pause)

I've spent some time--I guess, quite a lot of my adult life--trying to figure out what it is, within stories and the telling of them, that is as valid and vital for an anthropologist as it is for a poet or novelist. The best I can come up with, and more and more I think it may be enough, is craft. The craftsmanship intrinsic to

good storytelling. I had an unexpected lesson in this when I was working on my first novel, *The Sea Runners*, ^{a couple of years ago,} In trying to write about New Archangel in the time when Alaska still was Russian America, I wanted to know what kind of wood, in the ship timbers and lumber piles, my characters would be seeing and smelling as they walked along the New Archangel ^{in the 1850s.} waterfront. I got in touch with a park ranger up at Sitka, as New Archangel has become; an expert on the carpentry and shipbuilding during the period of Russian America. ^{The rangers} He gave me not only the working details I needed--yellow cedar was the distinctive smell that I put into the book--but he also wrote out for me a quote he ^{thinks} ~~said~~ is from ~~the English poet~~ William Blake: "Art cannot exist but in minutely organized particulars."

When I'd finished blinking over the literary and philosophical bent of park rangers at the time--probably something needed to get through the era of James Watt--

this nanger in Sitka

I saw that he'd told me something I already believed but hadn't known how to say. That when craft--craftsmanship--is done well enough, it begins to be art.

The craft of stories is more than a philosophical point with me. In my own work-- what I do in life--each book I have written is an attempt of the sort Eudora Welty describes--to discover--and then, as Randall Jarrell put it, to add it all up into a true but unsuspected sum. English Creek, my ^{most recent} ~~novel which will be published in a few weeks~~, not only is my most ambitious try at catching a story--the story of a Montana family trying to pull itself from the effects of the Depression, in the 1930's. English Creek also has a narrator, a 14-year-old boy, who is himself a storycatcher; a kid who can't wait to tell you the story of this summer when his older brother "began wearing a neck hanky and considering himself a cowboy." The novel before this one, The Sea Runners, began as an 1853 newspaper story I came across. The book before that,



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Winter Brothers, in a sense was a 40-year / day-by-day story--based on the 40 years of diaries kept by our coastal pioneer James Gilchrist Swan, of Port Townsend and Neah Bay. And my first book, This House of Sky, a memoir of growing up in Montana, turned out to be the story of the odd and contentious and yet unbreakable family that my father and my mother's mother made for me.

I'm a believer **that** Eudora Welty's demand to her grownups, "Now, talk," is the best prod for a writer to put to his characters, too.

As I hope that example shows, I'm a believer that Eudora Welty's demand to her grownups, "Now, talk," is the best prod for a writer to put to his characters, too.

I'm convinced that, when I was writing This House of Sky, that book of my growing-up years in Montana began to take on life

when I let the people in it tell their own stories. Almost all of the dialogue of House of Sky is storytelling of one sort or another, the material which lodged in my head the decades ago as I listened in the bars and cafes of small Montana towns, and ⁱⁿ the bunkhouses of ranches and farms out in the valleys from those towns. Thanks to a lot of years of notes and letters and tape recordings, I could retrieve those stories, and they ^{they} usually seemed ~~to me~~ to tell themselves at least as well as anything I could do in their place.

sometimes

In fact, sometimes--and this is one of the continuing dilemmas of a writer--
 the unrefined stories do a whole lot better than I can, and I'm baffled as to how
 to try and keep up with them. This ~~third~~ example of the force of story in my work,
 is ~~also~~ from during ~~the~~ ^{that} writing of This House of Sky, and it is one that stays and
 stays with me. One of those embroidered samplers in a writer's mind, that reads:
 "If you're so damn smart, what happened to you that time?"

That time--actually is one of the portions in House of Sky I am proudest of, the portrait of an old couple named Kate and Walter Badgett, of the tiny Montana community of Ringling. Kate and Walter Badgett lived in the neighboring house there when I was in junior high school, and they were very old and very, very interesting to me. Walter had been a cowboy in Texas--rumor had it Kate had been a bootlegger--perfect neighbors for a kid. ^(pause) Across thirty years, Kate and Walter still loom mightily in my memory--"like barn and silo," which is the way they were built, as I described them at one point in the book. I'm sure I spent at least two full weeks on the research and writing of the thousand or so words I came up with about Kate and Walter Badgett, and I'm satisfied that, through the resources of memory and description, I caught the pair of them with more exactness than almost anybody else in the book.

But even so, ^{mine} ~~it~~ was a second-best version. While I was gathering material for the book, someone had given me the name of a niece of Kate Badgett-- a woman I will call, for the sake of her privacy, Loretta Walker. I sent in her small town in Montana, off a letter to her, and back came, written shakily on lined tablet paper-- Loretta Walker at the time was well into her eighties-- ^{back came} her version of Kate and Walter Badgett.

P. 19 follows →

(4 min) 23
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Dear Friend Ivan Doig--

I am going to attempt to answer some of the things you asked me. This won't be very good or wrote very straight as I am almost blind. I am clear blind in left eye and don't see too good out of the rite ~~one~~ but I am going to try, and hope you can read it.

(cross arms)

First about Aunt Kate coming to Mont^{ana}. Her dad Wiley Clark come to Mont. from missouri with a freight outfit which was 8 big steers on an ox team and he ~~was~~ hauled freight from Deadwood, South Dakota, to Billings ~~and to Fort Shaw up close to Great Falls~~ and then he met a man in Billings who had a sawmill ~~and~~ on Deer Creek and he wanted Grandpa Clark to haul lumber from ~~the~~ ^{his} sawmill ~~to Billings~~. So Grandpa did start hauling lumber and he made up his mind he was going to stay there, so the mill workers

helped him and they built a house and he sent to Missouri and got Grandma Clark and their three girls, Nellie who was 12, Ethel 9 and Kate ^{who was} 4. ~~Nellie was my mother.~~

Well, that was their home, on Deer Creek, for many years. It was about 1888 when Kate and the rest come to Montana.

About 1902, or 1903, Grandma and Grandpa Clark went to ~~what~~ what was the Antelope ^{Stage} Station, ~~It was close to where (the town of) Zovina is now,~~ ^{about} It was 20 miles out of Billings. That is where Kate met her first husband, Henry Coger. ^{Henry} He tended bar in the saloon there. When Grandpa left the ^{stage} station Kate and Henry went to Hardin, ~~Mont.~~ and bought a saloon and Henry got sick and died there, so Kate sold ^(call in one sentence, all of this) as soon as she could and come back to Deer Creek, and she went to Broadview to visit friends of hers who ran the hotel there and Walter was the bartender there. ^(pause) So that ^{Kate and Walter} is where ~~they~~ met.

Hand to write

She continues:

I know Walter was from Texas but that is all I know. After Kate and Walter got out of the hotel in Broadview they ... farmed (~~near Acton~~) for 2 or 3 years. It was very dry there, all they had was sagebrush and rattlesnakes, then they went to ~~Silesia~~ and raised sugar beets for a few years, from there they went to Maudlow and Kate run the railroad terminal there. The train workers changed shifts there ^{at Maudlow} and Kate boarded and roomed the men and also cooked for all the folks traveling on the train....^{Kate and Walter} When ~~they~~ left there they went to Ringling, I think, and they lived at Ringling till Walter passed away, he died in Bozeman with pneumonia. Then Aunt Kate come here to ~~Roundup~~ and lived with me. There was my mother, my brother Leon, and then Kate. I had my home and we all paid an equal share of expenses and I cooked for them all. Momma passed away first, then Leon, and at last I had to put Kate

hand to break?

in the rest home at the hospital. I couldn't take care of her, she got quite bad and required a lot of care. Walter and Kate are buried at White Sulphur Springs, their graves are right by a Doig, I think it is ^{one of your uncles} ~~Volga Doig's~~ husband.

That is all I can think of, so if there is something else just ask me. If I know it I will write it to you.

Sincerely,

~~Lenora Gramblit~~
Loretta Walker

end 259 on tape
13 min to here

Because of the pace and direction of House of Sky at the point where
 Kate and Walter Badgett appear in it--simply as the nearest ^{pair of} faces
 in the description of Ringling I needed to do--I felt I couldn't insert
 Loretta Walker's remarkable history of them. It was wonderful, but would
 be out of place ^{like} a Charlie Russell painting hung from the rear view mirror
 of a ^{pick up} Volkswagen. ^{What's all this doing there?} Yet I believe that story achieved by Loretta Walker,
 sitting old and unlettered and nearly blind and scrawling her sentences
 to me, I believe it did have its profound use--as ^{a crafted story} something for me to try
 live up to, in my own use of language and in the effort to accurately
 trace the trajectory of the ^{Montana Western} lives I was writing about.

17 min.

~~So it seems to me~~ there is a kind of oxygen, a breath of life, which stories provide a writer--and which he in turn tries to pass along to the next listener, the reader.

A story also gives a writer a set of directions. Sometimes they take years to figure out. ~~It's like being perpetually trapped in one of those conversations you get into when you're trying to find someplace in suburbs laid out the way ours are--people keep telling you, turn left at the third stoplight, you'll see there's a Pay and Save there on the corner--or is it a Pay and Pak?--anyway, turn left right there and go about a mile, maybe closer to two miles, and then the road makes a right turn, DON'T TAKE THAT, just kind of hold left....~~

As all of us have to do from time to time, the writer must pull over and tell himself, it's just a matter of getting from here to there, nothing a grownup can't do.

Frank/O'Connor, the great short-story writer, once said "There are three necessary elements in a story--exposition, development, and drama."

An example of exposition, said ^{Frank}O'Connor, might be: "John Fortescue was a lawyer in the little town of Waterford."

(deep voice)

Then an example of development: "One day Mrs. Fortescue told him she was about to leave him for another man."

Then an example of drama: "You will do nothing of the kind," he said.

Frank/O'Connor was a sophisticated storycatcher, invited to places such as Stanford and Harvard, to tell audiences that a story consists of exposition, development and drama. But people who don't know or care where Stanford and Harvard are, ~~have no knowledge of the ingredients of a story.~~ have this same knowledge of the ingredients of a story.

Listen now, to the old storyteller's tale of the young man who grew angry at the ^{ocean} sea--

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Frank O'Connor

as that story comes to what ~~a professor~~ would call, development. Remember, illness has "put its cold hand on ~~the~~ ^{that} village," no one dares to meet the young fishermen when his boat comes in and tell him."

"His darling wife and the child were dead. The young man went home alone, /nobody to meet him, /and he found out in that minute that he was always going to be alone.

"Now, I will not tell of the wake and how deep-stricken the young man was, because you know that and you can think it more truly than I can tell it in my poor way. What you do not know, and I'll tell you, is that when his dear ones were buried and him alone, this terrible anger against the sea came on ^{him}. One day not long after, /when he had taken a drink, /he was seen by his friends on a lonely part of the shore, standing with his feet in the water, and he was shaking his fist at the sea and roaring curses ~~on~~ on it.

(aloud)

"They heard him say this to the sea--they heard him say, 'I hate you and hate you and hate you, and so I'll beat you always. I'll go back upon you and I'll beat you. You'll try to take my boat, and I'll beat you and bring my boat home to the land again. You'll try to take me and you'll try to drown me, but you'll never have me, because I'll beat you, and I'll walk the land alone until I die in my bed. I hate you and hate you and hate you. You kept me away while my dear ones were ~~at~~ dying, and if I had been here, I would have saved them and not let them perish.' That is what the poor man was roaring at the sea, and who could blame him for that?"

(soft)

(soft)

(low)

(soft)

(pause)

21.
m m

The third instalment, drama, is to come. In the meantime, I want to look a bit at stories as a kind of social glue. As one of the basics that make us turn our ears and eyes to one another.

I believe...stories can be our way of sharing light--of sitting together around humanity's fire with the universal dark all around us. Which may be how stories began in the first place--and then somebody went back in the cave and drew on the wall the hunting escapade they had ^{all} just been talking about, and the written versions began. Often we ^{simply} tell stories to share. To say, we are in this, together. My wife Carol's mother used to tell — — ~~A friend of mine, now in her eighties, remembers~~ that when she was a young grade school teacher all those decades ago, ^{she and other} the teachers developed a code to use whenever their principal began one of his surprise inspection sweeps through their classrooms.

The first teacher on whom ^{the principal} ~~he~~ descended would immediately send a student around to all the other classrooms, to knock on the door, poke a head in and ask each teacher, "Do you have the Big Scissors?" (pause)

We do that a lot, in telling each other stories--alert one another that the Big Scissors of life is on the loose. Various famous book-length stories ^{try to} bring us ^{these} large facts of life. Home truths. Open the novel Anna Karenina, and the first sentence you read is, "Happy families are all alike--every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Tolstoy goes on for another 950 pages, but you've had the Big Truth there in the opening line.

Other books, considerably more light-footed, give us their story simply by being such good company. In contrast to Tolstoy's opening pronouncement, listen to the opening of *The Summer Book*, Tove Jansson's magnificent children's book that is so much more than a children's book:

"It was an early, very warm morning in July, and it had rained during the night. The bare granite steamed, the moss and crevices were drenched with moisture, and all the colors everywhere had deepened. Below the ver^uanda, the vegetation in the morning shade was like a rain forest of lush, evil leaves and flowers, which she had to be careful not to break as ~~she~~ she searched. She held one hand in front of her mouth and was constantly afraid of losing her balance.

"What are you doing?" asked little Sophia.

(snappily)

"Nothing," her grandmother answered. "That is to say," she added angrily,

(staccato) "I'm looking for my false teeth."

(a hugely engaging book.)

Then there are writers, storycatchers, to whom the language itself is part of the story. To me, these are the real magicians of our tribe. The ones who are not only providing us a narrative string of events, but meanwhile are showing us-- is capable of? see what the language can do? See what the human tongue isn't this a terrific language?

We are all, interested in the play of language. We all do it. When I was

~~aboard the University of Alaska oceanography ship, the Alpha Helix, during my research~~
~~we would meet fishing boats with their~~
~~for the Sea Runners, dark would come and the first mate would flick on the~~

light are
~~work lights on and our first mate would say, "Norwegian sunshine."~~

Notice how rapidly the coming of the computer is providing its own vocabulary of slang. It was ever thus. For the background of my next novel, I've been reading up on the craft of wheelwrights a hundred years ago in Scotland--the wheelwright shops, where craftsmen made the wagon and carriage ~~wheels~~ wheels the world ran on before train and automobile. Like the computer hackers, the wheelwrights had a rich lingo of their own, as I find when I come onto sentences such as: "If ye ~~ni~~ was to nip yerself while gettin' her onto her legs, ye'd catch ~~yoursself~~ a woodlouse." Which translates: If you pinch a finger while hoisting a wagon box onto its wheels, you'll get yourself a blood blister.

We all go through life with some playful bit of language tagged onto us--some flip of the tongue we made, perpetually told on us by our parents or siblings--that when we were just learning to talk, we insisted on calling our sister, "mister" or some such. And every generation in turn insists on embarrassing its grown-up children by telling that kind of stuff on them.

Well, writers try to use that play of language, to see how far it can go.

Anais Nin once urged her fellow writers to /"the use of language as magic, the use of rhythm and image. The fear of using the full span of language would be like denying ourselves the use of an orchestra for a symphony. James Joyce tried to tell us in so many ways that man's life does not take place on one level only but on several simultaneously. And we cannot express this with one string."

I think a mark of our

Our great American writers, the ones for whom the language itself is a kind of story, is that they tend to bite off more than they can chew. Melville, Faulkner. Faulkner once told Malcolm Cowley: "My ambition is to put everything into one sentence-- not only the present but the whole past on which it depends and which keeps overtaking the present, second by second." Faulkner went on to explain that in writing his prodigious sentences he is trying to convey a sense of simultaneity, not only giving what happened in the shifting moment but suggesting everything that went before and made ^{created,} the quality of that moment. *a big ambition -- biting off a lot.*

And so you get from Faulkner a sentence such as this one, ^{glorious} in his story "Spotted Horses"--where a herd of ~~horses~~ mustangs have been brought in from Texas for sale, they are in the corral at Frenchman's Bend, the Mississippi farmers who have spent all their lives slogging behind slow mules are standing looking ^{longingly} at these quick, vivid horses from the West, ^{horses} described by Faulkner this way--

"Calico-coated, small-bodied, with delicate legs and pink faces in which their mismatched eyes rolled wild and subdued, the horses huddled, gaudy, motionless and alert, wild as deer, deadly as rattlesnakes, quiet as doves." An extravagant

sentence, which kicks over some rule of writing about every third word, yet one in which the language itself is telling us, those horses were all these things, ^{Godamighty} at once.

You should have seen those horses!

Another sort of writer, another sort of storyteller, gives us scenes rather than the spell of language. A New York Times article ~~of about ten days ago~~ ^{from last year} reported the ~~coming~~ ^{current} boom of Henry James--The Bostonians ~~is being~~ ^{has been} made into a movie, The Aspern Papers ~~is~~ ^{was} opening as a play, The Turn of the Screw has been both a movie and an opera, and some of you may have seen the Masterpiece Theatre tv production of The Golden Bowl. This is interesting, the emergence of high-Victorian collared Henry James as a storyteller in our technological age; one critical description of Henry James has been that he was a writer who chewed more than he could bite off. His biographer, Leon Edel, who wrote the New York Times piece, admits that the prose of James is "baroque, difficult". But Edel thinks it is exactly the fussiness, the solemn thorough chewing every scene gets in James,

that accounts for the love affair of television and movie and stage with Henry James. "He was the most visual of all our novelists," Edel writes. "Any page in any of his novels is filled with subtle observation, by his characters, of their environments. We could say that his eyes were camera lenses: that he turned himself into a mobile camera long before film was invented. ~~In his skillfull attempts to remove himself from his stories and let the characters' 'point of view'--by which he meant angle of vision--prevail, James anticipated the many technical skills of the camera--its ability to move close up to a face, its freedom of movement in landscape or in a house."~~

In my own case, I'm trying to work on the same side of the street as the guys who believe language is part of the story, rather than ~~an~~ ^{a Jamesian - a camera -} instrument ^λ to show the story. This last ~~set~~ ^{pair} of ~~ex~~amples I want to give here today--are one more, brief one from my own ~~current~~ ^{recent} work, and then one from somebody ~~really~~ good at finding the magic of language.

