

1 Nov. '84

Dear Bill--
1

First, our compliments to the chef. The liver was great.

Next, I want to pass along to you something that happened during the signing at Freddy's and that I was too blunked out that night to remember. The very first guy who bought a book from me was a 40ish town-rancher sort of guy, hat, boots and evident ranch background but some other job now, and as I was signing he asked, Is that Walter gonna be in any more books? Took me a moment to realize he meant the Walter Kyle minor character in English Creek, of the Scotch hotel sheepmen in Ingomar, and so I said yeah, he might indeed. The guy then said, Boy, I've heard those stories all my life from my aunt, about those geezers in that old Ingomar hotel... So I got her name from him, and as you're a habitue of the Jersey Lily, you can look her up there sometime: she's Louise Whitmore and works there. I should explain too that when you asked me if that story was true, I was too travel-weary and unfocused to find what was at the edge of my mind, which was that someone has since told me those sheepmen weren't all Scotchmen but included some Norwegians! The names that were recited to me by my original source, Bradley Hamlett in Great Falls, were Scotch though. Incidentally, there was a marvelous local history of the Ingomar country done in the Bicentennial year; they straight-facedly called it the Tri-City Reunion--Ingomar, Varanda and Sumatra--and they had the exquisite common sense to print the current address of everybody who came, in the back of the book. I've gleaned some excellent homestead memories from those people, thanks to that mailing list.

I've had a little time to catch my mental breath since we got home, and to try to think about the history in my fiction, for the sake of your Montana article. This likely won't be much help, but I think I tried to use history in two ways in English Creek. First, for veracity of detail. When you get to the forest fire section, for instance, the description of the pick-up fire fighters coming from "the bars and flophouses of Clore Street in Helena and Trent Avenue in Spokane and First Avenue South in Great Falls" is an almost-throwaway phrase (in appearance) which actually derives from 3 different sources-- Dave Walter of the Montana Historical Society library tracked down for me a retired Helena forest ranger who "said the FS long had hired off the streets in the Park/Wood/Main area (of Helena). He referred to South Park as Clore Street--by which name the street became famous for bars, whorehouses and sleazy living. Then, in about 1911, the city fathers decided they could cleanse the reputation of Helena by changing the name of Clore Street to South Park Avenue. An admirable attempt--but the same activities continued there, and most everyone still called it Clore Street." Which I decided to do in the book too, to celebrate the defeat of good intentions. Trent Avenue in Spokane was provided for me by a friend whom I knew grew up there; and First Ave. S. in Gt Falls of course was ~~not~~ notorious to me during my own boyhood. I tried to bring Missoula into the scene, hoping the Oxford would star, but one of my Missoula rangers said no, they hired the firefighters there down by the railroad tracks--rail-riding hoboos and such--instead of in any neighborhood. And incredibly, I couln't

find anybody who knew which of Butte's sundry rough streets the Forest Service did its emergency hiring on. Anyway, the point is the "history" behind this single phrase of description, and while it's just one example, I did something similar time after time in the book. It was the most demanding book to check I've ever done or hope to.

Then history in a larger sense, which I think you'll see happen--at least I hope you do, though reviewers haven't, yet; the publisher inadvertently tipped them all off by including the year the book takes place, in the pr stuff with every review copy--at the end of Part Three, p. 325. That development is meant to take the reader by surprise, in somewhat the way history did to the people at the time. You'll notice that I assiduously avoid saying just when this English Creek summer is taking place, until then. And again, this comes out of actuality. A friend of ours of Jick's generation remembers her father calling out across the lawn almost the same words I use there, that same evening. So I've tried there to make time itself, history's abrupt turn, the "foe" of the McCaskills--whoever or whatever they thought they were facing that summer.

Enough of that; you'll probably know better what I was up to than I do. (If, heh heh heh, I was actually up to something, right?) Feel free to ask me any specifics you want to, but I'll be just as interested in your piece if you close your eyes and freehand it.

Now to the important stuff: Carol and I came home thinking goddamn it, we really ought to get back to Montana as quick as we can. That would be March 23-30, Carol's spring vacation. If that jibes with the UE's and you guys want a week of seafood gluttony, we're game for a house swap. What say? (Instant answer not required.)

love to Juliette.

March 16, 1991

Dear Ruth McKechnie

Thanks for your letter, which I've just received after returning from an extended research trip ~~where I gathered information for my next book.~~

of the 1890s
I ~~appreciate your comments about my books and~~ should explain about the language in Mariah: I always work at making the characters sound as they actually would have, in the time and place described. In the Montana trilogy, there are immigrant Scots in Dancing at the Rascal Fair, hayhands and ranchhands of the late 1930s in English Creek, and ~~XXXXX~~ contemporary urban newspaper people in Mariah.

I believe you'll enjoy my next book, which will be nonfiction and about my mother's life. It will be a companion book to This House of Sky and will be based on some of her letters which I've recently inherited. ~~XXXX~~ Since I've just started the writing, the likely publication date will be the Fall of 1993.

from Jean Fiji

10/02/87

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17 Sept. '89

Dear Cindy Berger--

I'm deep in the writing of my next novel and so am not getting around to the mail, but I hope the couple of enclosures and a few quick answers will help you out at your book group.

--I put a book together by having a general arc of events (often it's simply a chosen period of time; a single summer in English Creek; a 30-year span in Rascal Fair, from the bright hopes of statehood in 1889 to the killing winter of 1919) which then, through two or three years of constant work, I put the specifics into.

--I write a given amount each day; on this book it's 4 triple-spaced typewritten pages, approximately 800 words, 4 days a week, with a middle day of research, editing or rewriting. I don't know of any writer who waits for inspiration; any of us who are professionals at writing see a constant output, which means self-imposed deadlines, as utter necessity.

--None of the "male relationships" in Rascal Fair represent any experience of my own, no. I make my people up, which is not to say they don't have experiences I've seen, heard of, read about, whatever. Any "sparse female voice" is not intentional; Rascal Fair simply has as a main part of its plot the lifelong link of Angus and Rob, and so, ergo, their voices are indeed male. In the book I'm doing now, by contrast, one of the two main voices is female. That book, incidentally, is the final one in the McCaskill trilogy that begins chronologically with Rascal Fair: a novel set in Montana this year, during that state's centennial celebration, with historical flashbacks to Angus, Anna, Adair, etc.

Sorry, no local speaking engagements are ~~xx~~ happening this fall; I am holed up writing, as I have to do to produce these books. Best wishes to your book group.

regards

August 30, 1989

Dear Mr. Doig,

Our book group is opening this years review with your wonderful novel "Dancing at the Rascal Fair." I enthusiastically volunteered to present your book because I enjoy reading authentic western history and was told you had a simple but passionate writing style. I have taken much pleasure in reading it.

Answers to a few questions would enrich my Sept. 26th description of you and your work. What technique do you use to put a book together? Do you write those absorbing descriptive passages first and then the story line? Do you write 20 pages a day or pound out on a computer as you're inspired? Does your insight into male relationships come from a real friend experience? Does the sparse female voice reflect the womans lesser place during the homesteading years? What are you currently writing?

I am penning this letter while on vacation in the breathtaking Yosemite Valley. I am feeling the intensity of my surroundings much like Rob and Angus discovered Two Medicine Country the first time.

Please include places and dates of any of your local speaking engagements (in the Seattle area) so I can learn more about your writing when I return to Olympia. A woman who heard you read here in Nov. 1987 said it was inspiring.

I thank you in advance for sharing your thoughts with us.

Respectfully,
Cindy Berger
Medical Auxiliary Book Group

December 26, 1988

Dear Carol and Ivan,

Well, there's no need to blame the author of The Sea Runners. The teacher was very impressed with my paper and gave me 100% points for it. I hope both of you had a great Christmas and have a happy New Year!

P.S. Thanks for helping me with my paper--I couldn't have done it without you. (obviously)

Sincerely, Peter

Dear Peter--

2 Jan. '89

Hey, for once your teacher was right, huh? That was a terrific paper on The Sea Runners. I just wish the newspaper reviewers and literary critics were as painstaking as you are.

Carol and I tropistically turned south for Christmas, to the Monterey Peninsula, couple of hours beyond San Francisco--not as classy as La Jolla, of course. A great aquarium in Monterey, though, and unbeatable coastal scenery at Point Lobos, and best of all, we got a tour of the late poet Robinson Jeffers' house and his Hawk Tower he built himself out of boulders rolled up from the Carmel seashore. He and his wife and kids lived there, in that damp coastal climate, with only fireplaces for heat for about 40 years; makes me think we're pretty swanky, with a furnace.

Tomorrow morning Carol goes back to teaching--this quarter she's team-teaching, with an English prof she's teamed with before and has a lot of respect for--and I'm back at writing the next book. We'll be in Montana, for research and inspiration(?), off and on this summer, into the autumn, actually. The annual question: will we see any Reeburghs zip through Seattle this year?

All best for '89, and thanks for sharing a copy of your Sea Runners paper. Save that sucker and hand it for a college assignment some day.

P

The Sea Runners

Ivan Doig, 175 pages

Interview

Peter Reeburgh

I read "The Sea Runners," an adventure book set in Nineteenth Century Alaska, and conducted a telephone interview with the book's author, Ivan Doig. This report summarizes the book and describes the interview.

"The Sea Runners" takes place on the Northwest coast of the continental United States and the coast of Southeast Alaska. In 1853, four men signed long-term contracts with the Russian-American Company to come from Sweden to work in Alaska. After years of working, these four men felt they were being imprisoned. The four men began planning an escape. In the middle of the night near the Russian Christmas, they stole a canoe and fled from a Russian-America Company settlement, New Archangel, better known today as Sitka. The four men, Melander, Wennberg (pronounced like "Vennbairge"), Braff (pronounced like "Brawv"), and Karlsson traveled for three months in the worst of the winter to a small town in Oregon at the mouth of the Columbia River called Astoria. The four men battled the weather, rough seas, hostile Indians, and themselves emotionally throughout the journey along the coast. Finally after losing two travelers, Melander to Indians, and Braff to

the surf, the remaining two, Karlsson and Wennberg, beached their canoe at a place near modern day Astoria, Oregon. The story ends with them being rescued by nearby cabin owners.

Ivan Doig had the idea for the book while researching his previous book, "Winter Brothers." "I found entirely by accident the 1853 newspaper article that said that three men had been found floating in Willipa Bay at the mouth of the Columbia river...so I jerked a copy of that off the microfilm thinking it was a good story and got to looking around for how I might try to write about these guys that came down by canoe...and I couldn't find anything beyond that story."

Starting with the idea, Doig's next job was to develop the characters. This involved doing research to make up backgrounds for each of the characters: Melander, an experienced seaman, Braff, a low-life thief, Wennberg, a blacksmith, and Karlsson, a skilled lumberjack. "Once I had the article...I began inventing the characters...there was research involved in that...find a background, a life before Alaska for those guys...there was some reasearch for all four of them...I wanted them to have lives or stories they brought to Alaska." Doig made the characters so they came from different parts of Sweden and all had occupations, and accents, and stories corresponding to their origins. Next, Doig went about composing and developing the beginning of the book. "I decided pretty early on that I simply wanted it to be the canoe...notice the book doesn't even open with a complete sentence...just a phrase describing the canoe...and I did that quite deliberately because I wanted that to be the

only thing in the reader's mind or eye...that is right at first and I wanted them to see that canoe."

Doig encountered a number of surprises during his research. One of the most surprising things was how long and how complicated the history of Russian-Alaska is. Another thing he found surprising was the distance between Russia and Russian-America and how they could supply Alaska without communication for up to two to three years at a time.

"The Sea Runners" was Doig's first attempt at fiction. Doig enjoyed writing fiction because of the freedom it gave him. "I have found fiction kind of a freeing or liberating way to write because in being able to make up the characters and to some extent...their lives, I'm no longer bound to a precise set of facts, I'm able to bring in other facts."

The chapter headings in "The Sea Runners" are illustrated. Doig explained that his editor suggested that the book have a Nineteenth Century look, since the setting was also in that time period. He came upon a twenty volume report of an expedition up the Pacific coast and into Southeast Alaska called the Harriman Expedition, led by E.H. Harriman. This expedition took place in the early 1900's and was joined by famous naturalists such as John Muir, John Burroughs, and other writers and artists. In this twenty volume set, Doig found a number of fitting sketch drawings, five of which were used as illustrations at the heads of selected chapters in his book.

"The Sea Runners" is one of several of Doig's books that have been read aloud on National Public Radio's "Radio

Reader", narrated by Dick Estell. Doig explained how he felt about this. "I think his portrayal of the characters was okay. The thing I didn't like about it was the mispronunciation of many of the geographic coastal names. He simply recorded the book before I quite knew about it...I sent him a list of the pronunciations...even of the names of the four Swedes...and Estell did not know any of this and so a lot of the names and coastal Indian names were quite mispronounced...I guess I'm probably the only person who is bothered a lot by that, but anybody that would know the specific name along the coast, and hear it there on 'Radio Reader' might have his teeth put on edge."

Doig says he wouldn't change a thing if he were to start over and rewrite the book. However Doig is commonly asked about the death of the leader of the escape group and why he was killed by Indians so early in the story. "One thing I do hear whenever people ask me about the book...is the death of Melanderit's quite a surprise to some readers." Doig explained that he didn't want a typical hero story where the plan goes to the dump and the only one that makes it is the leader, but a story that would be more unusual and have the crew pick up the pieces and go ahead with the plan.

Doig indicated that over 12,000 hardback copies and over 22,000 paperback copies of this book have been sold. "It's probably about what I expected...it's pretty close to what my previous book had sold...it sold well for a first novel, which usually sells 5000 copies."

One book of Doig's has been translated into a foreign

language. His book, "This House of Sky", an autobiography, has been translated into German. The German title is "Das Haus Des Himmel."

I learned a great deal from reading Doig's book and being able to ask questions about it. I really enjoyed reading this novel, interviewing the author, and learning more about how an author might go about creating a novel.

*This is superb!
Everything fits together perfectly.
A nice blend of author's words with
your own editorial commentary.
Wonderful job. 50/50*

6 Jan. '88

Dear Bill--^{Bruce}

Just a quick line to pass the enclosed Rascal Fair stuff along; if I understood Bill Lang, aright, in a quick conversation just before the holidays, you're completing your Montana writers book and I thought you might like to see Rascal Fair's main reviews and interviews. The book's done wondrously well; it's evidently going to end up selling at least as twice as many as anything else I've ever done. Which made for a nice autumn in this household.