My novel, English Creek, ~~will have~~ ^{has} in it a Fourth of July rodeo--the biggest doings of the year, in the time and place of the book, and as the annual local rodeo was in my own growing up in Montana. But the book takes place in the 1930's, a bit before my time, and so I wondered whether a public address system was used, back then--or whether someone announced through a megaphone, or ^{what}. I wrote that question to the Rodeo Hall of Fame in Colorado Springs, and back from the archivist there, came a photocopy of an advertisement of the time--of a brand-new public address system,

the very latest thing in rodeo announcing. It was a sort of huge hat stand, with morning glory horns--like the ones on old photographs--coming out in all directions, ^{a dozen or so of them.} X
 A dozen or so of these big horns--~~it~~ ^{the thing} looked like it could broadcast to the moon.

~~When~~ I looked at this gizmo, and began thinking what it would be like, the first time one of those windy local announcers got hold of this new technology. In the book, I present that brave new world of rodeo announcing something like this-- with spacing on the pages, and voice descriptions to try convey what is going on with the language, as it goes through those ^{new} glory horns: "WELCOME!--To the--Gros Ventre--rodeo!--Our--Fifteenth--annual--show!--Some of--everything--is likely--to happen--here--today.--You know--the Fourth--of July--is called--the cowboys'--Christmas..."

↓ Where everybody could hear him, whether they wanted to or not.
 The television of its time.

Well, thinking an afternoon of that

Well, I found, by turning this dippy rodeo announcer's language loose on the page like that--I found a lot of things began to happen in my story, in response to this. People at my rodeo begin to say, "Where ^{id} ~~did~~ he get ~~at~~ that thing?"--they begin to imitate it-- somebody says, "The Fourth of July is called WHAT?" I'm told that our great Northwestern and Western poet, the late Richard Hugo, used to tell his writing students at the University of Montana: "When all else fails, throw in a crocodile." The language of the new rodeo p.a. system seems to be my crocodile. (elaw)

Now to a somewhat more sublime example, of how language itself can be part of the story. A book called Riddley Walker. Written by an American living in England, Russell Hoban. Hoban began as a writer of children's books--any of you ~~Hobans~~ ^{with youngish} children may have some of ^{his} ~~those~~ books around the house. P. 44 --then wrote what I think is a fine imaginative novel, Turtle Diary.

The writer, Russell Hoban, has made the language the story here: the nobility of ~~the~~ our language, that lives on and on, that carries power in the sounds of itself/despite all that has happened to it.

Time now, as Randall Jarrell said, to draw the line under the column of numbers, add them into a sum. I am going to let the genuine storycatcher of today, the County Kerryman telling the ^{story} ~~tale~~ of the fisherman angry at the ^{ocean} ~~sea~~, do that for me. ^{roared curses at} ~~just~~ ~~curse~~ the sea--
The final instalment: you will remember that the fisherman had just ~~curse~~ the sea--

"Away the young man went, back to his fishing. But that is not the end of my story. A big storm came in two days and the village was full of fear. And it was rightly so, because all of them on the sea were drowned--the young fisherman and all his comrades. In a bay far away, his body was washed up not long after, and it had not been touched by the fish that commonly devour the drowned people in the sea.

"They brought the young man's body back to the village and they buried him in the cemetery there. For centuries and centuries the dead of that village had been buried there, the most peaceful place in all that village. Never in all the time there was an Ireland had the seaside cemetery been any other way than most

*peaceful
cemetery.*

(diminues)

"But/just nine days after the young fisherman was buried, in the grave nearest by the water, the most terrible storm in all memory arose. Three days it went on, and never had anybody seen the like of it. All the people stayed far back from the sea and prayed for the end of ^{that} ~~the~~ storm.

"So, the storm ended at last and the people went out. And they stood silent when they saw the ~~great~~ havoc the sea had brought about. It was not at the bigness of the damage that they were frightened and struck silent. It was at this--it was that the mountainy waves of the storm, the clutching hands of the sea, had reached in and torn away one grave. It was the grave of the fisherman who had shaken his fist at the sea, and his coffin was gone, and never again was it seen ^{here} it" (pause)

(so low)

So the story at last had ended--the audience drifted away, John McNulty had tea and bread-and-butter with the storyteller and his family, and at last was saying his goodbyes, when the storyteller stopped McNulty at the door.

McNulty

"Do you see what I have done?" he asked softly. "Without passing a solid thing from my hand to yours, I have put words into your head, and they're the words of a story. Now you will carry the story back in your head to America, and perhaps you will tell the story, too, or perhaps you will write it down. And after a while I will die, but over in America will be a story of mine going around, without ever stopping from going, one to another, and so I won't be dead at all, in one way of thinking it. That's what I have done this day." ~~God bless!~~

I think that ^{may be} the impulse in all our ^{storying} tongues--to have some portion of us live on within the heads of others. Thanks for listening to my tongue ~~tonight. This long.~~
~~now~~; this day.

Bivue

6

"A story is a chain of events. Since the stories that we know are told by humans, the events of the story happen to human or anthropomorphic beings--gods, beasts, and devils, and are related in such a way that the story seems to begin at one place and to end at a very different place, without any essential interruption to its progress. The poet or storyteller, so to speak, writes numbers on a blackboard, draws a line under them, and adds them into their true but unsuspected

sum." In my own work, each book I have written is an attempt of the sort Eudora Welty described--to discover--and then, as Randall Jarrell puts it, to add it all up into a true but unsuspected sum. This House of Sky, a memoir of growing up in Montana, turned out to be the story of the odd and contentious and yet unbreakable family that my father and my grandmother made for me, after my mother's death when I was six.

64 follows →

I think this is an insert or
change I did to adapt this
talk to the Shoreline
"development day" audience.

Winter Brothers is based on the 40 years of diaries kept by our coastal pioneer
 James G. Swan, of Port Townsend and Neah Bay--which in a sense ^{was} ~~is~~ a 40-year
 day-by-day story. Next, my novel The Sea Runners was born of a story found by
 accident--an eleven-inch newspaper article from the 1850's which caught my eye
 while I was researching Winter Brothers. It told of an escape from New Archangel
 in Alaska--of how four indentured Swedes got tired of working for the Russian
 American Company there and set off by canoe for Astoria, more than a thousand miles
 away--in winter. I knew nothing about indentured Swedes, and not much about
 Russian America, and not one ^{blessed} ~~damn~~ thing about canoeing that colossal coast--
 but I knew that was a story.

English Creek, the novel I have just finished and which will be published this fall, not only is my most ambitious try at catching a story--the story of a Montana family trying to pull itself from the effects of the Depression, in the 1930's. ^{English Creek} ~~It~~ also has a narrator who is, himself, a storycatcher. A fourteen-year-old boy--I've named him Jick McCaskill--he likes to hear about the family's past. And his mother, in that way that parents and grownups have, generally thinks she has better things to do than cater to his curiosity. Here is a brief scene where the boy's quest for story is launched. The small-town weekly newspaper has come, this day, and Jick notices that in the 25-years-ago column, there is a reprinted item about a wagon trip his mother and her brother and their mother--Jick's grandmother--had taken, to St. Mary lake in Glacier National Park, where Jick's grandfather was providing the

at the time.

workhorses for road-building } Jick's mother then would have been about his age
 now, fourteen or so, and he's curious about that journey } by wagon, alone,
in the early years of this century. } a woman and two children, }
 across the Montana prairie } Jick After supper, he starts in on his mother:

"Where'd you sleep?"

She was going through the newspaper. "Sleep when?"

"That time. When you all went up to St. Mary."

She glanced over at me, then said: "Under the wagon."

"Really? You?" Which drew me more of her attention than I was bargaining for.

"Uh, how many nights?"

"Jick, what's got your curiosity bump up?"

"I'm just interested, is all. Interested in, uh, old times."

"All right. That wagon trip to St. Mary. What is it you want to know about it?"

"Well, just--why was it you went?"

~~My mother~~ ^{My ma} took the notion. My father had been away, up there, for some weeks.

He often was, constructing horses like that."

"How long did that trip take then?" Now, in a car, it was a matter of a couple or three hours.

She had to think about that. After a minute: "Two and a half days. Two nights," she underscored for my benefit, "under the wagon. One at the Two ^Medicine River and one at Cut Bank Creek."

"How come Cut Bank Creek? Why not in Browning?"

"My ~~mother~~ ^{ma} held the opinion that the prairie was a more civilized place than Browning."

"Were you the only ones on the road?"

"Pretty much, yes. The mail stage still was running then. Somewhere along the way I guess we met it."

This mother of mine
~~She~~ could nail questions shut faster than I could think them up. That was just the way she was. A person who put no particular importance on having made a prairie trek and seen a stagecoach in the process.

"What about the road-building camp?" I resorted to next. "What do you remember about that?" The St. Mary area is one of the most beautiful ones, with the mountains of Glacier Park sheering up beyond the lake. The world looks to be all stone and ice and water there. Even my mother might have noticed some of that glory.

Here she found a small smile. "Just that when we pulled in, Pete"--her brother, Jick's uncle--"Pete began helloing all the horses."

She saw that didn't register with me.

"Calling out hello to the workhorses in the various teams," she explained. "He hadn't seen them for awhile, after all. 'Hello, Woodrow! Hello, Sneezer! Methusaleh! Runt! Copenhagen! ^{Ma}~~Mother~~ let him go on with it until he came to a big gray mare called Second Wife. She never thought the name of that one was as funny as Father did."

Seldom have so many turned out to hear so much ^{from} ~~of~~ someone who has so little
to say about his topic.

The marvelous geography of the west, then, of course is vital to a western writer. But now to the argument.

"When I went from the Reservation that midsummer to my first work as a hired hand, in effect I stepped across time to Dad's life at the same age, going off to try to earn from the very surroundings which had been so stingy to the larger household. But where under him the broad muscles of horses had rippled and become a way of life, beneath me machinery throbbed. In the hot weather of that year and the next ones to come, I learned to keep the pace of piling ~~eighty-pound~~ hay bales onto a moving truck, of cocooning inside the roar and dust of tractors crawling across wheat fields, of steadying a grain truck beside a lurching combine to catch the harvested flow of gold. The north country opened and beckoned for me as the sage distances of the valley must have for Dad at my age."

Well--when I was a newspaperman, I worked for an editor who had to sit through interminable editorial board meetings, and whenever the talk got too rarefied, he was apt to show up back in the office with the rest of us, ~~saying~~ ^{and saying,}

slow

"When they started ~~saying~~ ^{in on} that, I felt I just had to get up and walk around for awhile." I respond ~~that way~~ somewhat that way myself when high-sounding explanations begin to miss the plain logic of the situation. If today's western writing were primarily



Ellen Webb, sitting down to eat with her family, the radio on for them to listen to the commodity prices on the Farmer's Noon Hour; or Ellen Webb, driving the day's last truckload of wheat to the elevator and feeling the gratitude that there's no line of trucks ahead of her there, she can dump it right away and have time for a dip in the reservoir on the way home.

Those details are ones I've lived myself--any number of rural westerners of my age, or even a generation older, have lived those details or ones very much like them. The truth in them, the artistic exactness--the minutely organized particulars--radiates right out to me.

So that's one method of diagnosing a book, and with more common sense behind it than other reviewers and critics sometimes can muster. Maybe more than I'll be able to, in trying to identify the ingredients of my own and other works.

First, though, I notice that when Drek Zirinsky asked me sometime last fall to put a title on this talk, I included the subtitle: "voyaging in search of the phrased that as Northwest rather than west Northwest." [I think I ~~did that~~ because of the coastal novel I was completing then, and which will show up in my thoughts here after I talk about This House of Sky and Winter Brothers. But] for scholarship's sake, I probably should nail down what I meant by "Northwest."

Given this gathering of all of you who have to deal with the printed results from those of us who put onto paper words about the American West-- it seems to me a chance to talk over how some of the things that ~~are~~^{show up} in books...get there. ~~Probably~~^{Maybe} some of you have ~~gotten~~^{even} college degrees on the basis of wondering about that.)

The ~~makings of~~^{makings of} a book can be mystifying in more ways than one. I think all of us who write or want to, ~~should~~^{ought to} look at our effort every so often in the light provided by the incident which ~~gave~~^{gives} me the title for this talk. The Danish writer Isak Dinesen tells it in her book which I think is one of the most beautiful of this century--Out of Africa.

characters--Norman Maclean's great and doomed flyfishing brother,
 Paul; Richard Hugo's imagined lover beneath the water of Kicking
 Horse Reservoir; ~~Jim Crumley's shambling wanderer of a writer,~~
~~Abraham Trahearne,~~ Jim Welch's bleak men of the Reservation, Jim
 Loney and Myron Pretty Weasel and the narrator of Winter in the Blood;
 I hope, also on the list, Charlie Doig and Bessie Ringer^{of House of Sky}--the
of recent western literature who seem to
 characters ^{written} ~~who~~ have found a continuing life in the minds of readers [ⓧ]
recently.

I came to a scene where the Puget Sound pioneer I was writing about
a passenger
was ~~sitting~~[↑] in an Indian canoe along the Strait of Juan de Fuca in 1860,
the northern lights were illuminating the night sky, and the pioneer
records in his diary the story told him by a young chieftain of the Makah ^{Indian}
tribe to explain the mysterious sky display ^{above them:}

Under that star, many snow's sail from here in a canoe, live a
race of little men, very strong, who are dressed in skins. They look
like Indians, but they are not taller than half the length of ^{canoe} my paddle.
They can dive down into the sea and catch a seal or a fish with their
hands. Their country is very cold, and they live on the ice where they
build great fires, and that light is the fires of those little people. . .

The Makah Indian

~~Swell~~ as tutor about Eskimo life puts light on something else
for me. ¹

as well. Along the wilderness that was the North Pacific coastland,
more than five hundred

~~thousand~~ miles of broken shore from ~~Neah Bay~~ ^{the Makahs} even to southernmost Alaska . . .

~~many times that distance onward~~
and ~~greater distances beyond that~~ to the people of the ice, ideas of

that sort must have traveled like thistledown on the breeze: canoeing
tribe in wary touch with canoeing tribe, a seed of story deposited, to

be carried along by the next barter-trip southward. By the time the

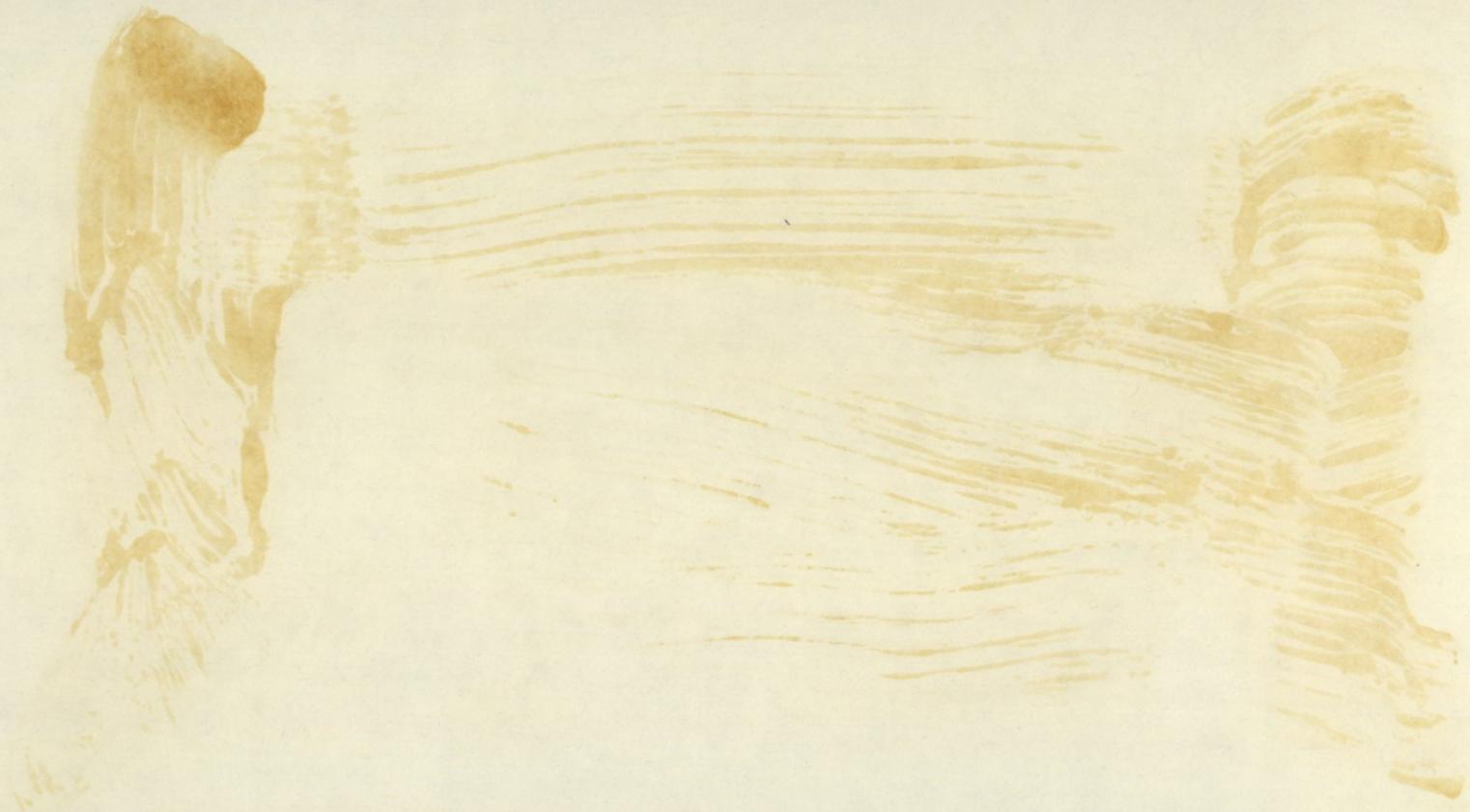
^{Indians} Makah had the story of the miniature ice-men of the north, lore had been
nurtured into legend. I recognize such wafts of alchemy, for I live with

them as well. A morning in the nineteen-twenties a dozen riders are re-
turning to their home ranches after a weekend rodeo. Whenever the horses'

hoofs strike the dryness of a Montana country road, dust drifts up until



from a distance the group looks like men of smoke. Most of the journey, however, cuts across open sageland, and the slap of the gray tassels of brush against leather chaps competes with their talk of the rodeo broncs. Unexpectedly the loose troop reins to a halt. Across a stretch of pasture they have always ridden through, a fresh barbed wire fence glints. The owner of the land emerges from a nearby cabin to explain that he intends to plow the ground, that they can no longer go across ^{that field} ~~it~~. A rider with a notch-scar in the center of his chin--he was my father--grins down at the man and says in his style of half-joke, half-declaration: "We never saw any place yet we couldn't go." Turning his horse to the fence he touches spur to flank, and ^{home} ~~mount~~ and man pass through the air above the blades of wire. One after another the others soar after him, like boys on great birds of sorrel, roan, dapple gray.



The story and its impromptu anthem of the west's last horseback generation have come down to me, on embellishing lips, very much as legends of the Eskimoes ~~must have arrived south to swell.~~ ^{the Makah tribe.} I have read from a folklorist, "The same winds blow spring on all men's dreams." ~~I read once from a folklorist.~~ Whether there were a dozen rodeoers or just four; whether they all lofted themselves in the barbwire steeplechase or just the rider with that starred chin: in the tale as ~~I have received it,~~ ^{it has whiffed to me,} they are twelve and they soar.



Denver 15
E. Long 42

The fuel of Western work also interests me as a writer--food, and drink. Take the first of those, first. I have a rough theory that a person's attitude toward food may say a lot about him--at least, literarily. A person who likes all kinds of vittles is likely a fairly amiable person. And a picky eater is probably a picky person. Of course, this ^{theory} ~~theory~~ is easiest to hold if you're an amiable plate cleaner-upper--~~both of~~ which I happen to be. But anyway, I think food can be a way to say something about a character in a book. In English Creek, my 14-year-old narrator is on a trip into the Montana Rockies with his forest-ranger father, and that father tends to let details take care of themselves, is even a little absent-minded about them, as his son says this way when they stop for lunch:

"Out like this, my father tended to survive on whatever jumped out of the food pack first. He did have the principle that supper needed to be a cooked meal, especially if it could be trout. But as for the rest of the day, if leftover trout weren't available he was likely to offer up as breakfast a couple of slices of headcheese and a can of tomatoes or green beans, and if you didn't watch him he might do the exact same again for lunch. My mother consequently always made us up enough slab sandwiches for three days' worth of lunches. Of course, by the second noon in that high air, the bread was about dry enough to strike a match on, but still a better bet than whatever my father was apt to concoct."

E. L. 44

And, as to the liquid fuel of the West, my narrator ^{a little later} makes this comment: "I have long thought that the two commonest afflictions in Montana--it may be true everywhere, but then I haven't been everywhere--are drink and orneriness." He says this while trying to cope simultaneously with a drunk sheepcamp tender and an ornery packhorse.

~~I call that drink. So he has some grounds for it.~~ I call that provocation.

~~Western~~ ^{Western}

I'm going to save the treatise on orneriness for some other time, except to say that I look on an ornery streak as a virtue, at least in literary terms; "variant of ORDINARY," my dictionary imparts about the origin of "ornery," and variants are some of a writer's best friends. ~~But the Montana capacity for whoopee, liquid style, needs a bit of discussing.~~ ^{one reviewer} ~~in this newspaper~~ I'm gratified that Bill Hornby of the Post wrote, in his ^{paper} ~~in This House of Sky~~ up in Livingston, this review of the tour of bars I remembered from my boyhood.

style

So that's the kind of mulling about the magic of stories that ~~has been~~ ^{going} on when I'm at my typewriter as I ought to be. I'm intrigued with that phrase--"the same winds"--of love and mystery and danger and curiosity and humor and hope--"the same winds blow spring on all people's dreams." It nicely says that there is a common perpetual urge toward storying, to have our lives freshened by the adventure of stories--as if storytelling is a ~~kind of chinook of the western soul, thawing the cold routines~~ of life, promising us warmth and a new green horizon and maybe ~~the first laugh we've had since the thermometer hit thirty below.~~

kind of thawing breeze--a chinook, we would call it up in my part of Montana: a kind of chinook of the western soul, thawing the cold routines of life, promising us warmth and a new green horizon and maybe the first laugh we've had since the thermometer hit thirty below.

You've just heard from the ~~really~~ ^{truly} famous writer of the Valier class of 1957. Now for the runnerup.

If I ever have as many dedicated readers as Wayne, I'll really have it made as a writer.

This is an extraordinary evening for me, with so many ^{long-time} ~~old~~ friends in the audience. ^{People from Dupuyer, and Valier - more people from Sixteen than I ever lived there.} I have to admit to mixed emotions at seeing you all here tonight. I'm flattered you came out to hear me--on the other hand, I had always liked to think I ~~had~~ ^{have} smarter friends than that.

A young lady ~~sat~~ down here at a front table who used to be squinted around by my uncle, Vanete Dorig. ~~and~~ ^{sit} on horseback

What is most extraordinary, and quite moving for me, is the presence here tonight of ~~some~~ ^{two} of the people who are in House of Sky. I like to think that my invitation ~~here tonight~~ ^{to this occasion} is a shared honor--not just to me as the writer of the book, but to the Montanans who people it, who have led the lives I simply was lucky enough to get down onto paper. I'd like to ask ~~some~~ of these co-authors of House of Sky--~~there are at least four of them here tonight~~ ^{two} to rise for a moment of recognition: ~~from White Sulphur, Theresa Buckingham; from Geysers, Susan Buckingham Evans; and from Dupuyer, Harold Chadwick and Tom Chadwick.....~~ I'm pleased beyond any saying of it, ^{Harold and Tom} that you're here tonight.

but I think my pair of wests are alike in two very large ways:
 each has dramatic and challenging landscape, each has a tradition
 of storytelling. At least, I'm drawn to both these elements, whichever
 of my wests I happen to be writing about. In House of Sky, almost all
 of the dialogue is storytelling of ~~one~~ sort or another, the material
 which lodged in my head a few decades ago *and cafes of small Montana towns,*
~~as I listened in the bars of White Sulphur~~
~~and the bunkhouses of ranches and farms out in valleys from those towns.~~
~~or the Chadwicks' cafe in Dupuyer.~~ And the western thread of storytelling--
Pacific Northwest
 the "storying"--caught me up again very early in the book I've just finished,
Winter Brothers.

Quite a few of us guys ^{at the moment} happen, for reasons I'm not ^{at all} ~~entirely~~ clear on, to be from Montana.

Just after House of Sky was published, I had a phone call from a bookstore owner in Idaho. He said he'd just been to a reading Jim Welch had done ^{from his new novel The Death of Jim Loney,} at the university, and he'd noticed Richard Hugo had a new book of poems coming out, and he reported he was selling a lot of Jim Crumley's latest ^{and William Hjortsberg's latest novel,} novel, and he was excited that ~~Norman Maclean's~~ A River Runs Through It

^{at least} was coming out in paperback--finally, "Good God," he said, "you guys from Montana--there must be something in the water up there."

67 Fall

42

Characters, I might say, in fact, who have become your tenants in the libraries, living as they now do between book covers, on your shelves. This storying process I've been talking about of course ends up with you, the librarians. Your own interest in the books which some of us make of the West's trove of stories gets translated into the holdings of your libraries, into recommendations to your library ~~patrons~~^{users}, into the enthusiasm and professionalism which is your gift to society. Without you, we writers and our characters literally are homeless, and I can't pass up the chance to point out that you are as much the conservators, the guardians, of the storytelling tradition of the West as any of us earlier along in the process.

Lunch boxes: add detail about the road

Eskimos: emphasize great distance to the north

"The same wind...." transpose attribution to front.

Tri-Q. Recommend that they order it.

Say something to the librarians about their central role in preserving Western storytelling.

AGENDA

Curriculum and Classroom Support Group

Monday, April 28 - 2:30 p.m.
Room 2216, FOSS

1. Report from Diane Gould re: Flextime group.
2. Status reports from members about their work since last meeting.
3. Short- and long-range directions for this group.
 - (1) Providing information for faculty and college at large.
 - (2) Providing policy recommendations for AFT.
 - (3) Possible involvement in planning or implementing specific projects.
 - (4) Other.
4. Use of questionnaires. Who currently has them? What is the next use to be made of them? Article(s) for Soundings? Analysis? File somewhere?
5. Election of group coordinator.
6. Schedule next meeting.
7. Other.

But I suppose there is...somehow...something more than time span and Scottish stubbornness involved. I have a couple of thoughts, one being that much of my writing ^{output} reflects a fascination with storytelling. That is, not with ^{story} technique, although that interests me too, but ^{with} how people tell their lives. I know I'm not much good myself, out loud, at this. I have a constitutional ~~inability to remember~~ ^{make the most of} ~~or an anecdote,~~ a joke. I spend too much time alone with the typewriter to be very good at telling about how ^{own} my days go...how much can you say about sitting at a typewriter? But in all immodesty, I do think ~~I am~~ ^{I can be} a helluva listener. In the writing of This House of Sky, it seems to me this paid off twice. When I would get bogged ~~down~~ and be trying to think of some fancy ~~format~~ to get the book moving again, my wife would say, "Just tell me the story." ~~So~~ ^{and} that would settle me down.

When one war or another broke out, the British government imposed a number of new taxes, including one on candles. A Scottish housewife asked her storekeeper why the price of candles had gone up.

"It's because of the war," he said.

"The war?" she said. "Gracious me, are they going to fight it by candle light?"

(Br Flksts, 132)

Then too, I'm convinced the book began to take on life when I let the people in it tell their own stories. Out of a lot of years of tapes and letters and notes, I had those stories, and ~~the~~^{they} usually seemed to me to tell themselves at least as well as anything I could do in their place. Sometimes, in fact, they did a whole lot better, and I find that one of the ^{deepest} ~~the~~ veins of mystery in trying to know how writing happens. I have an example.

One of the things I am proudest of in House of Sky is the portrait of Kate and Walter Badgett. They lived in the neighboring house in the tiny town of Ringling when I was in junior high school, and they were very old and ^{very very} interesting. Across almost thirty years, they still loom mightily in my memory. ~~In the brief title section of This House of Sky, Walter Badgett makes his first appearance:~~

out

~~"When I fix my sandwich lunch, in a quiet noon, I may find myself sitting down thirty years ago in the company of the erect old cowboy from Texas, Walter Badgett. Forever the same is the meal with Walter: fried mush with dark corn syrup, and bread which Walter first has toasted and then dried in the oven. When we bite, it shatters and crashes in our mouths, and the more we eat, the fuller our plates grow with the shrapnel of crumbs. After the last roaring bite, Walter sits back tall as two of~~

~~the ten-year-old me and asks down: "Well, reckon we can make it through till night now?"~~

However,

The few pages about Kate and Walter Badgett were hard to achieve. The couple died years ago without immediate family, the friends of their generation mostly are dead, their pasts are both obscure and shadowed. I'm sure I spent at least two weeks on the research and writing of the thousand or so words I came up with about them, and I'm satisfied that, through the resources of memory and description, I caught the pair of them with more exactness than almost anybody else in the book. Here is

a brief bit ~~the part~~ of ~~the~~ ^{that} portrait:

~~There were enormities about the Badgetts which somehow seemed to bolster us simply by existing so near at hand. These began with size and age, and went on through manner.~~ Side by side, the two weathered figures loomed like barn and silo. Kate was pillowed in fat, so wide that she seemed to wedge apart the arms of the huge easy chair where she spent her days. Atop that crate of a body was an owlish face, and a swift tongue that could operate Walter all day long and still have time to tell what the rest of Ringling was doing. On her desk by the front window which looked across the tracks to the gas station and post-office-store, Kate kept her pair of binoculars. Who had come to town, for how long and maybe even what they bought-- it all came up the magnifying tunnel of vision to Kate, then went out with new life, as if having added to itself while re-echoing through that bulk of body.

Then in some midsentence of hers, Walter would appear from one or another of his chores, in his pauseful way looming tall as a doorway, and nearly as still--a rangy silent sentinel with great hands hung on poles of arms. His face was more an eagle's than any other I have seen on a man: the spare lines of brow and cheek and the chisel of nose, somehow with the hint of a beak, and beneath it all, the mouth which turned down sharply at its corners not from mood but just the decades of pursing around a cusp of chewing tobacco. Over the →

cut,

~~...Their was a household at once curt and cordial. Knock on the door, and Kate's voice boomed a single word like an empress's: COME! I was puzzled that she had the habit of calling other women only by their last names. Grandma ~~calling~~ always was simply Ringer to her. But Kate's brusqueness had a vast gap in it. Over the~~

years ^{Kate} ~~she~~ had ironed every thinkable vice out of Walter except for ^{that} ~~his~~ habit of chewing tobacco; for that, he was permitted a coffee can behind the stove to spit in. Yet when she talked to him for any reason besides an order, the tongue that banged bluntly on every other life in town suddenly went soft and crooned, of all words, Hubby.

So, that was my effort to tell something of those two lives. But in ~~the~~ my research, someone had given me the name of a niece of Kate Badgett--a woman I will call, for the sake of her privacy, Loretta Walker. I sent off a letter to her in her small town in Montana, and she responded. Written shakily on lined tablet paper--Loretta Walker is well into her eighties--here is her version of Kate and Walter Badgett:

Now: with all my care and effort and supposed professional skills, did I really do any better at describing the trajectory of those lives of Kate and Walter Badgett than did Loretta Walker, sitting old and unlettered and nearly blind and scrawling her sentences to me?

I would not want to have to bet on it.

The notion here this morning, besides trying to get enough coffee into ourselves to wake up, is for me to describe--for the next half hour or so--the creation of a fictional Montana town^{of the 1930's} for my new book, English Creek. To talk about the Montana-ness of this literary town, at least as I see it.)

~~(When I'm done with that, I'll be glad to have questions, about this town or anything else I'm supposedly up to, these days.)~~

trilogy
I have
to do
more for
1980's.

My name for the place is Gros Ventre. (spell out) As you know, the name of one of the Indian tribes to the north of us, and as the encyclopedia tries to tell me, the name is from the French and properly is something like gro VAHN treh. Right here the Montana background in me begins to come out, and the characters in my book pronounce it Grove on, in that Montana style of improving on French which gives us the front-end-loaded pronunciations of Choteau, ^Havre, and Wibaux.

--OK: to the business at hand. I don't much believe in speeches...so I want instead to bring you some of my work this morning. It's a portion of a novel I'm writing; only my wife, my agent and my editor have read any of it, so collectively you're all the 4th person ^{ever} to encounter this piece of writing.

--set in Montana in Depression...the Hoover one...in the region between Glacier Pk and Sun River: the Two Medicine country. *next to Teton County*

--forest ranger and family...Jick McCaskill, narrator...Stanley Meixell...

--A footnote about words here: Havre...

...in writing about ~~Montana~~ people living in combat with the Montana climate, I am inevitably writing about people who cuss. Myself, I've never understood concern about cussing; I hold with the theory that the first civilized human was the one who cussed out his cave-dwelling neighbor rather than bashing his head with a rock.

But I recognize this is not a universally accepted theory. I don't think the dialogue in this is peppery enough to bother anyone, and I'll try to unpepper it a little more, as I go along, but the characters in this ms aren't real prissy people.

lunch: horse names - Mouse
Pony
Hanser
on way to lookout

Those words--the title section of my first book, This House of Sky--I suppose began my career, of being freighted in for occasions like this, to spout words about words.

I take it that the only conceivable reason for asking a writer to talk out loud is to try find out what he's up to. In-so-far as I know what I'm up to, I'll concentrate--for the rest of my twenty minute slot here--on some of the ingredients of my work: how a writer, or at least this writer, makes books.

The makings of a book--and so far I've made five more, since This House of Sky, (the makings of a book) and have a couple of others wanting to happen--I'm sorry to say ~~XXXXXX~~ have more salt of perspiration than inspiration.

For me, the sweatwork starts with thinking up the situation for a book. The job description is maybe a little odd—staring holes into the trees outside your window while you think... "what if?" What if... two people had been in love... had a war of the heart and snapped apart... but still had to work... in the same office? What if it was a really small office, the size of a... motorhome? Three years of what-iffing, and here is this book--what if I called it, Ride with Me, Mariah Montana--featuring a newspaper photographer named Mariah, her emphatically ex-husband Riley Wright the reporter assigned with her to do a series of stories for Montana's centennial--~~going~~ ^{the 2 of them} ~~being~~ ^{struggling} newly-widowed father, Jick McCaskill, around the state (by Mariah's father Jick, who's mad at both of them) in his Winnebago.

As the characters themselves find, ~~the real trick to life is getting from here to there.~~ if you don't watch out, life turns out to be what's happened to you while you were busy making other plans.

So,
 1 The writer, or at least this writer, has to make the words and sentences add up day by day--the arithmetic of creation. ^{Along with} ~~Within~~ the daily woodpile of words, though, the carvings of craft have to add up, too. In the course of my first novel, The Sea Runners, I got in touch with a park ranger up at Sitka, who was an expert on the carpentry and shipbuilding that went on there when Alaska still was Russian America. He gave me not only the working details I needed, for some scenes in The Sea Runners, but he also wrote out for me a quote from the English poet William Blake:

"Art...cannot exist but in minutely organized particulars."

When I'd finished blinking over the literary and philosophical bent of park rangers these days--probably something he had needed to get through the era of ^{Reaganomics} ~~James Watt~~--it occurred to me that the quote explains much of the craft that I believe has to go into the writing of a book.

An example: at one turn of the plot in Ride with Me, Mariah Montana, the three main characters visit the family ranch that the reporter, Riley Wright, turned his back on for a newspaper life instead. Riley's ^{rancher} brother Morgan Wright shows up briefly to confront Riley-- and here is Morgan's appearance:

"Morgan stood spraddled, thumbs alone showing from the weather-worn hands parked in his front pockets, as though it might take all the time in the universe to hear this matter out."

The vital word, what is sometimes called the crystalizing detail, in that sentence is the verb "parked" /--those hands "parked" in the front pockets of ~~his~~ Morgan's bluejeans, habitually, naturally, not stuck in his pockets, jammed in his pockets, but just by God parked. And I only worked ¹⁰² about half a day to come up with that one precise word-- that minute particular.

The details that make a book sound believable--the write stuff, the W-R-I-T-E stuff--do not just stroll up to a writer and volunteer themselves. They have to be located, coaxed, tracked down, spied at, eavesdropped on--whatever it takes. In the middle book of this trilogy I've just done, for instance, English Creek, I needed to know the details of a haying season in Montana in the 1930's, when the haying machinery still was run mostly ~~by~~^{by} horses instead of horsepower, so that my narrator would have that experience--the memory in him, of "the leather reins in my hands like great kite lines to the pair of rhythmically tugging horse outlines in front of me." When I was a kid just after World War Two, my dad was a haying contractor every summer, and his crews largely put up hay in that old workhorse way. So I did have my own memories to bring in and use. But, I had to admit to myself, those days when I was a red-headed kid in a hayfield are getting to be a long time ago, in a galaxy far away.

So to add other memories to my own, I ran little classified ads in weekly newspapers in Montana, asking to hear from anybody who had worked on a haying crew there in the late 1930's. I heard from about a dozen people, and in corresponding with them or talking to them, I captured the details I needed.