With some holiday recuperation behind us, I'm back to writing and Carol is teaching tooth and nail--as I suppose you and Juliette are. All best wishes to you both in this new year; see you, here or there, sometime in it.

28 Oct. '87

Dear Ellen--

Okay, I'll make a stab at the questions you and your students had. Excuse the brevity, if my answers turn out that way, as my life is at its busiest, with the traveling and other work I'm doing on behalf of my new book.

1. No problem to me to have my memoir used as required reading. I view this development as a professional writer, rather than as a character in Sky, and so it's a mark of success that I could never have dreamed of, to have this book assigned to English classes. A major part of writing is putting yourself on the line; I did, to some extent, in Sky--it worked, and I'm gratified. Sky has been used at a number of colleges--NYU in a western history course, U. of Montana and Montana State U. in their regional lit courses, U. of Oregon and Oregon State U. in regional culture courses, occasional other undergrad English courses across the country--it sells about 9,000 copies a year, and probably at least half of that total is college use, to give you some idea. Yup, students in Montana read Sky, often in high school; when I talk with them, they're still able to identify with a lot of the family situation and town life and so on in it.

2. I write a steady amount, about 800 words, every day; but I don't necessarily do it in consecutive narrative. That is, if I get stuck, I'll jump elsewhere in the manuscript and try write a page of dialogue, or a description of landscape or weather, figuring I'll smooth it into place eventually. Do I recommend this jumpy way of writing? Nope. But it seems to work for me.

3. Maybe it's because of my own involvement, but Sky does not seem to me an unemotional book. The situations and people I was writing about, I thought conveyed the emotion. Beyond that, I suppose my view was that it was not my emotions that were the vital part of Sky--hell, everybody's got emotions--but the language, the feel of the situation as deftly as it could be shown on the page. I can't say too strongly that in my view, writing is about words and the magic the writer tries to do with them, rather than the standard array of emotions that are in all of us.

Finally, maybe a longer piece of writing, the one time I've found time to try to assess back into my Montana life and its effect on my writing, will add to this letter. I'm enclosing that piece, along with my regards to you and the students at Beaver.

Alan

October 19, 1987

Dear Dr. Doig,

I write to you on behalf of students in my English Composition class. After a lively and most interesting discussion of This House of Sky, my students concluded that they would like to share with you questions raised by their reading. Because you will be visiting our campus and because these students may not be able to speak with you after the reading, they hoped it would be appropriate to deliver this letter to you.

Reduced to just a few, the following are questions that interested the students the most:

1. What is your reaction to your autobiographical work being used as a required reading? To your knowledge and with what response, has this book been used as required reading at any other undergraduate school? Have students in Montana read This House of Sky?
2. What is your writing process?
3. In stark contrast to your beautifully detailed descriptions elsewhere in the book, descriptions of emotions are without detail. As we feel this must have been intended, what was your desired effect?

This letter has been a collaborative effort among the students, and these students are anxious for your reply. I am hopeful that you will be able to respond before the second week of December when the semester ends. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Yours very truly,

Ellen Sklaroff
Ellen Sklaroff

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98195

September 24, 1987

Dear Ivan,

I want to report on the outcome of my project with the Western Writers Series at Boise State University--the one that was to be titled Ivan Doig.

I completed the manuscript last year and sent it off well before the deadline. Both Dick Dunn and Hal Simonson had read it and pronounced it seaworthy. The editor, however, thought otherwise. He asked for several substantive revisions, some of which I agreed were necessary or desirable. I at first thought I would undertake them, but my other obligations in the department are so numerous and consistently demanding that I have concluded I will not have the time to do the rewriting in the foreseeable future. So, with considerable regret, I wrote the editor and told him I had decided to withdraw the manuscript. He has agreed, and the project is abandoned.

Probably someone else will propose to write for the series about your work, though, of course, I have no idea who that will be or when it will occur.

I'm sure this outcome will have no bearing on your work, though I'm sorry my assessment of what you have done so far won't be published.

I see that you are keeping up the publishing pace. I received a copy of the latest book and will read it soon.

Thanks for your willingness to be interviewed and to share other information. You were most helpful.

Sincerely,

Eugene
Eugene Smith

Dear Eugene--

Thanks for passing along your WWS bibliography. I've noted on it the modifications that occurred to me--I think the Blair and Ketchum publication is more generally known as Country Journal, though I leave it to you to follow whatever RGPL or other library listing there is of it; and, surprise, there's another magazine named Montana which is not Montana The Magazine of Western History in which my article and another one or two of your citations occurred; again, you'll have to be the editorial arbiter, but Montana The Magazine of etc. lists itself on its masthead just that way, no comma or colon or anything.

As to additions:

ARTICLES AND EXCERPTS:

"Kefauver versus Crime: Television Boosts a Senator," Journalism Quarterly, 39:4 (Autumn 1962), 483-490.

"Borrowing a Forum: a Public Critic's Letters to the Editor," Journalism Quarterly, 48:4 (Winter, 1971), 761-764.

(I assume you're deliberately, and probably wisely, staying away from my couple of hundred freelance magazine pieces? A few, mostly in the 1970's, are listed in RGPL, and there are 6-8 New York Times travel pieces in the late '70's. Let me know if you need any of that stuff. And meanwhile I just thought of a forthcoming piece that'll appear this spring:

Introduction to Scorpio Rising, R.G. Vliet, Penguin Books, 1986.

As to other reviews that ought to be mentioned:

THIS HOUSE OF SKY

Kirsch, Robert. "Ivan Doig: Hewn from Montana," Los Angeles Times, ~~Book~~ (Sept. 13, 1978), IV 4.

Suplee, Curt. "The Hardpan World of Stoic Westerners," The Washington Post, (Dec. 11, 1978), B 11.

Trippett, Frank. "Patterns," Time, 112 (Sept. 11, 1978), 90-2.

WINTER BROTHERS

Van Strum, Carol. "Notes from the Frontier," The Washington Post (Jan. 6, 1981), B1-2

SEA RUNNERS

Connell, Evan S. "Escape from Russian Alaska," The Washington Post Book World (Oct. 17, 1982), 3.

Kisor, Henry. "Trial by sea and by time," Chicago Sun-Times (Sept. 19, 1982), 22.

Muro, Mark. "Sea tale goes past adventure," Boston Globe (Oct. 10, 1982), 92.

English Creek

Beddow, Reid. "Coming of Age on the Continental Divide," The Washington Post Book World (Nov. 4, 1982), 3.

Lillard, Richard G. Journal of Forest History, 29 (Oct. 1985), 189-90.

Smith, Wendy. "Proustian View of Montana," Newsday (Nov. 11, 1984)--page unknown.

And as to interviews, Eugene, I put a recent Seattle Review one directly into place on p. 56, and there's been a very recent one, probably the longest and most careful newspaper profile of me done yet:

Donohoe, Cathryn. "A Montana laureate of the frontier," The Washington Times (Feb. 5, 1986) B 1-2.

That's all I can think of, you may be relieved to know. As to what's ahead, the next two of the trilogy, you're free to have a look at this manuscript of the first two chapters. (Ignore the penciled-in comments, they're from another friend who read this for me.) I guess I'd like to have this ms copy back by about mid-March, when revising begins in earnest. If you need a brief summary, I suppose it is that this book, like the Montana centennial one to come, will continue to have my McCaskills thinking about the land and time.

Give me a call if there's anything further you need to check. I hugely appreciate the care and effort you're putting into this, Eugene.

best
Evan

p.s. The Tom Turner citation you asked about must be his piece in Not Man Apart, Dec. 1984, p. 17; and wouldn't the Sybil Steinberg PW Forecasts be the Publishers Weekly citation in your biblio, Aug. 31, 1984, p. 420? If it's not, let me know and I'll scrounge further.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON 98195

Department of English, GN-30

January 27, 1986

Dear Ivan,

I enclose the bibliography for my Western Writers Series manuscript. Would you check it especially for important omissions? I think I have all publication information correct (except for a two or three volume numbers still to be obtained), but if you note errors, please circle them.

Also, in the manuscript I cite two of the EC reviews you sent me: Sybil Steinberg in PW Forecasts and Tom Turner in an unnamed periodical. Can you give me the date of the former and the title and date of the latter?

Is there anything else at this point that you want to tell me about the other two volumes of the trilogy? Or would you rather be mum about them?

I hope the writing is going well.

Sincerely,

Eugene
Eugene Smith

31 May '85

Dear Eugene ^{Smith}

This likely is the last possibly pertinent item I have to pass along to you for your Boise St. book, and I wanted to get it to you before summer. So, herewith.

Also the news I gleaned from Irene Wanner yesterday that the Seattle Review issue with the interview of me will be out toward end of June.

Other stuff: English Creek has been going good, won a Pacific Northwest Booksellers award, A Governor's Writers Day award, the Western Heritage award for best work of fiction (given by the National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City), and is one of three nominees for ~~and~~ the Golden Spur award for fiction (Western Writers of America). Beyond that, I am making progress on the next book.

Hope you're thriving.

best,

Wanner

p.s. Penguin is bringing out paperback English Creek as lead title in its Contemporary American Fiction series this Nov.

1 Oct. '84

Dear Eugene--
Smith

When we were finishing up last Wednesday, you mentioned that you'd like me to look over your eventual bibliography; it occurs to me I ought to mention a few sources, current and upcoming, that you might like to be aware of before you write:

--Inside This House of Sky, Atheneum 1983, photo book (pics by local photog Duncan Kelso) of many of the actual sites in This House of Sky, and with a brief intro by me in which I talk about importance of family photos in my work.

--Similarly, a forthcoming article in Montana: The Magazine of Western History, called "You Can't NOT Go Home Again," in which I muse on what seem to me some of Montana's influences on me. I think it'll be in the winter issue, which could be as late as March; if you need to see it before then you might try get a photocopy of the proofs from the editor, Bill Lang, Montana Historical Society, 225 N. Roberts, Helena, MT 59620. I'd advise you to work only from proofs or the article in print, as my original ms to Bill had various later tinkering and corrections.

--Maybe you know of the piece in the New York Times Sunday Magazine, "Writers of the Purple Sage," Dec. 27, 1981, by Russell Martin. In it he says Maclean and I write a prose that means to draw attention to itself, and he may have something there. There's a book coming out this fall by Martin and somebody else, an anthology of modern western writing also titled Writers of the Purple Sage, and ~~has~~ an excerpt from House of Sky is in it. I haven't seen a copy yet, so don't know how closely the intro ~~to the Eugene Smith~~ ^{29 Oct. '84} ~~is in~~ ^{back} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{to} ~~Montana~~ ^{to} ~~trip,~~ ^{to} ~~which~~ ^{to} ~~was~~ ^{to} ~~a~~ ^{to} ~~ripsnorting~~ ^{to} ~~success~~ ^{to} ~~for~~ ^{to} ~~English~~ ^{to} ~~Creek;~~ ^{to} ~~sold~~ ^{to} ~~more~~ ^{to} ~~than~~ ^{to} ~~a~~ ^{to} ~~thousand~~ ^{to} ~~books~~ ^{to} ~~at~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{to} ~~signings,~~ ^{to} ~~2-3~~ ^{to} ~~times~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{to} ~~pace~~ ^{to} ~~of~~ ^{to} ~~any~~ ^{to} ~~other~~ ^{to} ~~books~~ ^{to} ~~of~~ ^{to} ~~mine,~~ ^{to} ~~including~~ ^{to} ~~House~~ ^{to} ~~of~~ ^{to} ~~Sky.~~ ^{to} ~~Anyway,~~ ^{to} ~~before~~ ^{to} ~~this~~ ^{to} ~~gets~~ ^{to} ~~away~~ ^{to} ~~from~~ ^{to} ~~me~~ ^{to} ~~again,~~ ^{to} ~~let~~ ^{to} ~~me~~ ^{to} ~~correct~~ ^{to} ~~what~~ ^{to} ~~I~~ ^{to} ~~think~~ ^{to} ~~is~~ ^{to} ~~a~~ ^{to} ~~small~~ ^{to} ~~glitch~~ ^{to} ~~in~~ ^{to} ~~your~~ ^{to} ~~interview~~ ^{to} ~~with~~ ^{to} ~~me:~~ ^{to} ~~in~~ ^{to} ~~my~~ ^{to} ~~Continental~~ ^{to} ~~Divide~~ ^{to} ~~example~~ ^{to} ~~of~~ ^{to} ~~sparse~~ ^{to} ~~western~~ ^{to} ~~population,~~ ^{to} ~~I~~ ^{to} ~~think~~ ^{to} ~~I~~ ^{to} ~~said~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{to} ~~Divide~~ ^{to} ~~ends~~ ^{to} ~~up~~ ^{to} ~~in~~ ^{to} ~~Ariz.,~~ ^{to} ~~instead~~ ^{to} ~~of~~ ^{to} ~~New~~ ^{to} ~~Mexico;~~ ^{to} ~~let's~~ ^{to} ~~correct~~ ^{to} ~~that~~ ^{to} ~~if~~ ^{to} ~~you're~~ ^{to} ~~going~~ ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~use~~ ^{to} ~~it,~~ ^{to} ~~so~~ ^{to} ~~I~~ ^{to} ~~don't~~ ^{to} ~~look~~ ^{to} ~~any~~ ^{to} ~~more~~ ^{to} ~~ignorant~~ ^{to} ~~about~~ ^{to} ~~the~~ ^{to} ~~Southwest~~ ^{to} ~~than~~ ^{to} ~~I~~ ^{to} ~~already~~ ^{to} ~~am.~~

Now I start on the booksignings in this area; so it goes to Xmas, then at the start of '85 I get to the typewriter again. Hope you're thriving. Had a great couple of evenings with Jim Welch in Missoula. And Jim, Kittredge and I, who are all in it, first laid eyes on the Writers of The Purple Sage anthology last Friday.

best,

From **EUGENE SMITH**

Department of English GN-30
University of Washington
Seattle, WA 98195
(206)543-7993

2205 22nd Avenue East
Seattle, WA 98195
(206)323-0656

October 15, 1984

Dear Ivan,

Thanks for sending the bibliographic references. I knew about the photo book but not the other two.

I thought the interview went very well and hope you do too. The sound quality of my tape is excellent, perhaps even good enough for archival purposes.

My copy of the finished English Creek arrived a few days ago. It looks splendid. I'll return the proof copy right away.

I hope the Denver speech goes (or went) well. Off now for auto-graphing?

I'll keep in touch as I continue to work on this project. I appreciate your interest and cooperation.

With good wishes,

Eugene

Pacific Northwest History
Conference Program
Thursday, April 23, 1987
2 p. m. - 6 p. m.
Registration, Lower Lobby,
Ridpath Hotel, 515 W. Sprague,
Spokane, WA

6:30 p. m. - 8:30 p. m.
Reception at Museum of Native
American Cultures E. 200
Cataldo, Spokane

Friday, April 24, 1987
8:00 a. m. - noon
Registration, Lower Lobby,
Ridpath Hotel

7:00 a. m. - 8:30 a. m.
**Northwest Oral History
Association Breakfast
Meeting** (Empire Ballroom B)

8:30 a. m. - 9:45 a. m.
Session 1 (Empire A)
**Powerful Personalities Visit
the Pacific Northwest**
Presiding: Eckard Toy,
Oregon State University
"Timofei Tarakanov, Russian
Frontiersman in the Pacific
West," Kenneth Owens, California
State University, Sacramento
"Billy Sunday in Spokane,"
Dale Soden, Whitworth College
Comment: Nigel Adams, Green
River Community College

Session 2 (Legend Rm. A)
**Economic Changes in 19th and
20th Century Pacific NW**
Presiding: Burton Smith,
University of Alberta
"Economic Change and Cultural
Expression Among Northwest
Coast Indians, 1784 - 1984,"
Victoria Wyatt,
University of Washington
"Power to the People, Construction
of the BPA 'Master Grid', 1939 -
1945," Craig Holstine,
Eastern Washington University
Comment: Keith Murray,
Western Washington University

Session 3 (Legend Rm. B)
**Documentation of Ethnic
Experiences in Oral History**
Presiding: Linda Dodds,
History Resources, Portland
"The Battle of Little Bighorn:
Perspectives from Northern
Cheyenne Descendants," Royal
Jackson, Oregon State University
"Applied Hispanic Oral History in
Central Washington," Walt Smith,
Bicultural & Educational Assoc.
"The Finns of Long Valley, Idaho,"
Alice Koskella, McCall, ID

9:45 a. m. **Break**
No-host coffee/ juice at
Registration Desk

10:15 a. m. - 11:30 a. m.
Session 4 (Empire A)
**Politics and Power in
Achieving Statehood**
Presiding: Judith Austin, Idaho
State Historical Society
"Insurrection, Agitation & Riots:
The Police Power and Washington
Statehood," Kent Richards,
Central Washington University
"Spoils of Montana Statehood: The
Politics of Shaping a State, 1888-
1894," William L. Lang,
Montana Historical Society
Comment: Kenneth Owens,
California State University,
Sacramento

Session 5 (Legend Rm. A)
The Railroad-Made Palouse
Presiding: W. Thomas White,
James J. Hill Reference Library
"Rails Across the Palouse: A
Visual History," Carlos
Schwantes, University of Idaho
"Tekoa: The Work and Life of a
Railroad Town," Dale Martin,
Renewable Technologies
"Farmington: Boom and Bust,"
Susan Armitage, Washington
State University

From Rea

Session 6 (Legend Rm. B)
**Sampling as a Tool of
Archival Management**
"Sampling-Applications to Archival
Appraisal Problems," Jay W. Rea,
Eastern Washington University
"Sampling Case Studies in
Superior Court Files and Records
of the City of Spokane,"
Charles V. Mutschler, Eastern
Washington Regional Archives
"The China Papers: Archival
Appraisal of Department of State
Documents," Patricia M. Hall,
Washington State University

12:30 - 2:00 p. m.
Lunch (Empire Ballroom B & C)
Presiding: Madeline Buckendorf,
Idaho Oral History Center, Boise
Address: "The Historian as
Interviewer," Donald A. Ritchie,
U. S. Senate Historical Office

2:30 p. m. - 4:00 p. m.
Session 7 (Empire A)
History is Where You Find It
Presiding: Jeanne Engerman,
Washington State Library
"Making History: Washington and
the Great War as Seen Through
Recordings, Photographs, Personal
Memoirs, and Oral Histories."
J. William T. Youngs,
Eastern Washington University
✓ "Ivan Doig: Literary Craftsman
as Historian," William G.
Robbins, Oregon State University
Comment: Lewis O. Saum,
University of Washington

Session 8 (Legend Rm. A)
Indian Languages
Presiding: Robert Ruby,
Author, Moses Lake
"Jesuit Missionaries and the
Study of Indian Languages",
Gerald McKevitt, S. J.,
Santa Clara University
"Chinook into Shorthand, The
Kamloops Wawa," Ken Favrholt,
Kamloops Museum & Archives
Comment: Wilfred P. Schoenberg,
S. J., Gonzaga University

1987 Pac NW History Conference

12-2-86

Dear Charles

After you were ~~so~~ helpful when I was working on my article on Northwest literature, and after you were kind enough to look it over, I thought you'd like to know what's become of it. The Northwest Review of Books accepted it for their September issue -- September 1986, I thought. I'm beginning to feel like a guy awaiting the Titanic. Meanwhile, I'm expanding it to include a new book by Ralph Beer (a Montana Rancher) and I'll be giving it as a talk to a book club in Tacoma. I'm going to try to offer a course in NW lit, and also take the talk on the road through the Washington Speakers Bureau. So that's the current status --
Thanks again, Richard

Wakefield
10629-237th Pl. SW
Edmonds, WA 98020



George Wythe

Patrol



Ivan Boig
17021 - 10th Ave. N.W.
Seattle, WA 98177

July 17, 1986

Dear Mr. Doig:

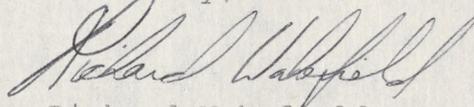
I want to thank you for your help while I was working on my article for The Northwest Review of Books. I'm enclosing a copy, and I hope you feel it fairly represents northwest literature and your place in it.

The editor says the article will appear in the September issue. There's a more than small chance that the publication won't be in business by then -- they've had chronic money troubles. But if they remain in business, and if I can squeeze them for just a bit more space, I want to add some material, so the version you see in September may look a little different.

Try not to laugh when I tell you that one addition I want to make is a comparison between your description of your father in This House of Sky and L'Amour's description of Hondo. If I had room to put the passages side by side and talk in detail about what's going on, I think I could better make my point about the differences between a conventionalized, downright cliched representation of character and landscape, and a genuine consideration of how place and character get wrapped up in each other.

Again, many thanks for your help, and please don't hesitate to let me know if you think I've done anything mildly stupid or even altogether wrongheaded.

Sincerely,



Richard Wakefield

18 July '86

Dear Richard--

Your article is jake with me. I maybe even learned a couple of things about myself. But I'd better point out that I ain't Proust: my Swan is spelled with one n.

Good luck with the piece, and regards.

Richard Wakefield
10629-237th Place S.W.
Edmonds, Washington 98020
(206) 546-2774

The Literature of the Northwest:

Language and Landscape

Long after "American literature" ceased to be a label of provinciality, the literature of the northwest retained a stigma of local color, of narrowness. It had a ready-made audience ("Gee, I've been there!"). It also had a ready-made non-audience ("Who cares?").

Whatever national attention came Theodore Winthrop's "The Canoe and the Saddle" (Ticknor and Fields, 1863) was the attention given an exciting travelogue. Depicting a distant place where old ways of thinking and acting no longer sufficed, the book used a journalist's language, a controlled descriptiveness, to plunge the reader into the confusing geography of the Oregon Territory. Disorienting the reader was the best way of getting language to convey the confusion of a journey the length of Puget Sound and across the Cascades.

The appeal of "The Canoe and the Saddle," however, lay precisely in its novelty. The northwest setting was less important for its own sake than simply because it was someplace else. It was a "someplace else" that attracted the attention of

people who were feeling a quickened interest in westward expansion, but it might have found equal acceptance had its subject been any sufficiently distant region. Travelogues were the order of the day; Mark Twain's "Roughing It" remains a classic of late nineteenth century travel writing.

"Roughing It," in fact, may point up in its enduring readability precisely what was wrong with "The Canoe and the Saddle" and with much other early northwest writing. The sub-theme of "The Canoe and the Saddle" is a genial democracy, a way of life where the stiffling conventions of the east have been cast off. The theme was attractive. It was also largely untrue. The book reads today like a story by someone who was impressed by natural grandeur, who strove to use language to capture some sense of grandeur, and who yet remained able to see in the region's society only what he wished to see. The ideal of the west as a democritizing, revitalizing region pervades the book.

Yet the setting is evoked well. Regional literature at its most basic arises from the urge to report what this place is like, and this "The Canoe and the Saddle" does. The theme, however, is not only not intrinsic to the region; it a misunderstanding of the region.

Donn Fry, book review editor for the Seattle Times, when asked to characterize northwest literature, answered that it is the very difficulty of characterizing it that distinguishes it. "We have a sophisticated mix of writers that other areas don't seem

to have," he told me. The place simply makes a good backdrop, as movie makers are beginning to discover.

Earl Emerson's detective novels -- "The Rainy City" (Avon, 1985) and "Poverty Bay" (Avon, 1985) -- don't claim to make any special statement about the northwest; they are simply set here. What matters most is that they are good stories, and if they would be different in a different setting, the difference might be intriguing but probably not profound.

David Wagoner, editor of Poetry Northwest, author of over twenty books, said of the phrase "northwest literature" that it "has no meaning." A given work is either literature or it is not, he feels. He mentions a number of our most successful writers, including Tom Robbins and Ken Kesey, and points, as examples of the absurdity of trying to characterize a writer by his or her place of residence, to the many science fiction writers who have lived in the northwest, the late Frank Herbert (author of the "Dune" series) probably foremost among them.

Wagoner's assertion is clear enough. To suggest that a writer is characterized by his or her region is to say that he or she is also therefore limited. Yet a sense of place has characterized American literature from the beginning. What of those works that purport to say something about our region?

Harold Simonson, Professor of English at the University of Washington, makes a speciality of such literature, and he believes that much of what we now see meets Wagoner's requirement that the writing be, first and last, literature. Simonson writes

that our regional literature has "come of age," that "events expand into fuller symbolism, themes reach universality, and people have life larger than their roles..." ("Pacific Northwest Quarterly," October 1980).

A good sign of wider significance is formal recognition by the literary establishment. The first novel set in the northwest to win the Pulitzer Prize (it also won the Harper Award) was "Honey in the Horn" (Harper, 1934), by H.L. Davis. In one sense, I suspect, the novel won the Pulitzer partly by default, because it represented a safe alternative to other candidates. Getting the prize committee to agree on the controversial social themes that pervaded the literature of the era was probably impossible. At the same time, "serious" literature was victim to a Joycean density that widened its separation from popular writing. "Honey in the Horn" was, to the 1930's, a story that happened long, long ago in a place far, far away. It has its social themes, but it does not trumpet them.

The story follows young Clay Calvert as he helps a man escape from jail and is then forced to flee his southern Oregon home. Its relies on language and events of the sort that reviewers like to call "rollicking," as when Simmons, a patent-medicine maker, takes delight in the distress his potions cause:

There were certain rules for barking a chittem tree for physic, and a good deal of hard luck was apt to hit the constipated sufferer who guzzled a dose that hadn't been peeled carefully... (I)t was liable to fetch his entire system up, like turning a sock wrong side out, and there was a story to the effect that somebody in the country had actually hauled his own toe nails plumb up into his ankles trying to heave up a slug...

Calvert, at the end of the novel, is reconciled to a woman he had met and then split up with. It is a time of a "great starve out," and the entire population of the valley is moving. He looks around, and he says to her,

"I wanted to settle down in one place and stay there, and then I looked at the people that had. They're all right, but they don't amount to anything. These people do. If enough of 'em ever take to the road all at once, they could stand this country on its head. You can't tell what they might do."

This treasured American ideal of the slumbering strength of the common man is as close to topicality as "Honey in the Horn" gets. Whatever political weight the ideal may have carried in the mid-30s, it also dragged with it a whole set of related myths. Davis said of the book that he intended to "include a representative of every calling that existed in the state of Oregon during the homesteading period -- 1906-1908." A celebration of the working man, if you will.

Such a conscious effort for inclusiveness results in a story that tries to leap to universality without first getting itself a firm footing in the particular. The critics saw this early on: "I hope Mr. Davis will try again, but concentrating on character rather than on types. Types are very much alike; character is always different" (Claribel Patterson, New York Herald Tribune, August 22, 1935).

The novel reads now as a conventional western played out in a slightly unconventional region. Davis himself said that earlier Oregon writers "in their search for the past must have missed something, since they failed to establish a unity between it and

the world out of which they wrote." If Davis himself did the same thing, his observation is no less accurate for it.

Robert Cantwell ("The Hidden Northwest," J.B. Lippencott, 1972) says that the fault of our early writers lay in the "remote and derivative forms that shaped their art." This is another way of saying what Davis was trying to get at: There was no unity to be found between past and present, because the past was a false one, Davis's as much so as anyone else's. The lack of a connection to now is really a failure to find the real then. It is a diversion away from a true past and toward a conventionalized one. The product may be enjoyable reading; it may even be important for what it makes of its own premises. But it does not directly tell us anything about this place as distinct from others.

Words can take over. Davis used language that carried with it a world of associations, of expectations, and they ended up shaping his book.

The problem occurs again and again in our literature. We are, after all, part of the west, and our past is at times so close to the cliches of popular western fiction that the cliches take over. Resisting the cliches is an achievement in itself, so much so that the genuine literary possibilities of the west have only occasionally been exploited, although this year we see a "western" novel receiving the Pulitzer: Larry McMurtry's "Lonesome Dove." McMurtry resisted the shaping force of the already-told stories.

Davis, whatever else he achieved with "Honey in the Horn," did not.

Still, "Honey in the Horn" is a turning point. It is the first work set in our region to win the tangible prominence of a Pulitzer. And in its succumbing to "remote and derivative forms," it embodies a problem that everyone, not writers only, must face.

Myths are the patterns people invent, the stories they tell, to make sense of their past, and they are the patterns to which they try to make their present conform. Myth is the language with which we try to reshape our landscape. Sometimes, it doesn't work. The constant testing of our invented patterns against the raw material of experience is part of our lives. Our best writers, compelled to struggle with and against myths, are trying to discover an authentic regional mythology and to reconcile it to our lives. The effort necessarily remains firmly located geographically, but at its best it transcends regionalism.