But it doesn't stop even there, the writer's quest, job of enlisting the right details onto the waiting white space of paper. Because, sometimes those details have to be heard with the eye, and seen with the ear. Among the people I heard from, in echo from those little ads I'd run, was a woman who took in laundry from hay crews. I wanted details, did I? The laundry lady had them, in her letter to me. The only problem was, in an already crowded book there was no room to bring in a character just to do the laundry.

But those passionately precise details she had written to me kept on humming to my eye every time I re-read the rhythms of her sentences, they kept showing themselves in my ear as a unique and valid performance. And so, not in English Creek, and not even in the next book I wrote, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, but in this book, those details of hers finally danced onto the page--not in haying country at all, but in this quite different vignette written by the reporter in ~~Maxiah Montana~~ Ride with Me, Mariah Montana--himself a fictional character:

"Age is humped on her small back. It began to descend there in 1936 in daily hours over a washboard, scrubbing at the Missouri-mudded clothing of the men at labor on the biggest earthen dam in the world, Fort Peck. "We went there with just nothing, and my husband J.L. got on as a roustabout. I wanted to find some way of earning, too, so I put up a sign LAUNDRY DONE HERE. I charged 15¢ for shirts--and that was washed, ironed, mended and loose buttons sewed on--and 10¢ for a pair of shorts, another 10¢ for an undervest, 5¢ for a handkerchief, and 10¢ for a pair of socks. Any kind of pants was 25¢ for washing and pressing. I had the business, don't think I didn't. Those three years at Fort Peck, I always had six lines of clothes hanging in the yard."

deep voice

I don't know--maybe that soliloquy on hand laundry registered on me so powerfully because writing seems kind of like that: hanging out sentence after sentence, hoping each one will dance on the wind, yet stay pinned to some visible means of support.

And as with any chore, it's useful to be reminded that we're not the first ones who've ever had to do it... and who've managed to do it, maybe even have shown us how to do it with a little distinction.

Maybe, though, we must hope that writing is always beyond the grasp of governments.

Our best guarantee of that, I suppose, is to keep our work on the frontiers of imagination. That, indeed, might even be in the novelist's job description. Fiction is a deliberate dream. Probably any writing--done with passion--is. At least so it seems, in the daily surprise, when you are a writer, and you sit down to a keyboard, to see what the fingers have to say to you. . . and they begin, "In the night, in mid-dream. . ."

9:50

19 min. Danya

One reason I like to hang around booksellers is that you always have your priorities straight. When Sue Skiles called to ask me here tonight, she said-- "Just get up and talk about your new book for twenty^{-five} minutes or so. Then the dancing can start!" (So here I am, with a few bars of Montana mouth music before ^{real} the band revs up.)

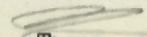
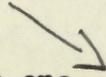
It's one of the most puzzling things a writer is asked to do--to tell what his book is about. John Gregory Dunne once told of the revelation he and his wife, Joan Didion, had when they were starting out as writers^{years ago.} Dunne and Didion were collaborating on a screenplay, what they thought was a strong dramatic story of two young lovers, both of whom were drug addicts--a script they were calling Panic in Needle Park.

We have a blurb quote ~~from~~ for English Creek from Wallace Stegner, which is going to be on the back of the book jacket in lettering not quite as big as ~~on~~ a billboard: "There is no room in the days of the McCaskill family for the cynicism and plain blahs that infest many modern lives and the fiction that reflects them. Hard and limited as it is, this is loved life, and loved country. "

I'm glad that shows through. Thanks for listening--strike up the dance band.

I take it that the only conceivable reason for asking a writer to talk out loud is to try find out what he's been up to. In-so-far as I know what what I've been up to, I'll concentrate here on some of the ingredients of my work--how a writer, or at least this writer, tries to draw on "the Northwest", tries to search out elements to make books out of.

The makings of a book--and so far I have made four and one-fifths books, which are set either ^{out} here along the coast or in Montana--the makings of a book can be mystifying in more ways than one.



~~The makings of a book can be mystifying in more ways than one.~~ I think all of us who write ought to look at our effort every so often in the light of an incident told by a writer I have admired all of my own writing life--Isak Dinesen. As you may know, Isak Dinesen is the pen name of Karen Blixen, the Danish writer who died in 1962. She has received some attention ^{lately} ~~in the recent past~~, with a marvelous biography of her by Judith Thurman published a couple of years ago--and a lot more attention is on its way, with plans for Robert Redford and Meryl Streep to star in the film of Isak Dinesen's most famous book--which I think is one of the most lovely of this century, Out of Africa.

2

And besides having to be approximate about my own interior landscape, there is the problem that the word place itself has so many dimensions. About three and a half pages of them in the Oxford English Dictionary--and in my own American Heritage dictionary that I instantly retreated to, thirteen different definitions of place as a noun, twelve usages as a verb. A word that sprawls all over the place--which is a phrase I didn't find anywhere amid all those definitions.

Before I try to stop it from sprawling uncontrollably through this talk--that's pretty much what a writer does, nag at his language to sit up straight and stop sharing its corn flakes with the dog--before I get going on deportment, I want to give Eric Sandeen a little heart murmur by saying that I think a sense of place is often over-rated in work such as my own.

a Western talker. In his own way, I think he was a kind of a Western writer, too.

Thank you for coming tonight to listen.

Montana poems by Lynn Adams Dierdorf in PAINTED BRIDE QLY, in archive box:
possible use in Wyo?

Finally, I'm finding for the third book in a row--and very different kinds of books they are: a memoir, a winter journal, and now a work of fiction--I'm finding that my writing about this region takes on life when I let the people start talking.

A quick example from House of Sky. A way to evoke my grandmother, a rather sharp-tempered lady who had her own notions about ^{how} our neighbors in Montana small towns ought to behave, was to turn her loose again on those neighbors, in the remembered sayings from her in the pages of the book:

"She goes around lookin' like she's been drawn through a knothole backwards."

"That pair is close as three in a bed with one kicked ~~out~~ out."

"That Vinton tribe must never heard that patch beside patch is neighborly, but patch upon patch is beggarly."

POSSIBLE CUT: Riddley Walker, 10 minutes from end.

--p. 37, line 2--make it "This last example I want to give here today is a brief one from my ^{own} recent work."

--p. 39, cut last graf; end with "seems to be my crocodile," go to last graf of p. 44

Today I've been asked here to think out loud a little--instead of sitting staring at my typewriter and waiting for it to tell me what to think, as I do on other mornings--to think out loud about stories, and what they mean to us. What they mean, in my belief, to all of us--in the sciences and professions, as well as the humanities.

Before I get going about stories, though, let me say that in the theme of this Development Day--"Excellence and Innovation in Education"--I consider that I'm here to speak up for the excellence half of that theme. For the excellence that humans are capable of, when they concentrate life into the diamonds of stories. I am not here to spiel innovation at you, to "develop" you, to motivate you--at least in any professional or financial sense. From all I can see, you already work about ~~three~~ ^{twice} ~~as~~ ^{as} ~~times~~ harder ~~than~~ this society is willing to pay you to work.

And the innovation I want to see is in America's attitude toward education, not in any attitude of yours. In my kingdom, we would turn the Pentagon budget over to schools and colleges, and every time the generals wanted to buy a bullet they could hold a bake sale. (pause)

So, here I am, simply to think out loud to you about stories and the sense of craft that I believe they ^{help to} preserve in us. Myself, I'm in the business of catching stories. Hunting them, corraling them, looking them over--trying to pick out the next likely one, the best of the herd. It's a strange occupation ^{I suppose} pre-occupation, some people might say--but at least it deals in one of humankind's best urges instead of the wide market of humanity's worst urges. The urge to know all the shapes and sizes and colors life comes in; that, I think, is why stories are told, and get listened to.

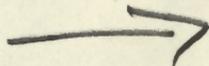
We know that stories become vital to us, very early.

So, let me see now what I can do about my novel English Creek--a story set, as my earlier book This House of Sky was, ~~along~~ in Montana, along the face of the Rocky Mountains--about a family in the 1930's, trying to pull their way out of the years of the Depression into better times--a tale of a rural valley, of its small town, of its summer of ranch and forest work, ~~and~~ an unforgettable 4th of July celebration--full of characters and humorous affection for them reminiscent, say, of listening to a Prairie Home Companion, a powerful parable of...

You know, that agent ^{maybe something there.} had ~~the right idea~~ ^{How about} just describe it. This House of Sky, as told by Garrison Keillor.

Romeo & Juliet on horseback

yesterday was the delivery day of the bound books, shipping is supposed to start on Monday--now that the book is really a book, I see some results in it I never intended. Never knew enough to intend. For instance, when I was finishing ^{with} up the very last of the writing of English Creek, I happened to read somewhere that John Gardner used



A few things I guess you need to know beforehand:

--7-year-men

--dim view of the Russians

--Meländer; from Gotland

--Karlsson: carousing outside the stockade--gate down by Sheffield Hse
Pavel

--Bilibin: Prince in War & Peace; 15 drops

Braaf--thief, and accomplished sneaker

Wennberg--blacksmith who has forced his way into the escape.

--they need to get control of the gate

--they need to get rifles for their journey, from the officer's ~~clubhouse~~ ^{clubhouse}

Kolosh

Slushai--harken; listen up

Silka

Like to thank...wd like to ~~do~~, but there are so many I've frankly
lost track. And so I'll ^{simply} thank command ~~control~~ on all this, the
honchoes at Old Harbor Books--Don Muller, Marilyn Newman and
Carolyn Servid. - clustered - Rob + Servid

— doubleheader: 20-25 min SR; 10-15 of current novel - then q & a.

A warning before we start: I've never read aloud this particular
portion... One thing, there will be another version: the Radio
Reader...

This may not seem a very guestly thing to do, but I thought I'd
read tonight the portion of Sea Runners where my characters are
desperately escaping your fair town. I emphasize this takes place
in 1853, not now--given the current amenities here such as KCAW,
Old Harbor Books, the nightly rock band at the Shee Atika, I'm sure
now you wouldn't be able to drive these guys out of town with a
stick.

You get the impression that somewhere just out of sight, there must be a catering service, maybe someplace around Omaha, that comes out and feeds everybody, and does the chores.

Nonsensical as that sort of portrait of the west is, it does have consequences: it fudges the terms of life in much of the actual American west and northwest--that this is a big, contentious part of the country where you're often fighting weather and distance, or both, and which requires a lot of work to make a living.

The Virginian's remarkable way with words reminds me that the language of the west and northwest is another fuel ~~of~~ for the writer.

Given this gathering of all of you who are interested, in one way or another, in the printed results from those of us who put onto paper ^{our} words about the American Northwest--it seems to me a chance to talk over how some of the things that show up in such books--get there.

The makings of a book can be mystifying in more ways than one. I think all of us who write ~~books~~ ought to look at our effort every so often in the light provided by the incident which gives me the title for this talk. The Danish writer Isak Dinesen tells it in her book which I think is one of the most beautiful of this century--Out of Africa.

• diff/c betn a person who is a writer,
& 1 who does some writing.
Was Conrad - seaman a writer?

So far as I can tell, my interests as a writer likely are going to keep on taking turns, focusing back and forth on the two chunks of the West I happen to know anything about--the Puget Sound and coast country here where I live now, and Montana along the rim of the Rockies where I grew up.

Then of course landscape, a particularly powerful element for a Western writer of either fiction or non-fiction. I'm not sure how you handle this big country as playwrights. Maybe technology will take care of it--maybe we'll see the day when holography or some other kind of ~~is~~ laser magic can simulate on the stage whatever setting you want--but in the meantime, I don't have much advice.

The novel I'm working on now, for instance, involves the coast all the way from Sitka down to Astoria. As the Montana landscape was in *This House of Sky* and the Cape Flattery country in *Winter Brothers*, I'm trying to use the North Pacific coast itself as a kind of character--a constant presence, and source of metaphor.

Any wish any could tell you about. North Pacific...

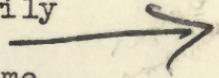
PARODY OF Michener's lead of Tales of S. Pacific...

I wish I could tell you about the South Pacific. The way it actually was.

Well, I respond to that ^{contention} pretty much the way of the Scottish housewife at the World War One, ^{a set of} outbreak of ~~a war~~, when the British government levied ~~new taxes~~ for the military effort. She demanded of her shopkeeper why the price of candles had gone up, and he told her, "because of the War." "Oh," she said, "I hadn't realized they're going to fight this one by candlelight."

cause & effect

^{Scotch} Like that housewife, I think high-sounding explanations often miss the ^{plain} logic of the situation. If today's western writing were primarily ~~a literature of place, of landscape instead of people,~~ ^{and their stories,} it seems to me ^{a kind of} ~~it would simply be travelogue,~~ instead of the rich and varied cast of ~~characters who have found a continuing life in the minds of readers~~.



One of the mysteries of life is why writers get asked to talk. To me, that always seems like inviting somebody who sits around humming absent-mindedly to himself all the time, to come on downtown and stand in the middle of Main Street and do some yodeling.

But you have asked for it, or at least Warren Street has, and so here I am. And my tune for today is how some of the things that show up in books such as mine, get there. Given this gathering at an honors college named for perhaps the greatest American Northwesterner, William O. Douglas--given such a special occasion, ~~and~~ I want to talk about how a writer is able to draw on a region ~~from his own~~--Justice Douglas's region, yours and mine--for his work.





Seattle P-1,
Mar 18, '80

By Paul O'Connor

Sure and if it wasn't Joe O'Feldman servin' as a marshal in the St. Patrick's Day parade that spread a nonstop smile along Seattle's Fourth Avenue sidewalks yesterday noon.

And you shoulda seen 20-stone Scotsman Michael McGilvray up from Tacoma and lookin' grand in his kilts, tam and velvet green jacket.

Says he, "We Scots always march with the Irish. Someone's gotta tell them the difference between right foot and left foot."

At least there wasn't the belliose blaring of the Scots' marching-to-war bagpipes. The parade

stepped off from the King County Courthouse at noon, with politicians and an Irish priest in the front line and with the Ft. Lewis band playing "McNamara's Band."

Being a school day, the parade and the crowd were not all that big. But downtown traffic was pressed into the celebration for about a half hour.

Larry Henricksen watched the marching through the windshield of his car, stopped at Fourth and Seneca. "It's better than watching a train," he said.

And there was Northwest Airlines pilot Moon Mullins wearing a forest green uniform with metal "I.R.A." tabs on his epaulets. He

SCOTSMAN MICHAEL MCGILVRAY of Tacoma marches with the Irish to "tell them the difference between right foot and left foot."

Chan. 9

- Wisham of Sauer beer's idea
- budget \$80,000; 24 samples
 - shooting 9:1 (vs 30:1)
- advisory committee
- script: worked from mine
- 2d wks in Jan. - Pt Tnd
 - Near Bay of Cape #
 - Hot rain forest of LaPusk
- Article photos
- people assume TV is Cysteryn - "school"
 - o 1/30th tunnel

Histms Guild
UW / Feb. 10, '82

- novel - difficulty of book drop
- Silba: pacing off stockade
 - Jerusalem: Teubner maps
 - Tom Hill: most expensive
 - Alpha Helix
 - World call - Vnaminie
 - Slenhai

heard at Carolyn Blount's book group:

Scots say, we feed oats to our men, 'Eng feed it to the horses.
We're famous for our men, .. " are famous for the horses.

(invert)

Again, a source of metaphor, of distinct regional flavor. So the voices of the people of the West, the turns of phrase, the topics in a Montana bar of my boyhood or in an Indian lodge at Neah Bay a hundred years ago or in barracks at Sitka in 1852--those I think are the most valuable words. At least they're the ones that speak to me from up off the paper, and demand that I damn well get busy and come up with some words of my own.

This storytelling to himself can be very direct in a Hugo poem.
and famous
The first lines of "Degrees of Gray in Philipsburg":

You might come here Sunday on a whim.

Say your life broke down. The last good kiss

you had was years ago....

You can see how Hugo invites you, the listener, to join in the story of that poem...

The storytelling tradition of the West, then, I think can give a writer ideas about how to put his work together. It also seems to me there is a kind of oxygen, a breath of life, which stories provide a writer about the West.

a literature
of place, of landscape instead of people and their stories--of
"Western experience with vast emptiness at its center"--it seems
to me it would simply be a kind of travelogue, a slide show of
scenery
~~landscape~~, instead of the rich and varied cast of

characters--Norman Maclean's flyfishing brother; no one of any imagination at all can wet a line in a Montana trout stream now without seeing, in the shadow on the water, ~~Maclean~~ Paul Maclean making his powerful cast; A.B. Guthrie's mountain men and Oregon-bound families of The Big Sky and The Way West; Dorothy Johnson's man called horse; Jim Welch's men of the reservation, Jim Loney and Myron Pretty Weasel, and Lame Bull, and the narrator of Winter in the Blood; I hope, also on the list, Charlie Doig and Bessie Ringer of This House of Sky--the characters of modern western literature who seem to have found a continuing life in the minds of readers.

I'm convinced that, when I was writing House of Sky, the book really began to take on life when I let the people in it tell their own stories. Out of a lot of years of tape recordings and letters and notes, I had those stories, and they usually seemed to me to tell themselves at least as well as anything I could do in their place. Sometimes, in fact, they did a whole lot better, and I was baffled as to how to keep up with them. I have an example.

I won't vouch for the usefulness of a story which can come in a dozen different versions, but I think we are exceptionally lucky, as western writers, that stories ^{of our region} can come in quite a number of different formats. The book I've just completed, for instance, is based on a pioneer's forty years of diaries--which in a sense is a forty-year day-by-day story. And I think I've read that of the great epic across the plains and mountains, the wagon trains coming west, some ~~nine~~ ^{nineteen} hundred ^{of so} diaries of those jourmeyers survive.

One of those in particular, from your own land of Wyoming, always strikes me as ^{offering} one of the most vivid stories possible.

but I think my pair of wests are alike in two very large ways: each has dramatic and challenging landscape, each has a tradition of storytelling. At least, I'm drawn to both these elements, whichever of my wests I happen to be writing about. In House of Sky, almost all of the dialogue is storytelling of one sort or another, the material which lodged in my head a few decades ago as I listened in the bars and cafes of small Montana towns, and the bunkhouses of ranches and farms out in the valleys from those towns. And the western thread of storytelling--the "storying"--caught me up again very early in ^{my Olympic Peninsula} ~~the Pacific Northwest~~ book ~~that~~ I've just finished, Winter Brothers.

Up until ^{right now} ~~tonight~~, I had what I thought was a pretty good record, since ^{of behavior} House of Sky was published at the end of last September. I'd managed to get by with giving just one speech, and that one to a hometown crowd in Seattle, and ^{been on any panels or} hadn't given any readings at all. Then I picked up the phone last week and ~~it was~~ Bill Kittredge had me by ear.