Ken Kesey's "Sometimes a Great Notion" is in part the story of the unstoppable force of American expansionism meeting the immovable object of the Pacific Ocean. It is here, in the northwest, that we discovered we could go no farther. Yet we had spent centuries always going farther. Huck Finn knows the Mississippi will carry him and Jim deeper into slave territory, but they remain on the raft even after they know they have passed the confluence with the Ohio River, which would carry them into

free states. The river seems to offer a solution by the simple fact of its movement. And in the end, even though Huck ought to know by now that mere movement is not deliverance, his decision is to "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest." That is, he is heading west. Unpleasant myths, myths that contradict or invalidate our experience -- these are what we try to walk away from when we refuse, with Huck, the effort to "sivilize" us.

A collective voice speaks from the Stamper family past, from the moment the westering clan found itself standing on the shore of the Pacific: "Where to from here?" And the answer: "Beats the piss outa me; all's I know's this don't taste much like wine."

After generations of moving on, that inherited restlessness is turned in on itself. Robinson Jeffers, the California poet, hardly qualifies as a northwest writer, but he believed passionately that the sight of the Pacific precipitated a crisis of the American spirit. The long-deferred moment of intropection suddenly could be put off no longer, or could be put off only through a grim, self-destructive violence. Only stubborn self-ignorance could keep America from the contemplation that had, before, been replaced by physical movement and the subjugation of nature. The Stamper clan is riven by the competing desires for ignorance and illumination.

"Sometimes a Great Notion" is about many things, including the collision of two of our most treasured ways of talking about ourselves. America in general and the west in particular are the land of the rugged individual. Our contempt for bureacrats and

their committees runs deep. But the frontier is also a place where people stick together, and historically the northwest has often been in the vanguard of various progressive movements -- it was Seattle that had the general strike of 1919, an event that still figures large in socialist history.

In "Sometimes a Great Notion," soon after Jonas Stamper arrives with his family in western Oregon, he leaves them:

"What come of his family?"

"They're still around, her'n' the three boys. Folks here are kinda helpin' keep their heads above water. Old Foodland Stokes sends 'em a bit of grocery every day or so..."

The family that survived because of the community's generosity produces Henry Stamper, whose motto, hand-lettered over his son's crib, reads, "Never give a inch!" The Stampers refuse to observe the undeclared margin of respect that everyone else gives the river. Long after their homestead has become a precarious point jutting into the current, Henry Jr. prowls the banks by night, reinforcing what the water has eroded. The house itself symbolizes the family motto, the apotheosis of the rugged individual:

It, the house, protrudes in the river on a peninsula of its own making, on an unsightly jetty of land shored up on all sides with logs, ropes, cables, burlap bags filled with cement and rocks, welded irrigation pipe, old trestle girders, and bent train rails.

The swarm of unionized loggers across the river embodies another, conflicting story of the west, the stick-together mentality that had saved homesteads and wagon trains all across

the frontier. The people on the other side protect themselves with their own familiar words:

A crowd of forty or fifty in all, some squatting on their haunches in the three-walled garage next to the highway... others sitting on crates beneath a small makeshift lean-to made of a Pepsi-Cola sign ripped from its morring: BE SOCIABLE -- with a bottle lifted to wet red lips four feet across.

One needs no crash course in the history of the labor movement to see that this conflict will not be resolved without violence.

The first literature of our region was travel literature, journalism. The impulse simply to record what is here remains with us. When the accretions of stories have grown so thick that the bedrock experience of being is buried, northwest writers turn again to try, in Ivan Doig's words, "to get it right," to strive for "exactness." In writing, the urge is to go full-circle, back to the journalistic account of "The Canoe and the Saddle."

Here is a great strength of the west, especially of the northwest. The overwhelming presence of nature will not let us get far from the physical facts of place. The first fact of our existence here is place. What is the link between what we are and where we are?

Doig's first book, "This House of Sky" (Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), is subtitled "Landscapes of a Western Mind." Set in Montana, it displays a willingness to push language in order to make it fit the west and the experience of being here. The old words won't do.

Here, for example, the words that depict the landscape overlap with the words that describe Doig's father after Doig's mother's death:

Day by day as autumn tanned the valley around us, now with bright winter frost, now with rain carrying the first chill of winter, my father stayed in the dusk of his grief.

Doig himself has said, "I like to see how language can dance." His current reading is the new Dictionary of American Regional English, a record of the possibilities of language. His own play, making language dance, I suspect, amounts to experimentation, just as the Dictionary of American Regional English is a compilation of other language experiments that have worked.

Doig's second book, "Winter Brothers" (Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), is a record of the compulsion to "get it right," and it both embodies and contemplates the journalistic impulse that animated "The Canoe and the Saddle." "Winter Brothers" is a treasure of regional literature because it simultaneously looks at our coming -- at what our we did to this place and what this place did to us -- and records its own creation. It is a book about its own writing.

For a year Doig pored over the journals of James Swann, a man we would today call an ethnologist, perhaps, but who in his own day had the luxury of escaping definition. Swann fled a wife and children in Boston in the 1850s, spent the last half of the century on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State, and during those years wrote on the order of two and a half million words in

his journals, chronicling his days in a place where, in the sameness of the weather, lesser hearts see nothing worth recording from one day to the next.

More than reading Swann's journals, Doig retraces his steps. He stands where Swann stood, tries to see what Swann saw. At Dungeness Spit, Doig tries to look through Swann's eyes and his own simultaneously:

A keeper's house and fine brick tower 92 feet high, he recorded in that year of 1859, in which is placed a stationary light of the order of Fresnel.

The Dungeness tower is now white-painted concrete, and not so lofty, that original beacon having proved to be so eminent that it blinked futilely above the fogs that drift on the face of the Strait.

A sense of place is also a sense of time. No place remains the same through time, not to a creature that can tell stories, at least, for the place becomes layered with what has been said of it. Doig may envy Swann the blank page of the northwest coast of the nineteenth century, yet Doig knows that the closest he can come to experiencing the sight of unwritten nature is through Swann's words. The century-old landscape exists only in words. The result, as the title implies, is an emerging relationship both between Doig and Swann and between the men and the place. It is partly through Swann that Doig can know this place.

After following Swann's journals through decades, Doig is ready to try to speak in Swann's voice. But because he is consciously adopting Swann's words, Swann's perspective, he remains in control in a way that other writers do not when inherited language shapes their landscape. Doig concludes the passage that

he writes for Swann, "...if I have not prospered greatly in my western life yet I am greatly prosperous in what I have done..." The compensation of the northwest is not that it grants the prosperity one strove for, but that it grants its own prosperity. In unlearning the old definition of success, we may find something better.

By the time Doig writes these words, making himself a man of two eras, he has followed Swann's journals to the years that saw the births of Doig's grandmother and father, the people who raised him. He has reached the time of Swann's life that overlaps with his personal history. "(S)eparations between Swann's territory and mine mysteriously close at some moments," Doig writes, shortly after speaking in Swann's voice. Fascination with the landscape and with language exist side by side. They may be at root the same fascination: "Profundities of westering there undoubtedly are, but do they count for more than a liking of mountains and of hearing a waitress say, There you go...?"

At Cape Flattery, on a day when sleet is "blanking the coastline of the Strait down to a few hundred yards of mingled sky and water and rock," Doig feels what it is to go as far west as one can go:

Behind, on all sides, the continent shears away, dangles me to air and the rocky water below...

Surf pounds underfoot with surprisingly little noise but wind makes up for it. I crouch carefully, not be pulled off the continent...

The feel of Cape Flattery as an everlasting precipice of existence is strong as I repeat routes of Swann's here. When he established himself in the

schoolhouse at Neah Bay in 1863, ready to reason the peninsular natives into the white culture's version of education, he made himself in the moment the westernmost frontiersman in the continental United States.

The "westernmost frontiersman" is a school teacher, eager to bring the white culture, white language, to the natives. Doig pointed out to me the tendency of our pioneers to settle down someplace very remote and immediately start looking for some sort of federal appointment -- judgeship, customs inspector, reservation school teacher.

Just as H.L. Davis brought a ready-made story to impose on the setting of southern Oregon, so Swann and others brought their familiar patterns, their familiar words. Swann's obsessive journal keeping may have been a prolonged effort to find the words that would embody his life in the northwest. The task, ever since, has been to reconcile language and landscape.

This is the overt business of "Winter Brothers." The book is simultaneously about language and about landscape, and it is the best frame we have for our other regional literature. At its best, northwest literature not only tells a story; it tells us about stories -- about the frustrations and rewards inherent in trying to use words to represent the fact of place.

December 3, 1985

Dear Ivan,

It is probably bad form to begin one's first letter to someone with an apology, but I feel I must. I apologize for the presumption of my letter in general, for calling you "Ivan" as though we were personal friends, and for the task I am setting before you.

In 1984 I reviewed *English Creek* for the Omaha World-Herald, and you responded kindly by sending me a nice note and a copy of *Montana*. I hope that by now responding to your response I do not persuade you to stop your practice of writing to reviewers.

I have not yet visited Montana, but I feel a great kinship with you and your writing. Briefly: I am 33, born in Texas (my father was in the U.S. Air Force) but raised on a farm in northeastern Nebraska near a small town in which both my parents had been raised. I worked throughout high school for the local weekly newspaper, studied journalism at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and, after graduating, worked a series of journalism jobs. I have worked on three Nebraska weeklies, once as publisher; I have worked on the Kansas City Times, the Lincoln (Neb.) Journal, the Fort Myers (Fla.) News-Press, the Rochester (N.Y.) Democrat & Chronicle and, now, the World-Herald. I've been reporter, copy editor, features editor, graphics editor, assistant regional editor, assistant sports editor and, now, magazines editor.

Like you, I sought to get away from my home place, away from Nebraska to the more important -- in newspaper circles anyway -- East Coast. I couldn't wait to get away. What I found, though, was that the farther from Nebraska I got, the more Nebraskan I became. Maybe I was simply growing older, more mature, more responsible, but whatever it was, I discovered my memories of childhood -- the people, the animals, the plants, the smells, sights and sounds -- were becoming sharper. And so, four years ago, I came back, if not to the farm, at least to Nebraska. At the same time -- initially as a way to relax after a stress-filled day at the office -- I began to write fiction. I took a couple of semesters at the writer's workshop at the University of Nebraska's Omaha campus. After having written newspaper non-fiction -- the "truth" we liked to call it -- for almost ten years, I discovered I hadn't been close to the truth at all. I was asked to read my first story, "With the Volume at Eight," at a public reading. I was intimidated as I had never been before: Though I had written countless bylined pieces without a moment's embarrassment, I was petrified to think of

what I was going to be telling a roomful of strangers about myself through this short piece of fiction.

The reading went well, and I have continued to write, but the feeling of what I had done -- discovered a part of myself through this process of creating fiction, then imparted it to people -- stuck with me.

What this lengthy explanation is leading to is that I want to write. My plans, with the help of my wife, are to quit my position at the paper sometime in 1986 and write, either on my own or with the help of a writing program somewhere. When you responded to my review of your book, my first reaction was, "What a nice guy this Ivan Doig is. I'm going to write him, send him some of my stories, ask for his criticism." It has taken me a year to muster up enough courage to do so.

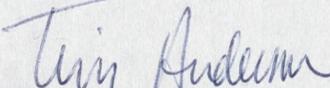
My reasons for picking on you? 1) You were kind enough to write. 2) You have written your share of questioning letters yourself. 3) You say if you ask a Montanan properly, you will "get back civility and I'll-do-what-I-can-for-you." 4) The closeness you have with Montana is what I feel toward my state, Nebraska.

Again, I apologize for being so presumptuous. I have enclosed three of my stories -- the most complete of the bunch, I feel -- and I humbly ask for your criticism.

I recently met one of your fellow "Writers of the Purple Sage," William Kittredge, when he read a new story here in Omaha. His program at Missoula is one to which I will apply. I talked at length with him, and he was encouraging about my prospects of getting in.

If there is anyway you can take the time to critique my work, I'll be forever grateful. If you can't, I'll understand. Just remember: Not everyone you drop a note to is likely to write back with such a burdensome request.

Sincerely,


Tim Anderson

11 Dec. '85

Dear Tim Anderson--

You play a spiffy game of gotcha. Remind me never to sit down to a poker table with you.

To business. Frankly, and at the inescapable risk of sounding like a J. Frank Dobian killjoy, I can't encourage you to go on your own as a writer. A stint at a writing school maybe, but let me come to that later. First, the trio of short stories you sent. Both you and I can, and should, qualify my estimation with the fact that I've never understood the allure of the short story form to anyone who wants to write. To me, it's like deciding to become a major league baseball player even though the league happens to consist of just one division--the American League East, say. I honestly wonder if even the current master of the form, Raymond Carver, could make a decent living sheerly on his short stories; the market is simply so scant, The New Yorker, one a month in The Atlantic, a few in Playboy, and that's about it. Okay, that's my qualifying clause. Now your stories: I just didn't find in them the loving particularity that would ~~hook~~ hold me. In "Volume at Eight," what music is Warren playing? In "Testify," I may have missed a clue (though a story can't rely on a single clue), but did Grandma do it or not? If it's a "Bad Seed" story, I think your ~~own~~ narrator needs to be a lot badder; if the grandma is the villain, the little girl's death has to seem a lot more horrific. On pp. 4-6 of "Ways and Means" I bent my rule of never critiquing, even for close friends like Kittredge, and did quick indications of what seemed to me some problems. Dialogue among them; on p. 157 of the Dec. 9 issue of The New Yorker there's a swatch from Doctorow's new novel which I think shows what dialogue needs to do, tell the story by itself whenever it has to. This is not a surprising problem for a newsmen, because newsmen are trained to listen for the core of what's being said, and dialogue isn't so much the core as all the interesting detritus along the way to it. Another problem, which seems to me in all three stories, is also endemic to newsmen: reluctance to write about what you truly love. (Or truly hate, it could be; but passion of some sort is the point.) All three of those stories have an alienated narrator or protagonist. But what if the boy loved his grandmother so much he killed some member of the family, for instance? What if the air guitar player didn't conceal it from his wife, but she loved him for it anyway? Tim, both my wife and I were struck by the effectiveness of your letter; obviously it's effective or I wouldn't be answering at this length. That letter, and its topic, your working life, obviously mean an immense lot to you, and it comes through. I don't find that in the stories.