- source of notes to be here, in company of Bud & Mac
...interim book; Montana novel ahead

▼▼▼ Swan's background

...Typist went a little crazy...it's truly elegant...You may hear better-written things, but you're never going to hear anything that's better typed than this.

...the left hand is the italic.

E'burg 45

"Doig's depiction of the sociology of saloons in White Sulphur Springs as seen by a motherless tag-along to a foreman father is vintage." Perhaps inspired by that, I've made up a locally notorious Montana saloon for English Creek, and named it the Medicine Lodge. In a more perfect world, I suppose a western writer no longer would hang around small-town bars to hear what's being said. ~~It~~ ^{Instead} It would perpetually be the first really pleasant evening of June and we would all be out on the screened-in porch, looking at the Rockies, sipping herbal tea and discussing quantum physics. But in the imperfect meantime between here and there--the Stockman Bar in White Sulphur, the M and M in Butte, the Oxford in Missoula, the Ranger in Dupuyer, and a few hundred other Montana watering-holes serve not only as ^{my home} ~~the~~ state's saloons but its salons.

In any event, Winter Brothers, the book of mine set on the Olympic Peninsula, ~~out in Washington~~, is the one that speaks to me ^{next} of a couple of further regional writing ingredients.

Those are some coastal thoughts about what goes into my writing, and now to ^{go}~~come~~ across the mountains again, to Montana again, which is what I'm writing about and for the next some years. now, I mentioned my interest in the workaday West, the craft of making a living out here.

So, those are at least a handful of the makings of books such as mine,
 and ^{maybe} ~~I think~~, those of ~~some~~ other ~~western~~ writers as well. They seem to me
~~this corner of the country~~
 ingredients we haven't even begun to exhaust. And ~~the west~~ being the worthwhile
 place it still is, there seems to be incentive for writers to continue to work
 with these materials.

Just among the writers I once in a while see or hear ^{or about,} ~~from~~ there's
 considerable fiction on its way, right now. Bill Kittredge intends a novel
 set in his home country of eastern Oregon. ~~A.B. Guthrie will have a book~~
~~out this September, which will continue the lives of some of his characters~~
~~from the Big Sky.~~

54A
 follows

Norman Maclean has been at work on his much-awaited Montana forest-fire novel. Jim Welch ^{is well along on} ~~has begun~~ a historical novel about the Blackfeet, which sounds superb. As I've confessed, I'm typing away in the eternal hope that the next--can be my best. And I read that Ken Kesey is talking of doing a novel set in Alaska.

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So, across the next few years, I think the prospect is for quite an output of ^{books} ~~novels~~ set here in our part of the country. We're at least trying, as ^{Jack Dinesen's} ~~the~~ houseboy Kamante wanted, to make our pages hang together from ~~one~~ one end to the other. With a little luck, maybe some of them will even turn out to be good enough to be bound in blue.

Thank you for inviting me today.

#

Friends down here at your end of the Rockies tell me Denver has been celebrating its 125th birthday. I bring you a historical ^{greeting} birthday wish, of sorts, by way of Scotland. For a month ^{past} this summer I poked around in Scottish libraries and archives-- I'm working now on a novel about Scotch homesteaders who came to Montana in the 1880s, as my own grandparents did--and I was over there in Glasgow and St. Andrews and Edinburgh to try to figure out what kind of life those people left, when they made their immense journey to the west of America, and what ^{their} ~~the~~ voyage was like. In the archives at St. Andrews, I came onto the letters of David McNeil, who in 1889, late in his life, decided to move from Scotland to Utah ~~as his son had done, several years before.~~ David McNeil's letters were vivid about his journey to become an American westerner. He wrote, when their ship was hit by ^{an atlantic} gale:

"Tins, trunks, barrels, everything movable flew from side to side--and we poor human things held onto our bunks like grim death."

After McNeil got ashore, he headed for the American West, which had its own kinds of shocks for a Scotchman--McNeil wrote home that "clothing costs long prices here"--and his journey now brought him here to Denver. Of which, he wrote home to Scotland in the fall of 1889, "Denver looks as if it commenced last week--and might be moved somewhere else, next week."

I got a glimpse of your town from the plane this morning, and it looks as if you can probably begin thinking about leaving it here.

The West is the topic of my books--and so by common sense it's my topic here tonight. I want simply to talk a bit about ~~what~~ a few of the regional ingredients that go into my work.

And work is where I may as well begin, for as a writer I am interested in the working rural west, people full-time on the land. To me, the work people do is a way, for me as a writer and for other western writers I admire, ~~is~~ a way to focus into life in the West. There's the line in James Welch's famous Indian reservation novel, Winter in the Blood--the description of a lazy bale piler the narrator is working with in a hay field: "He had learned to give the illusion of work, even to the point of sweating as soon as he put his gloves on." Now, I've worked with that guy, too. Anybody who's ever been on a haying job probably has. The truth in that, the artistic exactness, radiates right out *of that line.*

Boysman

The humanists in charge of Eastern Europe "velvet revolution" (Havel, Christa Wolf...

review underlined portions of AN ARTIFICIAL WILDERNESS, by Sven Birkerts.

(chow-SHESS-cue's)
Andrei Codrescu on NPR, Jan. '90, revisiting Rumania after C'cu's overthrow:

"It is not only possible to run a revolution with poets, it is necessary.

Got to keep those bells ringing." (Church bells were ringing in Bucharest that day for 1st time in 40 years.)

--Codrescu on that visit said he was being invaded by Rumania from the ground up.

"As ~~Branch~~ the baseball tycoon Branch Rickey used to say,

'Luck is the residue of design.'"--Phil Berger, "The Business of Comedy,"
NYT Magazine June 9 1985

architectonic: pertaining to architecture or design

WHA72

--Missah Turner, he still ain't dead, or so I gather from (confces)...

His power of rhetoric.

--Social History of the Machine Gun (apropos my Chf J site/missile silos)
(also Ch J's speech as done by poet Linda)

--use metaphor.

One of my ostensible writing friends tells me I missed a bet with my title character of Ride with Me, Mariah Montana. What I ought to do, he says, is tell you she was inspired from the song "They Call The Wind Mariah," which probably at this very moment is being crooned by a Frankie Laine imitator at Caesar's ~~Palace~~ or The Sands. But the fact is, she's named after a river, one that sang in my ears in the northern Montana country I grew up in, the Marias. The book's epigraph is from the Lewis and Clark journals, of the June day in 1805 when Meriwether Lewis explored that flow of water and wrote:

. . .I determined to give it a name and in honour of Miss Maria Wood called it Maria's River. it is true that the hue of the waters of this turbulent and troubled stream but illy comport with the pure celestial virtues and amiable qualifications of that lovely fair one; but on the other hand it is a noble river...

(Meriwether Lewis, June 8, 1805)

"She did nothing too suicidal in firing off her clicks as a pony-sized calf suckled on its mama or the proddy old bull buffalo laid down and vigorously rolled, kicking all four legs in the air as he took his dust bath--up until where ^{Mariah} ~~she~~ climbed onto the top of the Winnebago to see how the buffalo scene registered from up there.

My heart did some flutters as Riley and I listened to her prowling around on that slick metal roof. My flutters turned into genuine internal gyrations as the old bull shook off the last smatters of his dust refreshment, stood for a minute with his half-acre head down as if pondering deeply, then began plodding directly toward the motorhome.

"It must take nerves of utter steel," Riley observed to me.

"What, to be a photographer?"

"No, to be Mariah's father."

As for Riley, the feature writer, he turns out things like this on his laptop:

They named the place Butte, in the way that the night sky's button of light acquired the round sound of moon or the wind took to itself its inner sigh of vowel. Butte was echoingly what it was: an abrupt upshoot of earth, with the namesake city climbing out of its slopes.

Beneath Butte's rind of sagebrush and rock lay copper ore.

That red earth of Butte held industrial magic: telephone lines, radio innards, the wire ganglia of stoves and refrigerators, everything that made America electric began there in copper.

The red copper earth drew other red to it. Bloody Butte, with its copper corpuscles. A dozen miners died underground in 1887, the early days of more muscle than machinery. In 1916, as the machine drill and the steam-hoisted shaft cage pressed the implacable power of technology against flesh and bone,

Butte's underground toll for the year was 65 miners. The next year, a fire in the Speculator Mine killed 164. All the while, the greater killer quietly destroyed men's lungs: silicosis, 675 dead of it between 1907 and 1913.

On its earth and its people of the mines, then, Butte's history of scars. Badges of honor, too, as scars sometimes are? It depends on how much blood you mind having in your copper.

So, Mariah and Riley are your average overachieving gifted brilliant newspaper people, thrown in together for their Winnebago circumnavigation of Montana with each other and with Jick, their highly reluctant combination chauffeur, chaperone, and shotgun rider. The road they're on is both freeway America of today and the backroads West, trafficked by the motorcycle rider who pulls up beside the motorhome at seventy miles an hour, reaches over and knocks on the driver's door and indicates he wants a light for his cigarette-- and by the jobless migrant who ends up broke and barefoot in a rest area--and by a ubiquitous country-and-western band called the Roadkill Angels.

Ride with Me, Mariah Montana finishes the trilogy I've spent the past ten years working on--English Creek having taken place in Montana of half a century ago, and Dancing at the Rascal Fair beginning with the start of Montana's century of statehood in 1889, and this one is the most up-to-the-moment book I've done in what are now four novels and two non-fiction books of looking at America and its times through a west window. If I have any creed of writing, it's that I believe writers can ground their work in specific land and lingo, and yet be writing of that larger country--life.

Thank you for being here and listening, and I'll be glad to see what I can do with any of your questions.

8 min.

Selba / 1

One of the mysteries of life is why writers get asked to talk. It always strikes me like inviting somebody who sits around humming absent-mindedly to himself to come on down ^{town} ~~to the middle of main street~~ and do some yodeling.

But you have asked for it, and so ^{here} ~~hear~~ I am--and my tune for the ^{evening} ~~day~~ is how some of the things that show up in books such as mine, get there. Given this gathering of all of you who are interested in the past of this region--and of the present, as well, which becomes history even as we sit here--given this group, I want to talk about how a writer is able to draw on a region for his work.

I'm not real sure I ^{should be} ~~want to~~ talk ^{ing} to a bunch who'd get up at this hour just to hear me. ~~Now, if you've been up since last night and this is just a refueling stop, that's a different matter. That's more the Montana I remember.~~
~~Could he, though, that~~

Some of you maybe were in the audience at Billings a few years ago, when I stopped in the middle of a speech to play a few tape excerpts I'd used in writing This House of Sky. Up there at the podium next to the tape recorder I could hear just dandy, and only afterward did I learn that nobody else could hear those excerpts at all. Well, any of you who remember that--this morning, I can promise you, is going to be an entirely different proposition. What I've got here today is a slide projector which probably isn't going to work.

Missoula reading intro: Sept. 30 '87

This campus has given me a lot of good moments in my life. They began the first time I was ever here, as a high school junior at the state track meet, when I was a not very apt javelin thrower for Valier High School. And there was the memorable time of the Who Owns the West conference here in the spring of '79, and the people I heard read their work--Jim Welch, AB Guthrie, Norman Maclean, Dorothy Johnson, Richard Hugo, and Madeline Defrees. A lot of friends go about their work here on this campus--Bill Kittredge and Bill Farr my and Duane Hampton and Harry Fritz. And certainly this university, and this English Department, are graced by one of the best minds and best persons I've ever known, Lois Welch.

A few years ago,

While I was in the basement of the library doing research for English Crick, Max Crawford was a floor above me writing Lords of the Plain.

*Bill
Berry
Juliette
Crump*

- it simplifies things to have all yr friends named Bill -- no, actually there are non-Bill friends as well on the faculty here ^{such as} Juliette Crump &

- Dir of Creative Writing who is responsible for getting me here today -

Bob asked me, before I get down to some reading, to talk a bit about the origins of my books--how they get from idea to being bound in hard covers. I don't have a terrifically long track record, at least as regards general, non-text books. I've written a total of two and 9/10s such books--This House of Sky, Winter Brothers, and the 9/10ths is a novel being published this fall, The Sea Runners.

2

Of course, the arithmetic of creativity is all in how you count. One of Henry David Thoreau's early books didn't sell well, and Thoreau ended up with stacks of them---he wrote a friend soon after and said, "I now have a library of almost a thousand books--more than 800 of which I wrote myself."

But even in sticking with my own two and 9/10ths estimate, I thought tonight I should focus on just one of those, and it might as well be the one set here in the Rocky Mountain west--This House of Sky.

I can pin down some of the history of how House of Sky came into being, and intend to in a few minutes, but as to where the notion of the book came from, I can't be quite so definite. It simply seemed to me that the life of my father and my grandmother and me, in a kind of unlikely household, was a ~~pretty~~ ^{decently} interesting story. Also, I was thinking over or working on the idea during an inspirational period for a free lance magazine writer, as I then was — the Nixon presidency and Watergate.

I should, I suppose, say something about my writing habits---
but I don't know what to use-fully add once I've said "habit."
I've recently been reading the letters of Flannery O'Connor,
though, and I think she gave a good summary of how to put
words onto paper.

The next spring, House of Sky was nominated for a National Book Award--and it since has come out in paperback, and sold about as many copies as in hardback--nearing 20,000 copies of each. It continues to ricochet along, and have its what-the-hell-is-gonna-happen-next history. It's recently been bought by a German publishing house--my command of German is of the variety that Heinrich Schnibble used to practice on the jokes page of the old Saturday Evening Post, so when the contract came from Germany I sent it to my lawyer with a note asking him to look over the details of how we were going to publish Haus im Sky-en-ge-uppen.

Well, that's pretty much how This House of Sky has happened so far. I think it's maybe time to get to the book itself.

I thought tonight I'd read to you about sheep. Sheep I kdon't think have had their full due in American literature--and it's spring, lambing time. Time for sheep.

- ranch called Camas when I was 12. Ran by man named McE.
a disclaimer - any propriety you may hear from now on is purely my character's, not my own.

Frederic Remington--if I dare mention that name in Charlie Russell's town--once titled a book, Men with The Bark On, which seems to me a full story in itself. You don't really need to look up the book.

"Death speaks: There was a merchant in Bagdad who sent his servant to market to buy provisions and in a little while the servant came back, white and trembling, and said, Master, just now when I was in the market-place I was jostled by a woman in the crowd and when I turned I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture; now, lend me your horse, and I will ride away from this city and avoid my fate. I will go to Samarra and there Death will not find me. The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant mounted it, and he dug his spurs in its flanks and as fast as the horse could gallop he went. Then the merchant went down to the market-place and he saw me standing in the crowd and he came to me and said,

Why did you make a threatening gesture to my servant when you saw him this morning? That was not a threatening gesture, I said, it was only surprise. I was astonished to see him in Bagdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight, in Samarra.

PNBA

- some cards transferred
to Playwright Conf. talk

It's good to be here tonight among so many of you I've become acquainted with, as a result of House of Sky. At least, I hope I'm safer here than I have been in going before ~~groups~~ some other groups. I talked to a book club here in town one night, and afterward a woman came up and said in indignation: "I've read your book, and I thought you'd look tougher somehow." So, those of you who already know me, don't have to go through letdown of that sort, ^{tonight.}

speech
material -
winnow

But the one strength writers have is stubbornness, so we did not keep away, and we've proved to be equally hard to starve out. It turns out that the sustenance which keeps at least some of us going is the atmosphere of ^{combined} ~~the~~ region itself--the "feel" of the geography ~~itself~~ and of the country of the mind, memory. In fact, it's beginning to be thought that maybe writers by now deserve a place at ^{larger} ~~the~~ tables than ~~me~~ just our typing stands. A week from now, I'll be in Billings, at the Montana History Conference, where the historians are putting together a gathering of us literary loiterers who have written about Montana--Norman Maclean, Richard Hugo, A.B. Guthrie, James Welch, Spike Van Cleve, ^{me. *} ~~A kind of~~ ~~man of the cave~~ ~~coyotes.~~ A year from now, there's to be a major academic symposium at Corvallis on Northwest regionalism.

You may be glad to hear that I've already turned down an invitation to that one, on the grounds that the best thing I can do for regionalism ^{will be to} ~~stay~~ stay home and finish the coastal novel I'm working on.

So the notion of regionalism seems to be having its day again. The value of a region, such as the Northwest, as a place worth some pride and faith and hope and endeavor, is not such recent news to writers as it ~~is~~ seems to be to convenors of conferences. Ecotopia, Ernest Callenbach's book of five years ago, was after all a feisty secessionist republic of the future stretching from Lake Tahoe to Bellingham--knit together by magnetic-suspension trains built by Boeing, which we're still waiting for.

John Keeble's ^{novel} Yellowfish, of earlier this year, was a ^{book} ~~novel~~ whose diction and storyline I didn't always entirely agree with, but which I admired for its ambition, in seeking the east-west patterns of this upper corner of the country.

Writers' versions of regionalism of course would ~~not~~ be only noise at the typewriter if it weren't for our accomplices in this dissent from the homogenizing of America. Booksellers. You people are the ones purveying this stuff of ours, after all. When the rest of the country catches on to what's been happening out here, you'll be right in there as accessories.

Now, I take it that the only conceivable reason for asking a writer to talk is to try find out what he's been up to. In-so*far as I know what I've been up to, I'd like to talk a bit about the resources which this region of ours provides to writing such as mine.

I don't at all work from some profound definition of the Pacific Northwest, or of who or what a Pacific Northwesterner really is. I've liked, and been content with, Norman Maclean's quoted definition from his brother Paul,

~~I've liked Norman Maclean's quoted definition from his brother Paul,~~

→ in A River Runs Through It:

"Practically everybody on the West Coast was born in the Rocky Mountains where they failed as fly fishermen, so they migrated to the West Coast and became lawyers, certified public accountants, presidents of airplane companies, gamblers or Mormon missionaries."

So, those seem to be at least a couple of ways this region of ours is influencing my work recently. It seems to have other accents to put into my typewriter as well. ~~In~~ The novel I'm at work on--a historical incident I came across, a sort of 19th century Northwest version of Deliverance, which I'm fictionalizing--takes place between Sitka and Astoria, and so the geographical sweep of this coast from the Gulf of Alaska to the mouth of the Columbia seems to be asserting itself in it. The book beyond that, according to what mutters I've heard from it, so far, evidently is going to draw on the language and memory of ranching life, probably again in Montana. All in all, I think those Board of Immigration people of a century ago were right to be concerned...that writers might find this region a ^{promising} ~~good~~ place to linger.