Next disquisition is that I can't urge anyone to go out on his own as a writer. Yes, I did it, and others will, ~~maybe~~ maybe even you. But hard facts: this year, my 16th, is the first one in which ~~my~~ my income alone could support my wife and me if it had to. She has underwritten my entire writing career until now, roughly 20 years. Before this year's income--which is only as high as it is because I received a NEA fiction fellowship--the most I ever grossed in a year was \$25,000, the year after This House of Sky came out; figure about \$10,000 a year off that in the research and other expenses it takes me to write a book, and you have some idea of how thin the writing life is, even in "good" years.

A friend of mine who also works at home, as an investor, has ~~described~~ described his way of life and mine as being "self-unemployed." Considerable truth in that.

over

Why, then, have I stuck to it? Because of what I think are probably not a very flattering set of characteristics in me. I continually meet people who are better writers than I am, who are better self-editors, who are more imaginative conceptualizers, who are more deft at business, or who are better at stolidly hunkering in at a job. But I don't often meet them in one skin; and it seems to be my stolid ability to do some of each, chore by chore by chore, that gets me by.

A stint in a writing school, I would not particularly discourage you from. You can handle the language, you do it in your work, and you might well learn a whole bunch at a good school. Where that is, I'm sorry to say I don't know--I'm not around writing schools, have never taught in one, and so am just deficient in information on them. Missoula is the one place I'm occasionally at the fringe of, because of friends there; I think it's had a good program, I like and admire Kittredge but warn in the same breath that he's busy in 40 directions and you'd better find out how much you'd be around him if you went there. Also, you ought to visit Missoula first before deciding. I think it's a marvelous community, but it's far different geographically and maybe culturally than Omaha.

I know these comments will smart, and I much regret that. But I'm about to send out the first chapters of my next novel to a friend to read, and as I told her in urging her to be tough on the work, "what I need at this point is a hard scrimmage, not cheerleading." So, cuss me thoroughly, have a drink and kiss your wife, and go on toward where you want in life. But not as a self-~~un~~employed short story writer, please.

best wishes

December 10, 1984

Dear Margaret,

I wonder if I can answer your nice long letter enclosed in a Christmas card and have it count? I shall try, anyway. Today is a horrible dark and dreary day, quite like the opening of an Edgar Allen Poe story- and I must say it makes me feel rather bah and humbuggy about Christmas, but perhaps writing a letter will get me in the mood.

The only good thing about the presidential election is that it is over. Oh, yes, and now we can sit back and say I Told You So and watch the honeymoon come to a standstill. Rather bitter satisfactions. Every time it looks as if someone is going to be skunked I mutter go to it, Ronny, sock it to 'em, they deserve everything they don't get.

I was amused with your troubles with the typewriter, as I am having my own with my lovely brand-new one, after six months. It works just fine for about twenty minutes, and then the carriage return begins to go slower and slower, while my fingers remain impatiently poised, and finally hangs up completely and won't move at all. The damn thing. Then I have to let it cool off for a couple of hours.

It really drove me crazy as I was finishing the book I was typing for the Latvian doctor. I have gotten very fast, what with typing a couple of hours every day, so the waits for the carriage return were particularly irksome. Anyway I did finish the book and now I really miss having it to type on it these long rainy afternoons.

Yes, we had our trip to the southwest--went in October, when the weather was superb and the trees, particularly the aspens, were gorgeous colors. We went to Bryce Canyon--like a fantastic fairy city; the north rim of the Grand Canyon, which really caught me by the throat when I first saw it; Monument Park--seen it dozens of times in movie westerns; Zion National Park--I am sure more vertical acreage than horizontal. Best of all was Mesa Verde, where we saw the cliff dwellings. The bigger ones are truly beautiful, and mysterious and exciting. We also stopped over night in Salt Lake City and went up to Temple Square where we were practically tramped under foot by the many earnest LDS's welcoming us to their stronghold. Indeed we saw many wonders--most of them made out of red rock. The green and fertile hills and valleys looked pretty good to our green-starved eyes.

Josephine sent me The Sea Runners for my birthday, and I liked it a lot. Johnny also read it and liked it. His style is so tight and economical it could almost be a narrative poem: to pick at random,

A high-standing sea of mountains,
White caps of snow and ice and
Rock, with arms of the Pacific,
BlueBluerfjords and inlets thrusting in
At whatever chance: Alaska's locked grapple
Of continent and ocean.

(over)

But of course if it were poetry no one would read it.

You would never know from this letter that my typing had become so good. My fingers seem to know that this is a personal letter and not a commercial venture.

My reading as usual is exiguous. I scabble at the library and half the time bring home books I have already read. Not that I read reviews of a whole heck of a lot of books that I want to read very much. I did read Muriel Sparks latest book--The Whole Trouble (something like that for a title), and I did like it even though the reviews I read were a little lukewarm. I haven't been able to get Iris Murdock's last book--can't remember the name of it. I always like hers, though.

My typewriter is beginning its descent into non-functioning, the dumb thing.

We have just finished practicing for and performing the Messiah. I played my flute during orchestra rehearsals as well as singing in voice rehearsals and sang in the final performance, although my poor old voice eventually gives out during some of the more trying numbers. Susan came up and played her bassoon, so we got to have her sans family for overnight, which we enjoyed. Crab season just opened so we pigged out on crab oh yum yum.

Our little book club is going to talk about Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass this week. I think that should be fun for I find that some of them have never even thought about the ideas in some of the episodes, such as the White King's Berkleyan dreaming.

Your courses for women sound very interesting--both to prepare and to attend. I hope you did find enough women who weren't employed to make up the classes--my goodness, is it that long ago that I got your letter?

We are planning to come to Seattle in January or February and of course will hope to see you then.

Love to Jerry and Pat--hope you all have a good Christmas.

Love
Mary

1 Nov. '84

Dear Bill--
Beins

First, our compliments to the chef. The liver was great.

Next, I want to pass along to you something that happened during the signing at Freddy's and that I was too blunked out that night to remember. The very first guy who bought a book from me was a 40ish town-rancher sort of guy, hat, boots and evident ranch background but some other job now, and as I was signing he asked, Is that Walter gonna be in any more books? Took me a moment to realize he meant the Walter Kyle minor character in English Creek, of the Scotch hotel sheepmen in Ingomar, and so I said yeah, he might indeed. The guy then said, Boy, I've heard those stories all my life from my aunt, about those geezers in that old Ingomar hotel... So I got her name from him, and as you're a habitue of the Jersey Lily, you can look her up there sometime: she's Louise Whitmore and works there. I should explain too that when you asked me if that story was true, I was too travel-weary and unfocused to find what was at the edge of my mind, which was that someone has since told me those sheepmen weren't all Scotchmen but included some Norwegians! The names that were recited to me by my original source, Bradley Hamlett in Great Falls, were Scotch though. Incidentally, there was a marvelous local history of the Ingomar country done in the Bicentennial year; they straight-facedly called it the Tri-City Reunion--Ingomar, Vananda and Sumatra--and they had the exquisite common sense to print the current address of everybody who came, in the back of the book. I've gleaned some excellent homestead memories from those people, thanks to that mailing list.

I've had a little time to catch my mental breath since we got home, and to try to think about the history in my fiction, for the sake of your Montana article. This likely won't be much help, but I think I tried to use history in two ways in English Creek. First, for veracity of detail. When you get to the forest fire section, for instance, the description of the pick-up fire fighters coming from "the bars and flophouses of Clore Street in Helena and Trent Avenue in Spokane and First Avenue South in Great Falls" is an almost-throwaway phrase (in appearance) which actually derives from 3 different sources-- Dave Walter of the Montana Historical Society library tracked down for me a retired Helena forest ranger who "said the FS long had hired off the streets in the Park/Wood/Main area (of Helena). He referred to South Park as Clore Street--by which name the street became famous for bars, whorehouses and sleazy living. Then, in about 1911, the city fathers decided they could cleanse the reputation of Helena by changing the name of Clore Street to South Park Avenue. An admirable attempt--but the same activities continued there, and most everyone still called it Clore Street." Which I decided to do in the book too, to celebrate the defeat of good intentions. Trent Avenue in Spokane was provided for me by a friend whom I knew grew up there; and First Ave. S. in Gt Falls of course was ~~not~~ notorious to me during my own boyhood. I tried to bring Missoula into the scene, hoping the Oxford would star, but one of my Missoula rangers said no, they hired the firefighters there down by the railroad tracks--rail-riding hoboes and such--instead of in any neighborhood. And incredibly, I couldn't

find anybody who knew which of Butte's sundry rough streets the Forest Service did its emergency hiring on. Anyway, the point is the "history" behind this single phrase of description, and while it's just one example, I did something similar time after time in the book. It was the most demanding book to check I've ever done or hope to.

Then history in a larger sense, which I think you'll see happen--at least I hope you do, though reviewers haven't, yet; the publisher inadvertently tipped them all off by including the year the book takes place, in the pr stuff with every review copy--at the end of Part Three, p. 325. That development is meant to take the reader by surprise, in somewhat the way history did to the people at the time. You'll notice that I assiduously avoid saying just when this English Creek summer is taking place, until then. And again, this comes out of actuality. A friend of ours of Dick's generation remembers her father calling out across the lawn almost the same words I use there, that same evening. So I've tried there to make time itself, history's abrupt turn, the "foe" of the McCaskills--whoever or whatever they thought they were facing that summer.

Enough of that; you'll probably know better what I was up to than I do. (If, heh heh heh, I was actually up to something, right?) Feel free to ask me any specifics you want to, but I'll be just as interested in your piece if you close your eyes and freehand it.

Now to the important stuff: Carol and I came home thinking goddamn it, we really ought to get back to Montana as quick as we can. That would be March 23-30, Carol's spring vacation. If that jibes with the UM's and you guys want a week of seafood gluttony, we're game for a house swap. What say? (Instant answer not required.)

love to Juliette.

148 Edwin Place
Asheville, North Carolina 28801
August 1, 1983

Dear Ivan Doig,

A year ago I published a book called Creativity and the Writing Process. Dissatisfied with what I learned, I have been focusing on the earlier stages of the writing process -- the collecting phase -- or what others have dubbed the "preparation and incubation" stages of writing. I have completed fourteen chapters of a new book. In it I am attempting to show serious beginning writers the value of keeping a journal (notebook, diary, or log) by revealing how more experienced contemporary writers have used their notebooks and by pointing to specific examples that show how in many instances the journal has proved to be a seedbed for later work. And that's precisely where I could use your help.

You have been quoted as saying "a journal must be kept as a ship's log must," and as saying that a diary allows us to "touch life as it flows." I know from reading Winter Brothers that you have kept a journal. I often wondered as I read This House of Sky if it too hadn't found its roots in an earlier notebook. I'm curious to learn more about your thoughts concerning journals and wonder if you might be willing to respond. What would you say to beginning writers to convince them of its worth? Of what value has it been to you?

What I am searching for now are original notebook pages -- scribbled, unpolished, unedited entries -- that subsequently became the source of or were incorporated in another work. It would be particularly valuable for beginning writers to see a page or pages from an original journal followed by an excerpt from a later revised and polished work that evolved from those pages. Is that possible? And if so, would you be willing to contribute?

At this point what I need is a one page excerpt from the original notes and an excerpt from a final draft of a later work that evolved from those pages. It would be nice to have three examples to choose from but maybe that's just wishful thinking.

I'm not sure what you need to know about me. I teach freshman writing at the University of North Carolina here in Asheville. I've published poetry in Southern Poetry Review, Northwest Review, Ohio Journal and other small magazines.

I am circulating a query for my work and should an offer be made, I will follow the necessary legal channels for obtaining permission and arranging payment for your contribution. Anything you can send, or any comments you might wish to make, will be helpful and appreciated. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Olivia Bertagnolli
Olivia Bertagnolli

19 Aug. '83

Dear Olivia--

Interesting book idea you're working on. Yes, I've worked from various mutations of a journal--keep a diary, although when I'm at full-tilt on a manuscript (as now) it tends to be a weekly catching-up; maintain notebooks labeled Ideas, Phrasing, Anecdotes, Comparison and Description, Technique, and Lingo, although file cards have somewhat superseded this habit; and for *This House of Sky*, I began a journal of remembered details when I started thinking of that book.

I don't know that it's any use to you--it's a piece written years ago when I was churning out stuff as a magazine free lance--but the enclosed article tells some of my original notebook habits. (The illustration I think is not an actual page, but a copied one for clarity's sake. Now virtually all my entries, except in a small pocket notebook, are typed.) You'll of course know Thomas Wolfe's notebook notions much better than I. The Roethke poetry notebooks, at the U. of Washington, are entrancing and somewhat eerie; evidently his handwriting is a reflection of his state of mind at any given time. A book was made from Roethke's notebook fragments: *Straw for the Fire*, ed. David Wagoner, Doubleday/Anchor 1974. I have to say, I think Roethke's reliance shows one of the drawbacks of notebooks: that the work can get somewhat bloodless, as the writer resorts to something he already has down rather than drawing on his mood of the moment (my impression is Roethke's reputation hasn't held up too well, and I wonder if that isn't part of the reason). But that's a nuance, and certainly I think the benefits outweigh it.

over

I am circulating a query form work and should an offer be made, I will follow the necessary legal channels for obtaining permission and arranging payment for your contribution. Anything you can send, or any comments you think wise to make, will be helpful and appreciated. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

William S. Burroughs
William S. Burroughs

As to examples of my work that have come from notebook pages, I'd have to dig them out and I won't have time to do so until toward the end of the year. I have a year-end deadline on a big Montana novel, the longest book I've done yet, and am letting nothing get in its way. If, as you go ahead with your project, you still think you'd like to have examples from me, let me know by Thanksgiving or so and I'll see what I can do. Okay?

Good luck with it all.

regards,

William S. Burroughs

9 Sept. '79

Dear Bob--

Thanks for troubling to pass along to me the draft of your WLA paper. A year ago, the Time review of Sky had just come out, quickly followed by yours, then Robert Kirsch's in the LA Times--three grand and good ones which began the book's remarkable course. Now it's a surprise to me--another wonderment?--to have the scholarly work on the book starting up. But more power to your arm, as I've just learned to say from The Year of the French.

Some quick points, then I'll see what I can do with the central theme of your paper.