Keith R. Oliver, Bellevue businessman and "sometime book collector," submitted this piece of interesting information. He writes:

"Eighty years ago last March, an Easterner introduced to the world what has since been recognized as the first Western. In fact, his book is said to have practically created the classic American cowboy.

"The writer was a 42-year-old Harvard graduate and Philadelphia lawyer, Owen Wister. The Western he wrote is 'The Virginian.'"

Set in 19th-century Wyoming, the novel became something of a classic. Wister spent several summers on a ranch in the area, absorbing atmosphere and knowledge for his story.

Although wondering why Wister made his Western hero a Southerner, Oliver defends the novel as presenting an outlook on life that is "brave, decent, wholesome, humorous and honest, mixed with human frailty that makes the story ultimately very real and appealing."

The book has been reissued many times and in several languages, including Dodd-Mead's edition in its Great Illustrated Classics series in 1968, Oliver adds.

S. Times April 18, '82

Montana State U. honors banquet speech: photocopy of full speech in '84 letters file with other MSU stuff. Missing cards from this version were replaced into U. of Wyoming "Trying To Place It" speech.

Trying To Place It

MSU - 9 June 1
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By Ivan Doig

Most likely I shouldn't admit this until I have the honorary degree safely in hand tomorrow, but part of the plot of English Creek, my novel that will be published this fall, involves a Montana family of the 1930s, who badly want their son to go to Bozeman to college--and ^{he} just as badly doesn't want to go. Had I known I was going to be asked here for this commencement weekend, I might have made that boy more reasonable toward this place.

Place is in fact what I want to talk about here tonight--a Western writer's sense of place, in the literary currents of the world; and my own sense of place from having been born and raised in Montana.

Fairly often these days, contemporary writing about the west of America is called a literature of place. A literature, I suppose ~~that~~ that means, which focuses

Begin with the beginning. I come from a place. I originate, as an American, from a place in a specific Montana sense of the word, ~~is~~ another usage which doesn't seem to have reached the dictionary-makers ~~is~~ of Oxford and Boston ~~is~~ Place, meaning an abandoned homestead. Small ranch or farm, either one, but abandoned, given up on, because of the winter of 1919 or the bank failures that rippled through Montana in the early 1920's or the Depression, or death or disgust or any other of a hundred reasons.

And at one of the first mealtimes, somebody said to me, "Well, you're doing pretty good on the binder with that master's degree of yours. Maybe if you go get a Ph.D., you can get to drive the tractor." At the time, I laughed with everybody else. (And none of us even knew that someday I'd be over here getting a degree we'd never heard of.) But I know now what was happening, in those mealtimes at that ranch, with the constant question--which place is mine? I did get a Ph.D.--but I did not go back and ask to drive that tractor. Those places among the hired hands at that table--none of them were mine, or ever going to be, if I could possibly find any way to be on my own in life ~~and not take the wage of a job I didn't respect.~~

Now to the third and last sense of place I'm aware of in myself, the one that has been making itself known to me ever since I sat down, more than ten years ago, to write something I called my ^Montana book, which turned out to be This House of Sky.

Trying to place it. To place it, first in the sense of identifying--as my dictionary helps out here, "to recollect clearly the circumstances or context of." As in the phrase, one that I myself have to resort to often, "I remember your face but I can't place you."

That's the first side, of trying to place it. And then the next, trying to place it in the sense of putting something into place. Setting. Arranging. Making it be where it ought to be.

This is the carpentry part of writing. Building a book the reader will want to live in. Hammering together a solid basic structure, then taking care with the finishing-work, making sure you've got the details right.

Time and again in the past couple of years, as I've worked to create a fictional ranching valley called English Creek, up in the Two Medicine country, I've sat at my typewriter trying "to recollect clearly the circumstances of" portions of my Montana past. Some comes easily enough. I haven't been around sheep full-time for twenty-five years and yet when I start to write about how sheep ranching was, I know at once--who can ever forget?--what a sheep rancher's mood was, late in lambing, when his feet were aching from all those weeks of living in overshoes.

But memory is not always enough. In fact, pretty damn seldom is your own memory enough when you're trying to write accurately. I make it a habit to try check details with people who know more than I do. Two quick examples, again from the carpentry on this English Creek novel.

In my own Montana life, I have definitely eaten cake at a Fourth of July picnic, and on other occasions I definitely have had to skin dead sheep. Yet in writing this novel which takes place about the time I was born, I found I had no idea what kind of a cake that might be at a Fourth of July picnic in that part of Montana, back then; and I wasn't dead-sure about the sheep-skinning any more, either. So I wrote to one friend, a ranch wife now living in Great Falls, whom I knew would have been a teenager in the late 1930's and asked her what kind of cake her mother brought to the Fourth of July picnic--and I wrote to another friend, Horace Morgan, who's been a sheep rancher out here by ^Maudlow, and asked him to give me step-by-step directions for skinning a sheep. The cake turned out to be a chocolate sour cream one, and the details of sheep skinning, you don't want to hear about this soon after supper.

So those are a few of the notions that come to mind in me, when "a sense of place" is mentioned. Not just geography, unmatchable as so much of the Montana landscape is. But "place" as something to work from, and work on, and work toward. In a forthcoming manuscript I've just read, a book called Sky People by a north-of-Spokane writer named Jack Nisbet, there is a story about one of his neighbors, a wiry rancher in years-old blue jeans, sitting around the kitchen with his hat on, drinking coffee, and the rancher says something like, "I haven't been all that many places. But I've seen things where I've been." Do I even need to add, that rancher was a Montanan?

#

18 1/2 min

In the arranging that goes on in the writing of a book--the process of trying to put things into place, make them be where they ought to be--I think a writer's main tool is his eyesight. At least I've always found it a good idea when I'm attempting to write about something to do with the American West, to go out and take a look at it. For my novel of a couple of years ago, The Sea Runners, the story of a long water journey from Alaska to the Columbia River, I bummed a ride down as much of that coast as I could, aboard the University of Alaska oceanography ship. The captain let me stand beside him in the wheelhouse--right under the big red sign that said "Crew members only allowed in the wheelhouse"--and from an hour before dawn until after dark, from Juneau to Seattle, day after day I stood and looked at that coast and water, and made notes about it.

For this Montana novel, Carol and I have been back here the past three summers.

Part of that research has been to wander around various towns and choose buildings for my fictional place of Gros Ventre--Carol taking photos for me while I made notes about our home-made town.

Gros Ventre, Montana, as we've created it, has the mercantile store from Augusta, the creamery from Conrad, the library from Lewistown, a bar from Choteau, and so on.

Personal experience isn't always an available tool. When it's not, and I'm attempting to write about something to do with the American west, I try to go/out and take a look. For my ~~previous~~ novel, The Sea Runners, the story of a long water journey from Alaska to the Columbia River, I bummed a ride down as much of that coast as I could, aboard the University of Alaska oceanography ship. The captain let me stand beside him in the wheelhouse--right under the red sign that said "Crew members only allowed in the wheelhouse"--and from an hour before dawn until after dark, from Juneau to Seattle, ^{day after day,} I stood and looked at that coast and water, and made notes about it.

For ~~this current novel~~, English Creek, my wife Carol and I ^{came} ~~have been~~ back to Montana ^{several} ~~the past three~~ summers, ^{in a row.} Part of that research ^{was} ~~has been~~ to wander around

✓ various towns and choose buildings for our fictional place of Gros Ventre--

Carol taking photos for me while I made notes. ~~The barber pole painted on a fancy granite portico column, for instance, we noticed in the little Highline town.~~
 The mercantile store of "Gros Ventre" is from Augusta, for instance, ~~of Chester, the more is from Augusta,~~ the creamery from Conrad, the library from Lewistown, and so on.

We're on our way to Montana again now, ~~for~~ for the sake of my next novel-- a book about the homestead era, ~~and the generation of people before my~~ (Cote) ~~English Creek cast of characters.~~

~~But~~ just taking a look at something doesn't make you an expert, and I'm certainly

✓ ~~I'm~~ no expert on the architecture of small towns of the American west.

What I do try to be expert at, is recognizing my own ignorance of a topic-- and going and asking somebody who does know something about it. Patricia Bick, of the Historic Preservation Office at the Montana Historical Society in Helena, sat down with Carol and me and told us what features popped to mind in her, in thinking of how a Montana town of the 1930s looked. ~~Again, the triggering effect~~ ^{now} in the upper corner of my notes from that talk with Pat Bick, there's a small sketch of a right angle and the jotting, "bank entrance often on corner, with steps." From that came my image of the catercorner two bank buildings of Gros Ventre, staring down each other's throat.

Then, the last of this literary construction job, the finishing-work.

Making sure you got the details right. This I try to do by checking with people who know about those details. For ~~this English Creek novel, which has a haying season in it,~~ the haying season in English Creek, which took place about the time I was being born, I ran little classified ads in the Dillon and Deer Lodge newspapers, asking to hear from anybody who had worked on a haying crew in the late 1930's in the Big Hole Basin--^{a famous hay area of Montana} ~~a famous hay area of Montana~~ and mowers men and hay cooks, I did hear from about a dozen people, from scatter rakers to a woman who took in laundry from the hay crews--she had the best stories--and I ^{was} ~~ve been~~ able to check ^{my} ~~details~~ of haying with them.

This checking of details, incidentally, reminds a person not to trust your own experience--that sense of where you are--not to trust it too far.

By the time English Creek was done I

~~Since before Thanksgiving, I've~~ had a stream of correspondence going, trying to check details of ^{that} ~~my~~ book with various Montanans. Two quick examples. In my own life, I have definitely eaten cake at a 4th of July picnic, and on other occasions I definitely have had to skin dead sheep. Yet in writing this novel I found I had no idea what kind of a cake that might be at a 4th of July picnic in that part of Montana, and I wasn't dead-sure about the sheep-skinning any more, either. So I wrote to one friend, a ranch wife, whom I knew would have been a teenager in the late 1930's and asked her what kind of cake her mother brought to the 4th of July picnic--and I wrote to another friend, who'd been a sheep rancher, and asked him to give me step-by-step directions for skinning a sheep. The cake turned out to be a chocolate sour cream one, and the details of sheep skinning, you don't want to hear about ~~this soon~~ after ^{supper} ~~break~~.

"The clouds have settled on her mind," the boy's mother tells him. A phrase he never, never has forgotten. A phrase he thinks more and more about as he heads toward old age himself.

All of this, because I figured my home-made town ought to have a hotel.

cut? ↙
 Richard Hugo, ^{our own great} ~~the~~ poet and head of creative writing at the University of Montana until his too-early death ^{a few years} ~~about a year and a half~~ ago, has done the best job of explaining this creative energy that comes from a sense of place. In his book, The Triggering Town, Hugo writes: "A poem can be said to have two subjects--the initiating or triggering subject, which starts the poem or 'causes' the poem to be written, and the real or generated subject, which the poem comes to say or mean, and which is generated or discovered in the poem during the writing."

Comes now ~~the~~ critical question. Why the hell go to all that trouble?

In my own case, the answer seems to be that the people of my books, the language of my books, have to have a place. A place that means something to them. ~~I've mentioned~~ I mentioned a bit ago my fictitious ^{Western} ~~Montana~~ town of Gros Ventre, built by my typewriter for English Creek--and currently I'm writing an earlier version of it, for the homesteader novel ~~which will take place in the couple of generations before English Creek~~. A big hotel sits at the end of the main street of Gros Ventre. Listen for a minute or two now, to what this hotel, its presence and its history, triggers in my narrator, Jick. Jick was a 14-year-old in this summer of the 1930's when ~~there~~ English Creek takes place, and he is telling the story from now, so he is a man of around sixty, doing some thinking about life.

The boy has ~~arrived~~ ridden into town, early, for the 4th of July picnic and rodeo. It is a special day, his ^{best} ranger father has lent him his own horse, and ^{Jick} ~~the boy~~ is sashaying through town, sightseeing on horseback. He rides down the main street, ~~past the buildings I described to you, in ~~this~~ my town of~~ Gros Ventre--and approaches the hotel. He knows, from stories, that part of this town's history always has been a big hotel sitting across that far end of Main Street; in fact, he has seen pictures of the original hotel that sat there.

From the book:

There at the far end of Main Street a broad false-front with a verandah
beneath it was proclaim^{ed}g:

beer liquors cigars
meals at all N O R T H E R N H O T E L lunches
H ours put u P
c.e. sedgwick, prop..

P-r-opp, period--short for Proprietor, but the town joke was that old
C.E. Sedgwick, who spent most of his time leaning against a verandah post with
his thumbs in the straps of his bib overalls, did seem to be propping the place up.

Again from the book, the boy's narration:

38

The Northern burned in the dry summer of 1910. Although, according to old-timers, "burned" doesn't begin to say it. Incinerated, maybe, or conflagrated. For the Northern blaze took the rest of the block with it and threatened that whole end of town; if there had been a whisper of wind, half of Gros Ventre would have become ash and a memory. Sedge being Sedge, people weren't surprised when he decided to rebuild. After all, he went around in those overalls because what he really liked about being a hotelier was the opportunity to be his own maintenance man. But what Sedge erected still sat ~~this Fourth when I was atop Mouse,~~ across the end of Main Street as a kind of civic astonishment, ^{III} a three-story fandango in stone, quarried from the gray cliffs near where English Creek joins the Two Medicine River; ^{straddling the entire block,} ~~half a block square,~~ this reborn Sedgwick hostelry, with round towers at each corner and a swooping pointed ornament

in the middle, rather like the spike on those German soldiers' helmets.

Even yet, strangers who don't know that the Pondera county courthouse is twenty-two miles east in Conrad assume that Sedge's hotel is it.

Sedge in fact contributed to the civic illusion by this time not daubing a sign all across the front of the place. Instead, only an inset of chiseled letters rainbowing over the entranceway:

I C K
 W H
 G O
 D U
 E S
 S E

Sedge sold out in 1928, to a family from Seattle who seemed to somehow eke a living out of that big gray elephant of a hotel even after hard times hit. ~~(Even during the Depression, whatever travelers there were had to sleep someplace, I suppose.)~~ About 1931 Sedge died, ~~of pleurisy~~, and almost as if she'd been waiting just offstage, his widow emerged as ^{one of} ~~probably~~ Gros Ventre's most well-to-do citizen^s and certainly its looniest. Lila Sedgwick was a tall, bony woman. Her build always reminded me of Abraham Lincoln. Almost any day she could be seen downtown three or four times, some days six or eight, for she no sooner would get home than she would forget about having just gone for the mail or on some other errand and would go for it again. In her long old-style dresses and with those Lincoln arms and elbows

poking out she inevitably was a figure of fun, although the one and only time I said something smart about her, my mother's frown closed *me* down in a hurry.

✓ "Lila Sedge is not to be laughed at," she said, ~~not in her whet-stoned voice but just sort of instructively.~~ "The clouds have settled on her mind."

I don't know where my mother got that, but always after when I would see Lila Sedge, creeping along this street for the third time in an hour or gandering up at a cottonwood tree as if she'^d never encountered one before, I would wonder about how it was to have a clouded mind.

Somewhere in there, I supposed, a bruise-colored thunderhead that was Sedge's death. Maybe mare's tails high away in the past where she was a girl. Fluffs which carried faces--aunts, uncles, schoolmates, any of us she happened to meet on the street--in and out of her recognition. Until my mother's words about Lila Sedge I had never thought of ^{the} weather of the brain, but more and more I have come to believe in it.

36 min.

All right. In that excerpt, look at some of the things that have taken place, because this boy--and the man who was that boy--sees that hotel:

--The original hotel burned "in the dry summer of 1910"--a historically dry summer in that part of the west. Three million acres of forest burned just in the Bitterroot fire of that year, along the Idaho-Montana line--and there were severe fires even on the east face of the Rockies, where I've put this fictional town. The fate of that original hotel thus becomes part of actual history.

--The rebuilt hotel, the fancy stone version, is the town's centerpiece; the one distinctive building visitors notice--"What is that, the county courthouse?"

--Which leads to thoughts of the people who built this thing. Old C.E. Sedgwick in his bib overalls but with a headfull of grandeur. And now his widow, Lila Sedge, who's gained the wealth from that hotel, but at the same time is losing to age.

One of the mysteries of life is

~~I wonder~~ why writers ^{get} are asked to give speeches. It always strikes me

like ^{inviting} ~~asking~~ somebody who sits around humming absent-mindedly to himself to come on

down to the middle of main street and do some yodeling.

~~My guess is that~~ ~~general~~
~~I suppose~~ there's ~~a~~ curiosity as to how a writer's going to behave once

he's out from behind the ^{hermit-like} ~~the~~ shelter of his typewriter. Today, though, for propriety's

sake if nothing else, ~~I want~~ ^{I'm going} to keep the topic on my ^{own} ~~side~~ of the writing machine,

or at least somewhere within that strange tapping behavior which somehow turns

the keyboard's scrambled alphabet into a book.

But if I don't care much for working out some recipe to describe this region, I do care, greatly, about the tang of some of its ingredients. Two in particular were powerful to me in the writing of *Winter Brothers*, the book that's on its way from the warehouses of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich to your bookstores this very minute. I hope, I hope.

Swan and Indians

I gather that ^{cultural} anthropologists and experts on Indian coastal art sometimes get a bit miffed with Swan. They'll be studying the artwork of the Makah tribe of the last century and ^{all at once} ~~suddenly~~ find themselves looking at a Chinese dragon, or the double-headed eagle emblem of the Hapsburg Empire. ~~Swan~~ As ^{Swan's} ~~the~~ diaries record, the Indians were intrigued with the new motifs Swan could dig up for them out of his books, and often would ask him to decorate their artwork himself. (p. 38)

The cultural swapping went both ways. I find the language of the Indians ^{constantly} inserting itself into Swan's diary. He'll ^{casually} write something such as, "the Makahs tell me I have a skookum tumtum to live in this schoolhouse all alone, because the memelose might come up into the house through the cracks in the floor."

over

"Skookum tumtum" ^{means} ~~is~~ a brave heart, or strong heart, and "memelose" were the spirits of the dead--but Swan has no need to translate those terms or even to think them into English, they've become part of his vocabulary.

Swell quote, p. 7

Winter brothers quote, top of p. 37

--traded lore; each was interested in adapting to the other's culture.

Swan's own talent as a minor artist and major appreciator of art seem to have been his ticket of acceptance among the Makah Indians in his years with them at Neah Bay. The Makahs, as ^{Swan's} ~~his~~ diaries record, were interested in the fresh motifs Swan could provide out of the collection of books he packed around the Pacific Northwest frontier with him. So when Makah artwork featured a Chinese dragon, or a double-headed eagle of the Austrian imperial crest, Swan and his illustrated books likely had been on the scene.

One other

Another regional element that went into Winter Brothers is maybe less expected. It's

~~A few other regional elements that've helped me, I can mention just quickly. One is~~

food. Early in the research for Winter Brothers, I noticed that James Swan was

an enthusiastic and fearless cooker and eater. ^{This} It dates from his ^{very} first years ^{out} here

~~north of the mouth of the Columbia,~~
on the coast, ^{up} down at Willapa Bay, when he shared a cabin with an old sea captain

who tried cheffing up all manner of wildlife--including a spectacularly unsuccessful

try at baking a skunk. Swan's diaries across forty years enthuse about whale mince

pie and halibut head chowder and something he called beef hash a la Makah. I

kept reading this ~~stuff~~ ^{from the diary pages to} stuff out loud ^{to my wife} Carol--she kept telling me,

put it in the book--and Swan's frontier ~~food~~ ^{MENU} is probably the single thing most

reviewers of Winter Brothers have ^{commented on.} ~~impressed with.~~

Why Swan?

p. 11, "back where we have never been..."

We live in a community of time, as well as the community of people who happen to be drawing breath along with us just now. James ^{Gilchrist} Swan and his forty years of frontier diary seemed to me to provide a path back into the ^{neighborhood} ~~part~~ of that community of time ^{which} ~~that~~ interests me most, the history of the west of America.

When he first came to the Pacific Northwest in the early 1850's, Swan questioned an old Indian woman ^{named Suis} about the meaning of the names of the Indians in her tribe. Suis at last got exasperated with Swan's questions, and ^{said to} ~~told~~ him,--
Look: our names are just like yours, some mean something and some don't. Your name, Swan, is like our word Cocumb and means a big bird, and ~~Moox~~ Captain Lake's name is for water, like ^Dhoalwater Bay out there. But ~~But~~ what about Russell and Sweeney and the other white names, what do they mean?

OVER

Swan had to admit he didn't know, and Suis told him, well, that's just the way it is with us. We don't necessarily know what names mean. All we know is that they were the names of our ancestors--the elip tillicums, or first people.

~~It struck me, while reading that, that Swan is of our own elip tillicums--~~ first people--the firstcomers who brought our white tribal culture to the Pacific ^{Nath} West, and so to me ^{Swan} is a kind of original tribal bard for us.

The irony is that Swan, who probably had a better "feel" for the Indian culture the coastal native way of life, than any other white man in the region at the time, and a vaster respect for ~~it~~ ^{became a} ~~was the~~ ~~first~~ cutting edge of change for that culture. ^{Swan} ~~He~~ felt he had very mixed luck in trying to teach the Makahs the English alphabet, yet by now, after generations of schoolteaching such as Swan began at Neah Bay, there is a federal grant to try ^{to} preserve the Makah language, which has been eroded and eroded from the tribe as English has taken over.

Edinso and fleas, 206 Slugs, 225

The sense of story is very rich in Swan's diaries of life along this Pacific Northwest coast. The Indian cultures had magnificent storytelling, and the white pioneers of course fashioned their own lore, in the saloons and homestead cabins, anywhere they gathered to talk. (go to "hard winter forecast" card, Swan's love of Indian gossip and story.)

hard winter forecast, p. 95 (also return of fish)

Swan loved gossip and lore, and his diary pages are chocked with what the Indians say to him day by day. Occasionally some of it is ^{quite} ~~very~~ funny--the Makahs were a a people who hunted whales from canoes, a community vivid tribe, full of passion and humor. Swan and the Makahs one day were standing around the beach at Neah Bay, watching young ^{U.S.} naval officers test-fire a mortar which was stashed ^{out there} ~~at Neah Bay~~ for some obscure military reason or another, and as the ~~dashing~~ ^{were} young navy men ^{solemnly} plooped mortar shells out into the Strait of Juan de Fuca, one of the Makah elders named Old Doctor nudged Swan and said, "Wouldn't that be a great thing to ^{hell} ~~hunt~~ whales with?"

Cape Flattery grandeur, p. 75

That passage I believe is from Swan's ^{scholarly study} ~~monograph~~ on the Makah Indians, written for the Smithsonian in the 1860's, and it's unusual language from him. Swan is generally straightforward in his diarying; he is a kind of inspired clerk, somewhat the way Samuel Pepys of the British naval office was. I say of Swan at one point that he had "arithmetic in his eye" --p. 90.

189

owl-Indian, p. 113

Swan was respectful, generally, of the Indian beliefs. (NWC, p. 197, tomanawos of whites)

"My turn may come," p. 234

That diary entry was in the winter of 1893. As morose a time as it was, Swan's turn did not come next. He lived on for seven more years, with the diary pages showing his dwindling health, and his chronic poverty--and very moving to me, because my own family received similar kindness in their small town in Montana, the diary shows ~~kindness~~^{affections} from the people of Port Townsend to the old man. One ~~day~~^{Swan} buys a packet of blue dye and ~~it~~ transforms his ragged^{faded} old suit, and when he ~~went~~^{goes} uptown, everyone^{he meets profusely} admired the results, asked^{handsome} him where he got the new suit of clothes--I think a wonderful bit of bolstering an old man's spirits. Then, at last, Swan ~~died~~^{vanished} with his century. In the spring of 1900, he died at age 82, and all that he left were a few ragged belongings, and some debts, and ~~the~~^{those} 2½ million^{glorious} words within his diaries.

42d birthday, ~~5~~ 80

Swan shows loneliness at times. During the last of the Civil War years, he was the farthest west white pioneer in America, living alone in the tower of the schoolhouse where he taught...

Women

It sounds rough and tumble, but an example of that sort can be accounted for by alcohol, as might happen in our own society. Actually, Swan agreed with the observation of Lewis and ~~Jack~~ Clark...NWCp. 160. Swan himself then notes: p. 161. There's the further point that Swan reports, in I think 1880, that the Makah women have the voting right in the new tribal council--this was some 40 years before American women nationwide got the vote.

"The season at the edge of America" which turned into both Winter Brothers and the subtitle of that book, dawned to me from the diaries of James G. Swan. We live in a community of time, as well as the community of people who happen to be drawing breath along with us just now, and Swan and his forty years of frontier diary seemed to me to provide a path back into the neighborhood of that community of time which interests me most, the history of the west of America. I didn't see why a person should have to be a tinsel-haired entertainment star, or an overpaid athlete, or a discredited and defrocked Watergate politician--currently we can add faltering financiers to that book list--to be eligible to have ~~your~~ his story told. (Books of that sort I believe are going to prove to be, in historical and literary terms, just a kind of dandruff of society.) But stories such as Swan's,

of a solitary pioneer who virtually every day between the Civil War and his death at the turn of this century wrote conscientiously of his life and the life of the other white westcomers and the Northwest coastal Indians around him, I think those stories rise from the broad bloodstream of this country. They're a kind of pulse of our everyday past.

More than that, too. James Swan the pioneer diarist led me on to what became a regional ingredient in my writing of the book, ^{Winter Brothers,} the native art of this coast.

The book, as you may know, draws on the forty years of diaries of an Olympic Peninsula pioneer, James Gilchrist Swan. I was interested in exploring back and forth between Swan's era in this region, and my own-- "a kind of border crossing of time," I say at an early point in the book.

The question was, how to structure such a book.

Well, I've had a total of two college English courses in my life, but in one or the other I must have heard it proclaimed that form should fit content. If I was writing about a day-by-day diarist, why not do it in the form of a day-by-day diary?

Not forty years worth, ~~of~~ of course, because there I'd be in that trap of logic described in the Borges short story, where the zealous map-makers

construct ever larger and more accurate maps, until the maps get to be the same size as the country. But a season's diary, a span long enough in which to do some exploring, and a period of time natural to us.

Comes now the first regional writing ingredient, the one straightforwardly said by the title: weather. Winter. Specifically, the winter of 1978-79. I've always been baffled by the dismal reputation of winter out here, by complaints about the sameness of our coastal winter weather. Months of ankle-deep Chicago suburban slush--now that's sameness. So I felt Northwest winter, with its day-by-day possibilities, its mood of "well, what's gonna happen next?" might be the proper framework for the book.

Early on in Winter Brothers, I tried to express this angle of view into winter:

"No winter I have spent in the Pacific Northwest--this will make an even dozen--ever has been as grayly bland and excitementless as the season's reputation. "Oh, Seattle," anyone from elsewhere will begin, and one of the next three words is "rain." There can be winter weeks here when the Pacific repeatedly tries to throw itself into the air and out across the continent, an exhilarating traffic of swooping storms. Other durations when the days arrive open-skied and glittering, the mountains of the Olympic and Cascade ranges a spill of rough white gems along two entire horizons. All else quiet, this modest valley where I live invites wind, the flow of air habiting to the southwesterly mood of winter and arriving into this green vee like

rainflow to a stream bed. Oceanburst or brave thin days of sun or spurting breeze, Northwest winter I enjoy as restless, startful."

That particular winter, '78 and '9, more than came through for me. Among its other exertions, you may remember, it drowned the Hood Canal Bridge. There were periods of brilliant frosty weather, and of various moods of rain, and of fat fresh snow at Mt. Rainier when I borrowed a cabin there, and of black ice on that last fifteen miles of roller-coaster road to Neah Bay. At the same time, in Swan's diaries as I gleaned through them, was his weather, of a century or more ago.

The nineteenth of December, 1865, at Neah Bay: "Crust of ice on the snow... The Indians have inquired of me frequently during the month when the sun would begin to return north. They say the fish are all hid under the stones and

The second regional asset I found myself able to draw on for Winter Brothers, came as more of a surprise to me. James Swan was a perpetual provider of surprises--he had so many forms of livelihood in his four decades along the Strait of Juan de Fuca, and also you never know what gossip or incident from the Makah Indians or the white residents of Port Townsend is going to turn up in the diary pages.

^{table time}

All the ~~food~~ in Winter Brothers in fact may have accounted directly for
~~its~~ ^{account} ~~the~~ favorable ~~comment~~ ^{treatment} the book in the New York Times Book Review. The reviewer
there was Raymond Sokolov, who for some years wrote a column in Natural History
magazine on regional ^{eating} ~~food~~. (In the writing business, you take the breaks where
you can get them.)

Incidentally, this artwork of the Haidas seems to be truly infectious. When I received the first copy of Winter Brothers from the publisher about ten days ago, I found that the folks back there on Third Avenue in New York had chosen as illustrations for the title page and chapter pages, Haida tattoo figures--~~which Swan~~ ^{by Swan} traced from the torsoes of a Haida canoe crew visiting to Port Townsend in 1873.

But my personal time-traveler, my ideal "what if," would be Isak Dinesen among the Northwest tribal artists. Think if we had an Out of Africa set on the Northwest coast in the late 18th or early 19th century, what a profound deep look we would have into the wonder of the tribes and their art. And also what tales we might have from the tribal point of view, of this tiny Danish storyteller-- Karen Blixen, when out from behind her pen name--among them like a dark small human butterfly.

But, given that Isak Dinesen happened into Kenya rather than the Queen Charlotte Islands, my own middleman of coastal art of course has been James Swan.

~~Still, I hadn't expected Swan to be the middleman of art he proved~~
~~to be.~~ Swan's ^{own} talent as an artist and appreciator of art seem to have been
 his ticket of acceptance among the Makah Indians in his years with them at
 Neah Bay. The Makahs, as ^{his} ~~the~~ diaries record, were interested in the fresh
 motifs ^{Swan} ~~he~~ could provide out of the collection of books he carried around
 the frontier with him. So today when ~~anthropologists~~ or experts on native
 coastal art come across Makah work featuring a Chinese dragon, or a
 double-headed eagle of the Austrian imperial crest, ^{they tell me} ~~they know~~ ^{figure} Swan probably
 has been on the scene.

But the art lessons ran both ways. Swan became deeply interested in the native art of this coast, particularly the art of the Haida tribe. To keep up with Swan's dabblings, specifically some writing he did about Haida artwork and a collecting trip he made for the Smithsonian in the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1883, I began to ^{try} look at that art and to read the brilliant analytical books by Bill Holm and Bill Reid. ~~What I read from them was, I suppose, precisely the sort of thing I wanted to hear.~~

himself a magnificent Haida carver:

Sentences from Bill Reid

32
masterpiece
of NW coast art
Rare
Discard
Marking
in a
clam
shell

"In Northwest coast art, perhaps more than in any other art, there's an impulse to push things as far as possible."

And: "Haida artists worked mostly within a rigid, formal system, but occasionally burst out and did crazy, wild things which out-crazied the other people of the Coast."

And yet again from Bill Reid:

"They weren't bound by the silly feeling that it's impossible for two figures to occupy the same space at the same time."

For a writer trying to imagine himself back into the life of someone born a dozen decades before him, that last sentence is particularly the sort of thing you like to hear.

From Bill Holm's analysis of form in ^{his book} Northwest Coast Indian art, I got lessons in the immense sophistication of that work. That there was painstaking use of standard design elements, yet as Bill put it, there was "easy transition from form to form" within a piece of art. That there was flow, connection, relation, double meaning, curvaceousness. Something was always happening in that art, any design element was on its way to add meaning to all the other elements.

~~I decided, again without going to extremes--such as taking out my Swiss army knife and starting to carve the story as a totem pole instead of making it a book~~ ^{I decided} to see whether some of this coastal heritage of art ^{technique might} ~~would work~~ into my writing of Winter Brothers.

So it is, for instance, that ^{I made} ~~there are~~ patterns of time ~~which~~ recur in ^{Winter Brothers} the book. A week of Swan's life, as told in his diary, at Neah Bay during the Civil War years. Further on, another week, again from his diaries, during his great Queen Charlottes collecting trip twenty years later. Characters appear and vanish and reappear: ^{I do myself} Captain John, a tribal bard of the Makahs; Swell, a young Makah chieftain who is one of the Winter Brothers of the title; and me, sometimes a witness to Swan's places and endeavors and sometimes not.

Yet these come-and-go elements I hope connect, relate, are held into the same flow of formline, somewhat as the Haidas did it by their marvelous patterns--are held together by the day-by-dayness of the book. The ninety individual days of it which add up into one single piece of time--a Northwest coastal winter.

8 1/2 min.

critical motion about Western writing

I've heard this called "the literature of place." Certainly it's an honorable enough phrase, and "place," landscape, backdrop of mountain and ^{of} plain and ^{of} hard weather, does figure large in the work of a lot of us. But I don't particularly think it's at the neglect of the people, the human stories, the Westerners who carry on their lives against these big bold landscapes. ~~Joan Didion, when she reviewed Norman Mailer's book, The Executioner's Song, praised Mailer's view of the west almost in astonishment. Odd argument for a writer as ~~brilliant~~ ^{gifted} as Joan Didion to make, but she seemed to say it's all but impossible for a writer truly to portray Westerners. She said:~~

I assumed I was leaving the lingering company of James Gilchrist Swan (0000-0000) when this book about our twined (coastal interest) reached print 25 years ago. I might have known better.

Of course, the arithmetic of creztivity is all in how you count. One of Henry David Thoreau's early books didn't sell well, and Thoreau ended up with stacks of them--he wrote a friend soon after and said, "I now have a library of almost a thousand books--more than 800 of which I wrote myself."

Bush School 4th grade 2/10/52
Images are a kind of wonderful pair of glasses...
they let us see the world in new ways. Help us see
into things. How things are connected.

I guess I work at images pretty much all the time.
I am a writer...
--pocket notebook
--ring binder

What am I writing down? How things--
--look
--smell
--taste
--feel
--sound

Look: Sky, WSS descriptn
combined: Sky, Ringling descriptn

try to turn the world around in your head.

--my poem - ~~kind of~~ new
--mtns: Sky, like army
WB, like lightning

- *you mean*

can let the sounds of the words themselves make image

--run bang zingo
--Downtown Freddy Brown
--Billie Holiday

exaggeration
--Woody Guthrie
--Patchen

I didn't see why you should have to be a ^{or} tinsel-haired entertainment star, or an overpriced athlete, or a discredited and defrocked politician, to be eligible to have your story told in this country. I know they're a considerable portion of the population, but there are some others of us. ~~Some of them are~~ (I suppose Spiro Agnew ^{is now} was my personal final straw.) Anyway, books of that sort I think are going to prove to be, in historical and literary terms, just a kind of dandruff of society. The point ^{ought to be} is ~~to~~ try to tell the stories from the broader bloodstream of this country.

(SMAN OVER)

But stories such as Swan's, of a solitary pioneer who virtually every day
for forty years wrote conscientiously of his life, and the life of the other
white westcomers and the Northwest costal Indians around him, I think those
stories rise from the broad bloodstream of this country. They're a kind of
pulse of our everyday past.

are friends of books and of libraries,

So tonight, here with those of you who have made books your calling in life, in trying to sketch out for you how a book got built from those musings on relic-hood-- I thought I'd go about it in roughly the sequence my grandfather did when he started all this, by rooting the Doig family out of Scotland and into Montana--by building that homestead where my father was born. You'll be relieved that I'll keep the description of my building project shorter than his was: the National Archives file documenting the homestead claim taken up by Peter Doig in the 1890s runs to 65 photocopied pages of periodic testimony and proof, and covers 13 years. My own proving-up papers and blueprints and so on--notes and letters and diary entries made along the way as I tried to carpenter an idea into being a book--^{mine} only go across about ten years, I hope condensed into the next half hour or so.

40 minutes

In the same way that people sometimes found themselves on ^{western} homesteads when they'd thought they were blithely on their way to do something ~~else~~ ^{simpler} in life, This House of Sky began forming itself ^{around me} in the summer of 1968 when I thought I was ~~in~~ researching a magazine article. My wife Carol and I were visiting in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, hanging around with my father and grandmother for a couple of weeks, and...

her 75th birthday was coming up,

To build, as the announced title of this talk was it.

amid
Somewhere ~~is~~ this, House of Sky began to happen. Not directly, and probably not yet even consciously, for a while--but that's the way beginnings seem to be, at least ~~for~~ in me.

So ~~today~~ ^{tonight}, in trying to sketch out for you the making of this book--how I went from relic-hood to being invited to places such as this microphone--some matters I can tell you fairly definitely, from letters and diary entries made along the way, but getting hold of the genesis doesn't seem that simple. As you'll see, there seems not to have been a beginning, but beginnings.

One of these, it may even have been the first, occurred in the summer of 1968. ^{My wife Carol and I} ~~we~~ were visiting in White Sulphur, hanging around with my father and grandmother for a couple of weeks, and...