The subtitle, "Landscapes of a Western Mind," is entirely the doing of my editor, Carol Hill of HBJ, as is the inside front jacket copy, which looks better and better to me. I had no notion of titling the book, and when Carol and I spent about a day and a half on the phone trying to come up with a title--out of a number of candidates I had wanted "In This House of Sky"; she said, how about House of Sky; I then said, This House of Sky and we had it--it somehow came to mind for her. Booksellers tell me it was a good stroke, as was the cover art, which is by the artist who did the covers for Jaws and Coma.

The dedication, "Westward we go free," is from Thoreau, and is an in-joke between my wife and me. I'm sorry I don't have the exact source, but I think the Thoreau language, as he writes about walking somewhere, is "Eastward I go only by force, but westward I go free." My wife Carol is from the New Jersey shore, and is now such an avid westerner she has to be all but dragged back there when it's time to visit family.

p. 11, line 4: I don't think Livingston fits in the list of "homes," or at least I can't remember why it would. I've never lived there, and don't know of any attention I'd have given it in the book, except some mention as a shopping town for us.

p. 12+: I much like your use of the bear story material. I remember it went into place in the manuscript almost automatically--that I worked a bit at editing the story down from the tape I'd made of my father telling the story in the summer of '68, and the last sentence, of "both hunter and hunted," just appeared, I think exactly in its printed wordage, ~~xxxx~~ to cap off the story. I incidentally had a chance to visit my great-uncle's homestead, where the story is set, last summer, and the story can be paced through there exactly as my father described it.

p. 14, the longing for "special blood-words": a historian friend has pointed out to me that of course the American Indians--some tribes--have these: names which describe the situation.

As to the themes of wonderment, Westernness and how/why I write about them, I may have solidier answers--although still not final--when I finish the book I'm on now. (The manuscript should be done by the end of this year, the book in print from Harcourt in late '80.) It's set here in the Pacific Northwest, although again drawing on mountain-West perspective I grew up into, and is intended to be an edge-of-the-continent book. Can't say much more about it now, because it's still in a cohering stage, particularly the parts which muse on westernness. So I'll have to give you some fairly random points, and you can apply them as you want if they seem useful to the WLA paper.

On a day-by-day basis, I'm more aware of working with the wonder of language than the wonders of the West, if they can be separated that readily. I work extremely hard over language, do little else in my days except write and read and think about the two of them. So the possibilities of language--and where there are possibilities, I suppose there is wonder--constantly interest me. From my newspaper and magazine days, I learned to like editing, and do an enormous amount on myself.

In terms of wonderment about life, I suppose mine is something of the sort Loren Eiseley wrote about when he excavated some kind of neanderthal skull: "The creature had never lived to see a man, and I, what was it I was never going to see?" I think I'm quite aware of the colossal flow of time and life, and interested in the individual rivulets as well. The West is the portion of this continent where I see all this best; as I believe I'll say somewhere in the upcoming book, I don't regard the West particularly as the newest part of this country, but as the oldest--in the sense that the fundament, the landscape, is still most visible here, and what rurality is ~~left~~ left (quite a lot, actually) is in a sense closer to America's origins than the megapolitan society obscuring so much of the Eastern Seaboard. I believe there are patterns of behavior out here, and certainly of language or storytelling, which fit this notion, too.

My wife, from her eastern background, makes what I think is a sensible suggestion: that in the East, there are so many people, so much habitation and other stuff, that everything and everybody seems the same size; that in the West, there still is enough landscape, and patterns of life not yet submerged within massiveness, to see people in sharper outline against their backdrop. I haven't reread Wolf Willow for years, but I think Stegner says something of this, at least the western portion of it. In any event, I do very much feel that people are different in different parts of this country, and that geography and the extent of metropolitan culture account for much of that.

A small point I forgot earlier: for whatever reason, I think of Sky, and prefer to call it, a memoir--"a narrative of experiences that the writer has lived through"--rather an autobiography.

There will be a trade paperback--Harvest line, from HBJ--of Sky this coming Jan. or Feb. The News book Carol and I co-authored is out of print, and we don't have any prospects of revising it.

So, best of wishes for Albuquerque, Bob; would appreciate a copy of the WLA program, if you think of it. Keep in touch--I'll be out from under this current ms early next year, and maybe have more time.

best

Robert Gish ●

August 30, 1979

Ivan Doig
17021 Tenth Avenue N.W.
Seattle, Washington 98177

Dear Ivan,

Last year about this time I was reviewing *THIS HOUSE OF SKY*. This year I'm trying to get my thoughts together to say something about the book at an early October meeting of the Western Literature Association in Albuquerque--in a section on the consciousness of the western writer. Big subject.

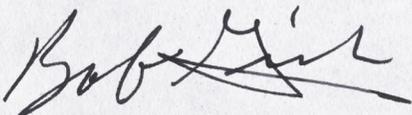
What I send you is an overly prolix--academic, alas--version of the kind of thing I have in mind. Could you take the time to comment on it? Not so much to criticize it; rather to elaborate, as explicitly as possible on the role of wonderment, the West, and writing--or rather on the "roles," interrelated, of all three.

I apologize that my insights and writing don't match the majesty of your book. I wanted to end my paper by saying that the biggest wonder of all to me is that you didn't win the national book award. But there are always other years and other awards.

I also send you a recent article of mine on Hamlin Garland--kind of, again, out of gratitude and appreciation for the wonderful experience of *THIS HOUSE OF SKY*.

Any insights you could share with me--and that I might share at the meeting-- about the above topic would be most appreciated.

Best,



P.S. I found your news book too. Like it. Useful in my argument and persuasion class. Any chance for paperbacks of it or *House*? What are you working on now?

THE WEST AS WONDERMENT: IVAN DOIG'S THIS HOUSE OF SKY

Robert Gish

University of Northern Iowa

"What is literary criticism to do with something so wonderful, with writing as an act of keeping alive rather than an image of life or of living?"

--Richard Poirier, The Performing Self

"In wonder everything is at stake."

--Cornelis Verhoeven, The Philosophy of Wonder

"'Curiouser and curiouser!' cried Alice"

--Lewis Carroll, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

Ivan Doig's autobiography, This House of Sky (New York, 1978) is, among other things, an account of the West as wonderment. Subtitled "Landscapes of a Western Mind," it provides us with a recent and eminently suitable glimpse into the consciousness and character of a Western writer; a Western version of that larger, fascinating compulsion which most writers--regardless of nationality or regional allegiance--struggle to give shape to in varying combinations of fact and fiction, by butting past against present in memory and imagination: the portrait of an artist growing up, the Künstlerroman (although, obviously, the genre I intend is narratively larger than the novel), the "education" of one Ivan Clark Doig (1939-), Ph.D. University of Washington, 1969 (topic: John J. McGilvra: The Life and Times of an Urban Frontiersman, 1827-1903), formerly of Montana, now of Washington state--one West.

The key to Doig's life and to the telling of it, to that house and landscape, that consciousness of the West, as his

titular metaphor would have it, and which his masterful debut book represents, is found in the attitude, the technique, the sights and sounds, the word/world of "wonder," or to use Doig's word, "wonderment." My purpose here is to explore Doig's sense of wonder as he unfolds it for himself, for all the world to see and hear (truth "down to the bone," he says). Doing this in the context of This House of Sky, defining "wonderment" and seeing where and how it operates in the structuring of Doig's fictive/factual, house/book, is a much easier matter than talking about the eye/ear of the Western writer and generalizing about wonderment and the West. Such generalizing I leave for later discussion. Wonderment is not meant to be fully understood anyway. But perhaps I'm safe in extrapolating at least one thing from Doig's work: for one writer (maybe many writers), the West is sensed as wonderment, the West is wonderment--word and world. But how is the wonder of the American West, living it and writing it and reading it, different from the wonder of just being--being anywhere? If being is somehow a process

equivalent to westering, in the sun-sense, in the born to die, iterological sense of journeying to home, to the "sunset regions," then westering (West as process) is wondering.

Cornelis Verhoeven, in what strikes me as a nicely off-beat book, The Philosophy of Wonder (New York, 1972), spends ten chapters and two hundred pages attempting to define wonder and relate it to just about everything else. Apparently Plato and Aristotle began at the beginning with wonder (and in wonder). Says Aristotle in his Metaphysics: "It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too, e.g. about the changes of the moon and of the sun, about the stars and about the origin of the universe."¹ Elaborating on Plato and wonder, Verhoeven asserts,

Philosophy is not knowledge; as a form of desire (love) it is more a pathos, a state, than an actual knowing. Plato gives this pathos a name: wonder. If philosophy proceeds from wonder, then it proceeds from it completely and in every one of its manifestations. Every philosophical term that has not become mere ashes conveys the pathos of wonder. Every philosophical step forward must be a step backward in the direction of this pathos; every path toward established knowledge must be approached in its light. If wonder is the beginning and principle of philosophy, then wonder will keep its grasp.²

Verhoeven says much more about the nature of wonder, particularly in its relationship to crises; such things as "Wonder is a crisis and has all the dangers inherent in a crisis. A crisis exists when a person is forced to review the structure of his existence and break out of his closed circle into greater openness" (Verhoeven, p. 29). In effect, Verhoeven is unknowingly underscoring Doig's dedication of This House of Sky: "To my wife, Carol. Westward we go free." One more Verhoeven quotation: "In wonder everything is at stake" (Verhoeven, p. 12). Much else of what Verhoeven says in The

Philosophy of Wonder applies to Doig and This House of Sky.

And, by extension, it seemingly applies to the westering "pathos," the Western writer's perception as well. Doig is writing out of a sense of love (a desire to know and discover that love), for his family, for his home, and for his craft as a writer--a craft dependent on that love and built crisis by agonizing crisis on his wondrous wanting to know. All in all, This House of Sky is an elegy for his family, particularly his father, and for the passing West they have known and shared; and the new West, the new times and wonderments which Doig faces alone--particularly the crisis/pathos of mortality.

In commenting on the nature of wonder as it relates to notions of the Sublime, Mary Midgley speaks pertinently of "absolute Otherness" and Kantian vastness. Like Verhoeven's, Midgley's comments also have their application to Doig's

West:

What is actually sublime? . . . It can hardly, he [Kant] says, be the actual sea and mountains, for

they are just dead matter, so many tons of basalt or H₂O. How can one revere that? He sees that sheer size is often central to the experience. Yet size impresses us only by contrast to the size of our own body, which seems to him a contingent matter: So he concludes that what is sublime is not the objects themselves, but what they stand for, that is the vastness of the human task. 'The feeling of the Sublime in nature is respect for our own vocation.'³

In a sense the Sublime is wonderment, that perception of a "shadow of a magnitude" which Keats talks of and which Doig communicates. Midgley says and I believe Doig's autobiography generally, and much more lyrically, affirms:

We need the vast world, and it must be a world that does not need us; a world constantly capable of surprising us, a world we did not program, since only such a world is the proper object of wonder. Any kind of Humanism which deprives us of this, which insists on treating the universe as a mere projection screen for showing off human capacities, cripples and curtails humanity. 'Humanists' often do this, because where there is wonder they think they smell religion But things much more unclean than traditional religion will follow the death of wonder. In truth,

as I have suggested, wonder, the sense of otherness, is one of the sources of religion (not the other way around), but it is also the source of curiosity and every vigorous use of our faculties, and an essential condition of sanity. (Midgley, 362)

In this sense of wonder, and in most of the other senses of wonder as awe, amazement, astonishment, admiration, miracle, marvel, surprise--in all of these ways, Doig is recording his wonderment at the West he has lived and attempted to fathom.

Like David Copperfield, Stephen Daedalus, Holden Caulfield or Henry Adams, Hamlin Garland, Wallace Stegner or any one of countless personae and author "tellers" of parentage and youth, of family-individual relationships, Doig is trying to locate himself in it all: son, grandson, stepson, sheep herder, worker, student, journalist, husband, Westerner. If, as the philosophers I have mentioned attest, all philosophy begins with wonder and wondering, in a preoccupation with the mysteries of existence, youth and age, birth and death, love and friendship, then Doig's stance is decidedly

philosophical, humanistic--and artistic. For above all, Doig's wonderment is how his Western heritage has brought him to the writing and conscious reliving of his life, this book. In his wonderment at and with words, language gives impetus to the design of the book, his remembering and wonderments as he looks back, listens back, over thirty-nine years, family photo album in hand, seated at his desk, his chair creaking with the echoes of saddle leather, orchestrating the voices he hears and mimics, wondering at how his past Montana fuses so curiously, so wonderously with his present Pacific Coast West, how the West of his father is also his West, how he fathers the son within him. Here is the beautiful passage where Doig builds, explicitly states, the main metaphor of his book/life:

I walk back toward my typewriter, past a window framing the background fir trees. They are replaced by the wind-leaning jackpines of one Montana ridge-line or another. I glance higher for some hint of the weather, and the square of air broadens and broadens to become the blue expanse over Montana rangeland, so

vast and vaulting that it rears, from the foundation-line of the plains horizon, to form the walls and roof of all of life's experience that my younger self could imagine, a single great house of sky.

Now the mood moves on, the restless habit of dream and memory, and I come to myself in a landscape of coastal western-ness so different in time and place from that earlier one. Different, yet how readily acquainted.⁴

It is a building, a description of the reverie/wonderment process which illustrates what Richard Poirier, via Robert Frost, is talking about in his essay, "The Performing Self," on writing, writing as an act of keeping alive, of luxurating--in wonderment--in that act. It is a metaphorical building of what Jack Brenner (via Frost, Poirier, and Wright Morris) champions so eloquently in his own more or less autobiographical account of "Imagining the West."⁵

As building blocks--in terms of both process and design, form and message--Doig's "wonderments" (dream, memory, imagination) provide the bases for the book's beautifully transcendent lyric quality and the means by which he eulogizes his mother,

Bernetta Ringer, dead of asthma at 31--the event which in "stop-time" fashion frames Doig's consciousness, frames his first memories of being 6 and awakened by a father's voice saying still, "She is dead. Ivan, your mother is dead." These wonderments also work toward the poignancy of Ivan's eulogy for his dad, Charlie Doig, a top hand who knew sheep and men and Montana and was able to face life after his young wife's death because of a friendship with a boy, a son destined eventually to become a father's father in Charlie's old age when emphysema began its creeping and ironically familiar (given the nature of Bernetta's death) attack on his lungs and life's very breath. A frame completed but carried on in Ivan's sonship, surviving as he does, yet another death, even his own by near drowning while wading in the Ellen near his Seattle home.