~~at the time~~
 I had in mind to write an article about Taylor Gordon, the black singer from ^{that town of}
~~the author, of course, of Born to Be -- Taylor Gordon,~~
 White Sulphur, who'd enjoyed a heyday of concert and radio singing in New York
 in the 1920's--until the Depression hit, and Taylor landed back ^{in Montana.} ~~herding sheep;~~ →
 up Four-Mile Creek. The best characterization of Taylor Gordon I've yet heard,
 came, characteristically, from Taylor himself. He recalled that one of the
 ladies he had known in Harlem during his glory time said good-bye to him with
 the line: "Taylor, you are a beautiful man, but you are no provider."

Over those next few years I discovered that, even with a doctorate on my wall, I was hopelessly a writer, of some sort, rather than a professor--and that I wanted to write something about my father, and ~~the~~^a way of Western life that seemed to be passing with him. ~~(And that was making of me a third-generation relic.)~~

Voices kept helpfully arriving to my tape recorder during this time. My grandmother in particular would often meet one of my questions with, "Well, I don't just know about that, you better go ask so-and-so." And I would. So-and-so once would be Pete McCabe of ~~the Stockman Bar~~^{my father's front saloon, the wonderful Stockman Bar} in White Sulphur; another time Clifford Shearer, who had worked on ranches with my father since they were both homestead kids in the Sixteen country, ~~in that part of Montana.~~^{as and so would be} Three or four times a year, another voice of so-and-so.

mid-
Then in 1971, ~~with~~ Carol and I ~~wrote~~ ^{began writing} a journalism textbook together,

and to keep straight our writing schedule and the dealings with our publisher,

I maintained a ~~diary~~ ^{journal} of our collaboration on that book. That ~~diary~~ ^{journal} worked out ~~at least we got the textbook into print and even into some classrooms and some libraries~~ pretty well and evidently it persuaded me to try another ~~one~~ ^{journal} as I thought about what ~~it~~ was then known in ^{our} the household as "the Montana book."

At a roughly comparable point in my grandfather's proving-up papers, ^{for his homestead,} there is his "claimant's testimony" that his homestead by now was graced with a cattle shed 38 feet by 75 feet, constructed ^{not of logs but of} of lumber. My own paper testimony here is not so grand as that, but it too speaks some progress: it's a notebook page dated the twenty-ninth of January, 1972 ^{it} and ~~reads~~ ^{reads}, "Start of a sometime diary, towards the book of where I came from."

Over the next several months I wrote in that notebook occasional details of the Montana past as they could be dug from mind. There's a notation on May seventh about the gutwagon which was used to bring ewes and their fresh-born lambs to the lambing shed--certainly the first time I'd thought of that in twelve or fifteen years. And another note, on my father's ^{manner} ~~style~~ of swearing, that rapid ^{hundred-proof} hyphenated ~~Scottish~~ ~~style of exasperation~~ ~~that made good use of all the hellanyway one fine expressive word.~~ style of exasperation, Names and descriptions of hired men--my father's haying crews, and sheep shearers, and gumboot irrigators--presented themselves out of memory. So did sheep herders and their moods, that delicate moment when you come to tend camp and find ^{whether} ~~if~~ out ^{an abruptly} ~~if~~ you're going to have ~~a~~ resigned shepherd and two thousand fleecy animals to cope with.

that he had.

was not quite the sort people expect of writers

One source of motivation during those years, ~~I maybe should pass along to this~~
~~caretakers of our written past, cultural environment,~~
~~tribal meeting of historians.~~ Neither of them will ever realize it, but two prime

sources of inspiration to me, through their own literary endeavors of the time, were
~~the actors~~ of her life as an actress

brought on Lauren Bacall and Richard Milhous Nixon. After Bacall's best-selling autobiography
six-digit the spate of books signed with names off movie marquee, there came and the simultaneous flood
of book contracts to Watergate figures after Watergate figures--well, I can't begin to describe what it does

for you as a working writer, what it does for your level of concentration and
determination, to get up in the morning and remind yourself, "Spiro T. Agnew is
writing a novel."

Not to put too fine a point on this--my reasons for working on House of Sky
undoubtedly were many--but during those years, it was often on my mind: that I didn't
see why you should have to be a discredited and defrocked politician, or a tinsel-
haired entertainment star, to be eligible to have your story told in this country.

(16A below) →

Orville
Sidel
testimony
of a secondary

Even with those exemplars of inspiration, however, my book attempt stayed stubbornly mostly attempt for the next year or so. Endless rewriting and fussing and starting over, amid my other work, of trying to earn some semblance of a living as a magazine writer. ~~A diary entry from~~ ^{an} mid-January of 197~~4~~⁵, after I'd spent half a day reworking the lead of the manuscript and thought I'd managed to improve a couple of sentences there ^{— this diary entry:} "It would be magnificent to do the entire book with this slow care, writing it all as highly charged as poetry--but will I ever find the time?"

And another diary note, this one from mid-July of 1975, seven full years after that afternoon of my father's voice storytelling in White Sulphur Springs:

SM 34
OLA

There followed the period of nothing-to-do-but-wait, until the book's end-of-September publication date. But interesting punctuations kept happening to the waiting. Sometime in early summer, I had a phone call from a friend, Archie Satterfield, at that time the book review editor of the ~~Seattle~~ Post-Intelligencer. Making conversation, Archie asked if I'd seen the cover design for ~~the~~^{my} book yet.

Carol Hill had arranged that

No, I say, I just know that ~~a~~ New York artist named Paul Bacon ~~was~~
was ~~hired~~ to do the cover, and I hope he'll do all right.

"Good ~~God~~^{guy}, Doig," says Satterfield. "Don't you know what Paul Bacon is famous for?"

"No," I say.

"He did the cover of Jaws," Satterfield says.

"He'll do ^{just fine,}" I say.

*white shark -
safe to go back
in water*

Indeed, before the book even came into print, Paul Bacon's House of Sky cover had won an award for best of the year, from the Society of Illustrators.

In late August of 1978, my advance copy of This House of Sky arrived, and ~~it~~ ~~it~~ brought with it the equivalent of the patent which concluded my grandfather's years of proving-up ^{and building on} ~~paperwork~~ for his homestead--the tiny line of type at the front of the book reading, "Copyright 1978 by Ivan Dig."

Yet when you've put a number of years into a particular piece of turf, literary or otherwise, you naturally wonder whether you were in your right mind to have done that; or whether you just ought to have gone into town and got a job where

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OLA

somebody actually would have been handing you money every couple of weeks.

still three weeks to go to House of Sky's publication date,

Around noon on the sixth of September, I came back to the house after an errand to the drugstore to find a message on my phone machine, from a friend who said he'd seen the ~~House of Sky~~ review of House of Sky in the current issue of Time.

What review? I said to myself.

The review in Time, the machine ~~repeated~~ ^{repeated} when I replayed the message.

By evening I had seen the review, and it was a writer's dream. No snide asides, no news magazine cutesiness--just long, ~~lovely~~ ^{miraculous} patches of pure quotation from House of Sky.

went to work on the writing of my next book,
That winter I ~~had gone to work on the book which is just coming out now,~~
Winter Brothers, and a morning in mid-March, ~~of last year,~~ Archie Satterfield of the
Post-Intelligencer phoned ~~me,~~ again, to ask how things were going, then after a bit,
said: "Oh...congratulations on your nomination."

"Nomination?" I say.

"Good ~~god,~~ ^{guy!} Doig," says Satterfield. "Don't you know ~~you've~~ ^{House of Sky has} been
nominated for the National Book Award?"

As it turned out, ^{the mountains of} Nepal ~~was~~ ^{were} thought to be more exotic than ^{the mountains of} Montana--a ^{viewpoint on this western shore} dubious viewpoint on the part of the East Coast judges, I'm sure all of us here ~~in the Rockies today in this Rocky Mtn setting~~ tonight can agree--and Peter Matthiessen's fine narrative of his trek across the Himalaya, *The Snow Leopard*, won the award.

I think, now, that my sufficient award was that *This House of Sky* happened. This sketching kind of recounting I've done ~~tonight~~ ^{the morning}, of course, can't begin to get a hold of all the elements of luck and good fortune that, across about ten years, helped make the book happen. Nor do I know of any way to get a hold of them: I'd bottle them for every future book I intend to write, if I did know.

But I at least can give a ^{final few} minute ^{or so} of accounting, of what's happened ~~performers, the other builders in the making~~ ^{witnesses} with the prime ~~players in the~~ proving up of *House of Sky*, since the book came into print.

L10
OLA

--Ann Nelson retired from agenting, until her children got of school age. That has now happened, and she periodically threatens to get a job again--but not as a Seattle literary agent. I think she would like to preserve her record, of very likely being the only agent who has agented just one book, and that one a National Book Award nominee.

--Paul Bacon, the cover artist, I am thrilled ~~to~~ to say has done the jacket illustrations for three more of my books--and despite how perfect the House of Sky cover was, he ^{somehow} seems to get better and better at making Doig books look good.

--Carol Hill resigned as editor-in-chief of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich a couple of years ago, to resume her own writing career. Her latest novel is a splendid piece of imagination called The Eleven Million Mile-High Dancer--which I see often in a Penguin fall, and we've been trading wishes by phone, that she and I will alternate, week by paperback rack next to my last novel, English Creek. ~~week, being first and second on the New York Times best-seller list.~~

40A →

--I parted company with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich not long after her, over their reluctance to see me turn to writing fiction. My current editor, Tom Stewart at Atheneum, was on Carol Hill's staff of editors at Harcourt when This House of Sky was published--and he seems to have learned from her, for he too is an editor in chief.

Carol,
--My wife, ^{four} has endured my writing of ~~three~~ more books--Winter Brothers, The Sea Runners, ^{and the forthcoming Dancing...} and English Creek--and taken photos of the West from ^{Alaska} ~~Juneau~~ to Montana, in pursuit of our research for those books. At this point of her teaching year, she seems to be looking ahead to her next photo assignment--~~Scotland, this summer, for my next~~ ^{novel,} about ~~homesteaders who came from Scotland to Montana.~~ Montana in the next couple of summers, as the state gears up for its centennial of statehood, and the novel I intend to write about that hooplah.

~~--My wife, Carol, has endured my writing of two more books, Winter Brothers and The Sea Runners, and about this point of her teaching year begins to lobby me to get us back to Montana when summer comes, to pursue the research for the next Montana book--a novel which takes place during the Depression. [The Hoover one.] Carol's urgings have ^{landed} ~~taken~~ us ⁱⁿ ~~to~~ Montana the past two summers, and evidently will again next year.~~

--And, from the ranks of the readers, I've heard from ^{many} ~~several~~ dozen Montanans ^{and other westerners,} about This House of Sky, a good many of them able to furnish information or leads toward the novels ^{I've been} ~~now~~ working on. Along with this, I admit, has come an A summer or two ago, during work on English Creek, occasional new perplexity for me as a researcher. ~~This summer~~ I was interviewing a long-time sheep rancher in ^{northern Montana} ~~the Choteau country,~~ and because he'd been recounting

to me his legion of sheep herders over the past 35 years, I asked him to describe his particular routine of tending camp. "Just like you said," he responded.

Since I'd barely managed to edge in a word all evening, I asked now: "What do you mean?"

"Just like you said, there in that House of Sky, if you come into camp and the herder keeps looking ^{sideways} off across the country instead of at you, you know you're ^{some} in trouble. Just like you said in that book."

Which is my first, and I hope last, instance of being quoted back to myself, as the actuality I'm seeking.

--As for the book itself, House of Sky sold ^{an eventual} twenty thousand copies in hardback, and is now out of print in hard covers. In paperback, the total to date is ^{54,000} ~~45,000~~ copies, and to my pleased astonishment it ^{seeps} ~~lately has been~~ selling at ^{the} ~~an increasing~~ rate ~~more~~ ^{of 8,000 to} ~~than~~ 9000 copies ^a ~~last~~ year.

By today's blockbuster standards, those sales figures are of course thoroughly modest totals--in financial return, I find them somewhat less than modest. The book, though, continues to ricochet along in its what 's-gonna-happen-next kind of history. It's now being used in a number of western literature courses, and regional history courses; and this ^{past year} ~~spring~~, when the National Endowment for the Humanities financed a library discussion program in thirty states, focusing on books about family, House of Sky was the lead-off book in that program. Some years ago a British publisher did ~~not~~ a House of Sky edition

of a thousand copies, sold 155 of them, and forthwith pulped the rest. ^{Last} This year, the West German edition ~~is to appear~~ ^{ed}, after a four-year translation process--Das Haus Des Himmels. And sometime back, word came that House of Sky had been read, and rejected, by the big Brazilian publishing house, Emece. The message from Brazil said, "The editor thinks you are a 'marvelous and natural writer' but fears that the book is a little too American, since it is so very much concerned with the peculiarities of the territory of New England."

Thank you ~~for~~ ^{tonight} for coming ~~this morning~~ to this ~~Rocky Mountain~~ ^{Pacific} outpost of New England and listening to me.

CORONA article on storytelling, for possible Boise use.

NZ-Australia material used w/ portions
of "Sense of Place" & other speeches

For my part, to close this out with somebody whose writing
motives I'm supposed to know something about, among the
things I tried to do in my Montana trilogy was to run a
musical crocodile farm. The first novel, Dancing at Rascal Fair,
takes its title from a Scottish song - (p. 12) - a very, very old
traditional Scottish song - which I made up. By time last novel
came along, I was writing country- & western songs for, yes,
Roadkill Angels.

over

In this scene, Mariah & Riley are getting back together, romantically, much to the disgust of the narrator, Mariah's father. His wife has died recently, & as you'll ~~hear~~^{hear}, the scene-song sets off a memory in him. (Explain King's X: time out - trace)

Thanks for taking in my words, here today.

Finally, amid passion & precision a novelist must have, there's
the crocodile factor.

(Has nothing to do with Crocodile Dundee, I swear to you.
Forget Paul Hogan(?) & concentrate on: crocodile)

Here's one of my spear carriers, who doesn't even have a name in Ride With Me, Manish Montana - she's simply the lead singer in a country- & -western band called The Roadkill Angels - but here she comes:

©Manish, p. 306

The first scene takes place in Montana in 1889. The narrator, Angus McCaskill, & his lifelong chum, his mate from Scotland & the voyage across to America, have alit in a tiny fledgling frontier town called Gros Ventre. In this scene they've also gotten themselves a bit lit up, celebrating their arrival into their new future. Here they are, in single dirt main street of that town, that night:

(R. Fair, pp. 79-80)

And one hundred years later, still in Montana, a fourth-generation Montana McCaskill - Mariah McCaskill - holds this conversation, in *Ride with Me, Manah Montana*, the final book novel in the trilogy. Manah is a newspaper photographer, assigned to do a centenary series of articles with a reporter named Riley Wright. Their relationship isn't helped any by the fact that they're divorced - from each other. Here, in 1989, they are having some trouble getting launched on their series - they're at a buffalo refuge, trying to figure out

(over)

What to photograph & write, ~~of - names of - who over~~
(Manah, pp 30-31)

Novelists try to tell the truth by making things up. It's a backwards job, but somebody has to do it. We go about it in various ways, in the million-element experiment called language, and the first ~~one~~^{way} I want to talk to you about today is talking. Getting people to talk on paper; transferring the delicious hunger of ear into dialogue in a novel. Let me read a couple of scenes of dialogue in my books, two conversations a hundred years apart.

(5)

Not surprisingly, I suppose, when I went to write a trilogy about a Montana family across a century of their trials and rewards, the set of novels chronologically begins with a pair of young Scotsmen setting out to take up homestead land in Montana. Here is the narrator, Angus McCaskill, and his cousin Rob Barclay, aboard the steamship James Watt, leaving the dock at Greenock on the River Clyde:

(RTair, pp. 7-8
4 min?)

(6)

And here, a ^{half} century later in 1989, in *Ride With Me*,
Marion Montana, the final novel of the trilogy, a Montana
newspaperman writes of what has become of those original
p. 213 - California
bright hopes of landholding:

(Marion, pp. 199-200)
3 min?

(21)

Here's one of my spear carriers, who doesn't even have a name in Ride With Me, Mariah Montana - she's simply the lead singer in a country - or - western band called The Roadkill Angels, but here she comes:

(Mariah, p. 306)
1 min?

Not surprisingly, I suppose, when I went to write a trilogy about a Montana family across a century of their travails & rewards, that family - the McCaskills - are trying ~~to~~ to find their way onward from such a place, from McCaskill homestead. (The McCs are not my own family in fictional masquerade, but I did use as an epigraph for the trilogy a saying of my father's: "Scotchmen & coyotes was only ones that could live where we did, & pretty damn soon coyotes starved out.")

Here in middle novel of trilogy, English Creek, is my narrator -

over

Jick McCaskill - describing his father, US forest ranger
Varick McCaskill, in 1939. (Eng Crk, pp. 33-35)

And here, half a century later in 1989, in *Ride With Me*,
Mariah Montana, the final novel of the trilogy, Jack McCaskell
engages in this argument about Montana — of Western identity — with
a young newspaperman named Riley Wright. Riley has just asked
Jack's daughter Mariah, a photographer for some newspaper, to marry
him ~~for~~ and move to California where he's had a better job
offer. Riley is speaking first:

(*Mariah*, pp. 213-14)

That generational skepticism & questioning about American West,
& what it has been & is, goes on among American historians very
frankly these days. I suppose I'm something of a reformed
historian - I have a doctorate in American frontier history, but was lured
by siren call of fiction instead - & I do have some suspicion of how
much historians can tell us about heart of a region - historians
remind me a bit of definition & once heard of newspaper editorial
writers, that they ~~are~~ watch from high moral ground until
over

the battle is over, then come down & shoot the wounded of both sides... But I think American Western history is fortunate to have a "gang of four" who are challenging old notions of how the West was settled, & what its identity adds up to. Just very briefly, to cite these 4 historians & their approaches:

- Donald Worster, U of Kansas, env'd his'm: water flows uphill to 'd money.
- Wm Cronon, U of Wisconsin, his'm of rel'p bet'n cities & the hinterlands.
(Chicago, Nature's Metropolis)
- Patricia Nelson Limerick, U of Colorado, legacy of conquest (read #, p. 18)
- Richard White, U of W in Seattle, W as a dispute, complicated, & un united ~~section~~ region (read #, p. 634)

So, if I think "place" goes beyond the power of geography,
what are the other meanings of it that I try to work from?

^{One}
The first is, that,

(12)

Identity
of am'ic West - myth, sense of
place

~~American West~~
In the U.S., one of the hazards of being a writer of my
sort is getting perpetually invited to conferences about "the
literature of place," as we American Westerners are always said
to be writing.