These wonderments amount to a thank-you to Bessie Ringer (Bernetta's mother) as well, a grandmother who claimed Ivan as both son and grandson, and simultaneously provided a strange kind of wifeship for Charlie Doig, whose sidekick bond with his

son made the ultimate terms of such a family affair clear to all. And in a larger sense, Doig's wonderments are a tribute to the people and ambiance of the Smith River Valley, White Sulphur Springs, Ringling, Dupuyer, and Livingston, Montana (homes all)--the house of sky, of friends as family, of the West as home for a life voyager--what Christopher Lasch has recently termed, in relation to the beseiged family, "haven in a heartless world."

Doig's prose-poem thus becomes an affirmation of the West, of words and of reality, not so much as a place for the pursuit of loneliness (although wonderously that is a part of it), but as a staging for the pursuit of togetherness, kinship. All this despite one of the loneliest of all possible final sentences, which poses Doig as man/child--without any real offspring (except his words), any continuing blood kin (he has his wife, fittingly one of three "friends" who pull Doig from the watery grip of death about which he wonders at the end of the book); leaving him with mostly himself, somewhat like Conrad's

Marlow, surrounded in a "heart of darkness," dreaming and dying and wondering alone. Such is the "pathos" out of which Doig writes; a wonderment of gigantic proportions: one is and is not of his heritage, his history, his story.

Central to Doig's narrative is a story heard countless times, told in a father's voice, and positioned with great effect at just the right place--a hunting story, something of the traditional tall-tale, mountain-man, big-bear story--retold for the reader (and for himself, his own solace) when Doig learns (remembering), and marvels at the certainty that Charlie, who has survived one close call after another in his rugged, dangerous life, will definitely die soon. This tale becomes a kind of central parable or life myth for Doig the son. The moral is an astonishing one, a surprising one: man is not unlike the victim bear. Here's the ending of the story, complete with Charlie's voicings and sense of wonderment recreated, retrieved by his author son whose inheritance in

large part was a legacy of the ability to spin a yarn, pass on the lore, the wonderment of the word:

So we waited a little bit. It was all quieted down in the brush there, and I knew he's either dead or gone. So we went down the creek a little ways, there's a bridge there, and come up where the brush wasn't so thick.

He was layin' there in a heap of brush dead.

I didn't get scared during it; never gave a thought to run when that bear was comin' at me. But I shook all night afterwards, after it was all over.

A hundred times told, and always that last lilt of wonder in his voice that he could have been both hunter and hunted. (Doig, p. 271)

Placing this story where he does (and it is just one of numerous juxtapositions and interpolations), is a masterful touch, a climactic touch, for his father's life has been so much a part of Ivan Doig's life that Charlie and his ranching, riding wonderments of life in the West are the most salient wonders in This House of Sky, permeating all of the other wonderments.

Doig grapples time and time again with what it means to have such a father, to love him so wonderously, to attempt to put it into the "words" of kinship. Combining his wonderment about the writing occupation he has recently chosen, at the frustrations of language, with his admiration for Bessie and Charlie, and in turn with his father's awe for the education and learning which face his son as he leaves home for college at Northwestern (another wonder given his remote Montana ranch life), Doig wonderingly muses:

Kin and clan. Son. Sire. The grand calved on in grandson, grandmother. The words of all the ties of blood interest me, for they seem never quite deft enough, not entirely bold and guileful enough, to speak the mysterious strengths of lineage. I admit the marvel that such sounds are carried to us from the clangs and sougths of tongues now silent a millenium into the past, calling on and on, in their way, like pulses of light still traveling in from gone stars. But the offhand resonance of bobolink arrives that way too, and sneeze and whicker and daisy and thousandfold words more. What I miss in our special blood-words is a sense of recasting themselves

for each generation, each fresh situation of kindredness.How can it be expressed that a boy's dreams of himself and his dream-versions of a threesome-against-life, yearnings so often drawn opposite each other in him, somehow were the same tuggings?

And less explicable yet: the materialized fact that at last, whenever it had happened that they found the habit of being together counted more strongly with them than the natures pushing them apart, my grandmother and my father had become some union of life all their own, quite apart from the abrupt knot of bloodline they had made for my sake. (Doig, pp. 238-239)

At over thirty points in This House of Sky wonderments come into play in major and minor ways--thematically and structurally. All in all, Doig's style and statement amount to wonderment: at childhood and its perceptions; at a mother's early death and an orphan's and widower's bafflement in the face of it; at school with its curious cruelties and even "curiouser" awakenings through the miracles of reading and writing; at the settlement by grandparents and parents, uncles and others of a majestic and harshly beautiful country like Montana; at being

the son and shadow image of a father like Charlie, so different yet so alike; at accidents and escapes from broncs and sundry other wild threats; at the adventuring spirit of youth; at the beauty and terror and variousness of weather and terrain, of valleys and mountains; at the ability of some few to handle and mingle confidently with men and with animals; at how a man meets a woman, staying together; at how some die and some are spared; at how a son can be a friend and a father too; at how an adult can treat a child as an equal; at how the streets and buildings of a town can be the very essence of mystery itself for a boy; at how blacks and Native Americans and whites can be "others"; at how a grandmother can be a mother and wife; at how one job is drudgery and another worthy of one's life's work; at how an old way of life, be it a town's or a person's, gives way to a new phase; at how an old West becomes a new one.

And if Doig as a writer and as a man, in art and in life, sees his West as wonderment, should we not wonder if it isn't

the case for other Western American writers? Or if not, wonder why not? Doig's legacy to us then, in This House of Sky, seems to be as much a question as its answer, a landscape of a mind the contour of which suggests that if all philosophy begins in wonder, so to_o^o does the American West--that in the wonder of it is the writing about it.

ENDNOTES

¹Aristotle, The Metaphysics, trans. Hugh Tredennick, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, MCMLXI), I, ii, 9, p. 13.

²Cornelis Verhoeven, The Philosophy of Wonder (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1972), p. 10. All further references to this work appear in the text.

³Mary Midgley, Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 360. Further references to this work appear in the text.

⁴Ivan Doig, This House of Sky (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), pp. 106-107. Further references to this work appear in the text.

⁵See Richard Poirier, The Performing Self: Compositions and Decompositions in the Languages of Contemporary Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 86-111; also, Jack Brenner, "Imagining the West," The Westering Experience in American Literature, ed. Merrill Lewis and L. L. Lee (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1977), pp. 32-47.

28 Jan. '79

Dear Mike--
Olsen

Another morning of frost here, getting to be the usual thing this winter. And, it's been a dry January; we've had only a fraction of the average six inches or so of rain. I imagine, however, that whatever weather I can report is small stuff compared to yours. Certainly the friends in Montana and Chicago are reporting tremendous winters; every so often someone will call me up just to say it's -44 in White Sulphur, or some such.

I'm about a third of the way--that is, around 25,000 words--through with this next book, and I think it's going pretty well, although that sentiment collides pretty often with the nagging fact that I have ten or eleven full months of work yet to do on it. There may be a break of five or six weeks this spring; Carol and I are thinking seriously of going to England then. There's a ~~very~~ business prospect for me, in trying to arrange the sale of the British rights to House of Sky, and some mild research I'd like to do about Scottish settlers heading for the American west. So, it's not certain, but probable. Other than that, the book is going to require a lot of time. For one thing, I have to go through forty years of James Swan's diaries, and only four of those years are transcribed by typewriter. Luckily, I don't find Swan's handwriting too bad--infinitely better than McGilvra's was, surely.

That reminds me that I've heard--not from Carstensen, haven't seen him for a couple months--that the UW is again looking for a western historian. I also heard that of the four search committees the UW history dept. has at the moment, three are looking to replace young untenured profs with young untenured profs, the game of musical chairs. I'd be almost certain the western job is one of those.

I've had a little time to think about your "why" question on House of Sky, and a couple of other thoughtful friends have recently said they found reading the book a surprising, even somewhat disturbing, experience, precisely because of your point about how little we know of each other. As best I can reconstruct it--and it's stunning to me how shadowy the purpose can be behind a project which occupied so much of my life for six or seven years--I originally had the notion of writing something about my father. I once made a very brief mention of him in an article I wrote about rodeos while I was on the Rotarian staff, in the mid-60's. Then in the summer of '68, there was the coincidence that while Carol and I were visiting my father and grandmother in White Sulphur Springs--we were there a week or two, at the start of a trip which idled us across country all the way to Nova Scotia; I think we did it because my last year in grad school was coming up, and we didn't know when we'd ever have the chance again--I undertook to interview Taylor Gordon, the black singer who lived in White Sulphur, as a start toward doing an article about him for the Montana Magazine of History. That article, incidentally, was written, accepted by the magazine, languished for years and eventually turned back to me; but that's another story. The point of this one is that when I called Taylor, he wouldn't let me come up until the next day, and so there was an afternoon to kill, and I decided to use it by having Dad and Grandma answer questions and tell stories into the tape recorder.

The couple of hours of tapes I got that day turned out to be truly fortunate; it was one of the last times Dad was well enough for such a session, and although Grandma's health was strong for another several years, I managed only another hour or so of taping with her (although I took a quantity of notes from talking with her the last few ~~xxxx~~ years of her life). Inevitably as happens in taping sessions, Dad or Grandma would say, "You oughta ask so-and-so about that," and so I began taping other people in the valley, two or three of them whenever I would get back to White Sulphur. I think I ended up with a couple dozen tapes that way, and a lot of notes. But still not knowing consciously what I wanted to do with them.

And it's hard to say when I consciously set to work on Sky. I didn't begin keeping a diary until Carol and I went to Britain in the fall of '72, so there's no help there. But I was keeping a kind of working journal--notebooks, really--and also, when Carol and I wrote our journalism text, we found that dealing with the publisher was such a hassle I kept a specific diary of that book's progress, just as a matter of self-defense. Evidently I had liked the way that worked, because I started another. The first entry--I looked this up for a persistent interviewer last fall--is Jan. 29, '72, and reads: "Start of a sometime diary, towards the book of where I came from." I went on just to jot down Montana things as I could remember them, and did a handful of such entries by the autumn of '72. Then we were in Britain for eight months, and during that time I took two major steps toward Sky. I began writing a play, set in a Montana bunkhouse. It came to nothing, because of plot problems and the impossibility of showing in a theater the sense of western landscape I was trying to evoke; but I did find I could write characters who talked like real Montana people. That, I'm sure, paid off at the points of Sky where I had to remake long-lost conversations out of memory; I knew I could do it. The second step was some conscious thinking about the book which became Sky, and how it could deal with the workings of memory. The working title then was "Half-life," and one of the ideas I was toying with was that memory has a kind of half-life as radioactive materials do, but in a queer erratic way, not diminishing with mathematical regularity. Where that came from, I have no notion, and it never really worked out for ~~me~~ the book, but it did get me farther into wanting to undertake what became Sky.

Much of this, I know, is "how" instead of "why", but I'm such a literary technocrat I can't easily separate the two. But I do feel that what was impelling me here, and did so off and on for the next several years, was the sense of story. That is, I knew, journalistically, that my father's life had been an interesting one, and it was dawning on me that parts of my childhood were unusual, too. I think it's significant that those are the manuscript parts I wrote first (as best I can reconstruct it): the first few sentences went through a lot of drafts, but from the very start they dealt with my mother's death on my sixth birthday. In cold-blooded terms, I knew that was an arresting fact. I think I worked next on the tour of the saloons, which I also knew was an unusual experience. Both portions are the most rewritten sections of the book, and I think now that they stand out a bit oddly in the narrative flow, but evidently the passion and care that went into them comes through, because only a few reviewers have knocked them and several have singled them out to praise.

Another technical matter--I'm sorry to seem to dwell on them, but I can't overemphasize how much they interest me; probably the main flaw of my writing before Sky was overexuberance for odd formats--was that I had become interested in a dual flow of narrative: that is, the italicized format which shows up between sections of Sky. I had done a piece for the Seattle Times Magazine about our U District neighbor, who had lived all his life in the same house overlooking

Union Bay, in which I interspersed italic paragraphs of what he had seen, as boy-schoolkid-young man-etc., with a straightforward narrative. A rhythm of time running through the story, as it were. Where I got this, I don't know, but it probably came somewhere out of the "new journalism" of the sixties, which brought some of the techniques of fiction into magazine writing. Anyway, it rather intrigued me; I used the technique again, I think with better success, in a Pacific Search piece about a NY Herald reporter in the Modoc War. I used italicized chunks of his enormous Modoc story as quickening "rhythms" of time in the article. It was enormously difficult, and maybe not worth the effort--the reader may not even be aware of what the stunt is, exactly--but I was interested to find that I could bring it off. The effect was that as I thought about a format for Sky, I was willing to try those italicized chunks about memory--"prism pieces", I've called them for want of anything better.

So, there were these technical impulses. A kind of professional curiosity, to see what I could bring off, I suppose. I can add that there also was some sort of impulse to see how much I could bring out of my memory, almost as if I was seeing how much I could learn about another country. The exact emotions toward my father and grandmother which helped bring about Sky, I'm unfortunately less sure of. It does seem to me that Dad's illness fastened me to him, and thus to thinking about his life, much more than would otherwise have been the case. I was a fairly stoic, guarded person until I began to loosen up a bit in my mid-twenties, I think. On the other hand, the effort of trying to deal with Dad's health dominated a number of years when I think I would have been quite close to him and interested in his life anyway. I don't know how that balances out, in terms of the book. The case is similar with my grandmother: in Dad's last years and after his death, I became more and more responsible for her, she luckily mellowed and became easier to know, and so we grew closer and closer.

I also wanted to tell you that I consider Sky a memoir--"a narrative of experiences that the writer has lived through"--rather than an autobiography. That is, it is the experiences rather than the life that I wanted to write about. I found it hard to put much of myself into the book, and would quite possibly not have done it in first-person except for the technical advantages of that. That the experiences add up to my life is in a way coincidental; at one point in the writing Carol suggested I end the book at the end of North, where I went off to college, and indeed I could have done so, and had a different sort of book.

One last thing, last because this has gone on way the hell too long. I've been doing some reading about Northwest Coast tribal art for the sake of the current book, and I read with some excitement the explanation of a Haida carver named Bill Reid: he said the Indian artists "weren't bound by the silly feeling that it's impossible for two figures to occupy the same space at the same time"--hence, a human figure carved to coexist with a bear's head crowned by a frog, and so on. Substitute "impulse" or "notion", or possibly "even" "technique" for "figures" in his sentence, and it may fit some of what I've been trying to say, and to do in my writing. Various things seem to ride together, "occupy the same space at the same time." I was trying to get at some of that in the "kinship" prism in Sky, and your comment about how the Indians have worked that out in names was a marvelous illumination. Anyway, enough for now, Mike. If you have specific questions on any of this, ask; I promise to answer more succinctly.

all the best

p.s. Carol just now looked this over for me, and she suggests that maybe part of your question is how, or why, I offered myself up for such self-revelation, to whatever extent there is in Sky. I suppose that I've been interested in how I've changed--or haven't--as a person. It may come from being an only child, or from the kind of self-reliant childhood I accidentally had. I was leery of the effects on my life now of writing about myself, but it seems the success of the writing--the language--in the book has drawn off any problems. Critics and people I meet or hear from seem to talk about the book's language, or its other characters, rather than dwelling on me. Or if they do dwell on me, it's as the writer of a "successful" book, rather than the character in that book--which is something else to be leery of, but at least it's not as deeply internal a problem as having to cope with continually-offered analyses of myself. So far, the "self-revelation" hasn't been any real burden. That, of course, could change, but I seem to be off to a strong start as the guy who wrote Sky rather than somebody who is one of its three main characters--which pleases me no end.

25 Oct. '78

Felt
Dear Dave--

You and anybody else of a Midwestern delicacy of stomach are lucky I didn't dwell on the disposal of Rocky Mountain oysters. One of the guys I knew in those boyhood times of castrating the lambs occasionally would nip out the testicles with his teeth, gaze thoughtfully at the rest of us with the twin results dangling down his lips, then gulp--one, two. I have to say that while I quite liked the fried "oysters"--calves' were really the best--that exhibition usually turned me pale.

I'm deeply pleased, and much relieved, that you liked the portrait of GOD--Good Ol' Dave--in House of Sky. It's touchy as hell to write about a friend. Also, that section of the book was one which I didn't manage to doublecheck by sending it around to you or Ralph. I had anticipated I'd be doing a bunch of rewriting, once the Harcourt editor saw the manuscript, and in the course of that I'd get the section to you for a look-over. Instead, the revision amounted to only 6 pages out of 410, Harcourt roared ahead with the ms to get the book onto its fall list, and I ended up doing the doublechecking on myself--i.e., out of letters which I fortunately was writing in those Decatur days to a college friend. Also, I had the advantage that my memories of you, and through you of Sam Tucker, seemed extraordinarily vivid. So, anyway, you deserved a high place in my book, and I'm glad you find the portrait of yourself at least vaguely reminiscent.

When Ralph was out here in August for the journalism educators' meeting, we had a terrific good time; calculated that we hadn't seen each other in 14 years, and yet we seemed to enjoy each other at full throttle, instantly. Ralph had a story on me which I'd entirely forgotten. It seems that when Mecklenberg came to the L-S editorial page staff, he was going by the name "Bill", even though his name really was Willard. As Ralph recited it, eventually came the day when he decided he wanted to be called "Meck", and in ponderous Mecklenberg style he announced and explained all this to us at length. Ralph says that at the end of this peroration, as Meck looked expectantly around, I got up--probably lusting to get to the typewriter, as I usually was in those days--clapped him on the shoulder and absently said, "Right, Meck, let's go to work." Ralph's telling of it had the rueful footnote that Meck has attained, at Duquesne or wherever he is, an academic rank higher than Ralph ever has--which we both agreed was a "rank" fact indeed.

All goes well here. At 39, I am being discovered as a "young" writer, and I chuckle a lot. Am off to NY in ten days, to negotiate a contract for the next book with Harcourt, and will settle down to the writing of it this winter. By the way, it's not inconceivable that Carol and I might call on you in Florida sometime. Every third Christmas or so, we and Carol's parents reach what in the good old pejorative days could have been called a Mexican standoff--with us balking at going to New Jersey, them adamant against Seattle--and we end up at Sarasota or some damn place. It'll be nice to know that at least you and Dorothy are on hand as bearers of civilization.

best

October 19, 1978

apt 203
1176 Bayshore Drive
Ft. Pierce, Fla 33450

Dear Ivan :

On two occasions ,within recent weeks, I was watching the television screen when a prince of the Roman Catholic church appeared on the balcony of St Peters and announced : Habemus Papam !

But neither occasion was so exciting as my reading in "This House of Sky" that Ol' Dave had stood in your ~~room~~ office door to announce in the same Latin words the election of Paul VI, so long and not really so long ago.

I cheerfully confess that when I received the autographed copy of "Sky" I thumbed through the pages to the Lindsay-Schaub experience to see my name in print, and between hard covers . Both you and Ralph had tipped me off, and I was inordinately pleased --even touched. I am not ^{the} newspaperman of fiction, though skinned and all that. It was most generous of you, Ivan. All my relatives have been alerted and I did what I could in Decatur.

Then,

I read "Sky", every word from first to last and enjoyed it thoroughly. The book has a particular appeal to me even though we two were boys at some significant interval in both geography, time and life style. But my farm boyhood in Southern Illinois in the years before World War I --yes, One -- enables me to understand, after a fashion, the handling of cattle and sheep in Montana. We had four cows, for milk and butter. No sheep. ^{Few} ~~None~~ in the neighborhood. But mother remembers the sheep on her father's farm, the shearing of the fleeces and the use of the wool for making clothes for the family.

She also remembered a home remedy, "sheep ball tea," made by brewing the dried balls of sheep dung. I myself recall that the dry dung when shredded looked a lot like the commercially packaged "tea" for medicinal purposes . I never tasted the stuff.

But I digress, a habit of Children of the Century.

The language of your grandmother and her peers I understand, and many of her homilies are familiar.

I enjoyed the report on the Northwestern years. My daughter Carol was Northwestern '55 and her husband, Byron Chrissis '55 Law. Then, of course, I know and still correspond now and then with Dr. Curtis MacDougal, professor of journalism and fellow member of the National Conference of Editorial Writers in which I was granted some time ago honorary Life Member status. Northwestern does just about as well as the University of Illinois in Big Ten athletics.

A further note on sheep handling. In our ^{old} farm neighborhood sheep were few, but everybody knew about the delicacy known ~~as~~ as "lamb fries," lamb testicles prepared, like chicken gizzards, for the table. With few sheep around, our people ate "pig's nuts," which may have been a fair alternative. I have eaten the latter, more as an experience than as a gustatory delight. You mentioned the ^castrating of lambs, but nothing about the disposal of the by-products, sometimes called "mountain oysters."

There went another digression.

You are right. We did not try to save the world with our editorials at Lindsay-Schaub. But I believed that an editorial page should be of a quality to hold readers so that when we DID have something important ~~to~~ say, we had an audience.

I, too, was at lunch, with Fred Pearson at the Decatur Club, when a waitress told us that President Kennedy had been shot. We hurried to the office, although we told the waitress she was kidding. Always to the office, mostly to get in the way of news staffers trying to handle the breaking ~~news~~ news.

I looked in on the third floor of the L-S building when Dorothy and I were a week in Decatur in August. Few familiar faces. The Herald and Review has moved to a new building on Broadway. After all, I was retired in 1967 and we moved down here to Fort ^Perce in July '75. I have not kept up with the Ivory Tower alumni, except for you and Ralph, Christmas greetings from Julius Duscha, Roger Stafford, Doug McCormick and the resident chief, Bob Reid.

There is no column in the Hardy-Tucker-Felts succession. Bob Sampson does something of the sort for The Review.

I have been writing editorial paragraphs since 1928 for the Illinois State Journal in Springfield, for Decatur newspapers since 1935. I still send in about 60 each month. The compensation just about pays my bar (home) bill. I am happy to have even that small rostrum and Decatur loyalists recognize the style of the heading "The Old Paragrapher."

Too bad that the NY Times was strike-bound when "Sky" was published. I trust the Times, a major item in selling books, will try to catch up when the strike is, if ever, settled. But TIME's review was great great and the LA Times and Chicago Tribune did very well by you, and why shouldn't they ?

And now, a suggestion, or even an assignment :

Next year will be the centenary of Vachel Lindsay's birth. He was born Nov 10, 1879, in the house on Fifth Street in Springfield in which he died in 1931. He called himself a citizen of Springfield, Illinois.

But Vachel Lindsay spent five good, possibly happy years in Spokane, Wash., until he returned to Springfield in 1929 to die two years later, two most unhappy years.

In Spokane Lindsay was the center of quite a literary group including Stoddard King, columnist of the Spokane Spokesman-Review and author of several books of light verse. King wrote "There's a Long, Long Trail a-Winding" while a student at Yale. He also wrote "The Tie that Blinds." I treasure the memory of King's visit to Lindsay's in Springfield. Vachel was out of town. Elizabeth Lindsay took King to dinner at the University Club and I picked up the check. King and I had correspondence. I have one of his books, "The Raspberry Tree."

Anyhow, I think that some magazine would be interested in an article on Vachel Lindsay in Spokane for use in the centennial year and you are in the territory.

My papers, clippings etc are in the Illinois State Historical Library at Springfield, but I have tried to keep up with the V. Lindsay tribe. His daughter Susan was married to Earl Russell's ~~grandson~~ (Yes, Bertram) heir, but the marriage failed before the younger Russell succeeded to the earldom. They had children. One of them, Vachel's grandchild, died of, I believe, self-immolation.

But again, I digress. If you should write the article, I would be happy to answer any questions I can.

Another Northwest item.

Simeon Francis, founder editor of the Sangamo Journal, in Springfield, later the Illinois State Journal, also was a founder of the Portland, Ore., Oregonian. Simeon Francis' wife brought Lincoln and Mary Todd together again after their ^{celebrated} falling-out. The Oregonian has all the details. I have had correspondence. But that is something else, just another digression.

SEE Edgar Lee Masters' "Vachel Lindday : A Biography."

Or Eleanor Ruggles' "The West Going Heart."

But enough of this. We shall be in touch.

In all affection

Dary

Dorothy is at the swimming pool. She sends love best you & Cora

also, Percy Knapp & Compton

I was an editorial writer on the Illinois State Journal 1928-1935 - when I came to Decatur

P. 340 at top

15004 Linden Ave. N.
Seattle, Wash. 98133
March 10, 1974

Schneider

Dear Larry
A

Well, the last of the big non-spenders -- that's us -- are on the brink of making an offer to buy a house, so I'll try soothe my nerves by writing you that promised letter. (The house is down the hill from Shoreline College in Innis Arden, is kind of nondescript outside but personable inside, has a wooded hillside behind it -- and that's enough on that topic.) Much appreciated talking with you a week ago, and your advice and info about West. We'll see what can be done with them; both of us indeed would like to meet Perlee if he ever travels in this direction.

You mentioned the problem of getting started on your text, and I've been trying to do some thinking about that, mulling whether I have anything helpful. Probably not, but I'll assume it's a friend's prerogative to ante in anyway. I think I told you that we keep hearing from publishers that they're interested in a new reporting text, that the MacDougall book is walking death and the Hohenberg has moments of being diffuse, abstruse, and no-use (I am paraphrasing here; we have yet to meet an editor who would understand half the words in this sentence thus far.). You have hold of a good idea, and are ahead of the field in having a contract in hand, plus a publisher who apparently can turn out a book months more quickly than other companies. I don't know whether it means anything to you to want to be first, to psyche yourself into beating out the other SOB's who have ~~the~~ ideas for texts -- you're modest and gentle enough that perhaps it doesn't. But you might try it. The Doig method, if such there be, is to get grim and mean the instant a contract is signed (good moods for dealing with editors, if nothing else) and start whipping the job. My own hangup, and I think many or most writers have some variety or another, is finding it hard to work on a project unless the contract is signed. I'm reluctant and commencing in the preliminaries, the queries, the research -- until the ink dries on the contract and I can tell myself that the work will go into the world with my name on it and it'll be embarrassing as hell or disappointing or something if the job isn't done well. As for working at the typewriter, two wildly different styles go on in this household. Carol does the good reporter's job of starting with the material and doing a graft straight through, however rough and jumbled it comes out. I'll start to work anywhere, just to be working -- perhaps with an idea for an ending, or on some incident I want to include, or whatever -- and eventually paste the chunks together in a sequence which can be polished into final draft. There are any number of writers' tricks, and excuse me if you already know them. Some writers have started by being almost nursery-rhyme simple: "This is a book about etc." and working up from there, finding the words improve themselves once volume of any kind begins coming out of the typewriter. Others pretend they're writing letters to friends or editors. I've recently read John Steinbeck's Journal of a Novel; while writing East of Eden (250,000 words) he warmed up every day by writing a journal entry to his editor, a sort of monologue, just to get the fingers and mind moving. Many, many writers subscribe to the notion that they must turn out a certain number of words daily -- maybe a low total, even just 250 or 500 words, and maybe awkward and awful, but by god a total, a sum which however dreadful can be gone back to and edited and improved. I use this a lot myself, and think it's psychologically important. I believe a lot of life is a matter of fooling ourselves into thinking ourselves useful -- the other way lies existentialism, nihilism, paralysis -- and even on days when I'm cheating like a sonofagun and telling myself that a few hundred trite words are a full day's work for a grown man, I at least have some product there on the desk to use as a defense in my own favor.

None of which gets to such an essential problem as finding time to write when you're fully employed at something else. You know my answer -- I've never gotten employed at anything else. This isn't what I recommend for anyone else, however. What I might recommend is trying a few months' of ruthlessly shucking everything except the classroom and the typewriter. Infinitely easier said than done, but the inexorable fact is that the time needed to write must be carved out of somewhere. This will mean committee meetings, time spent with students, with friends, and yes, with family -- though I think you're tremendously fortunate in Elizabeth, who I suspect would be willing to soldier on with the house and kids and countless distractions for awhile for the sake of your getting started at the typewriter. If you need some apology to be made for such behavior, as I suppose any self-respecting humanist must, set a time limit on how long you're doing it -- a couple of months maybe, or a summer -- and tell yourself and the world it is essential you spend this tiny portion of time on yourself and your work. Once you get underway -- Steinbeck's Journal is good on this, too -- you should find yourself making the time without being so ogreish about it, finding a place both for some worthwhile distractions and the writing.

One thing you probably definitely don't need is overlong letters, which this is showing signs of. Write the chapter of that text which interests you most or which you like best, then do the next most interesting, then maybe the one which has the fattest research file, then diddle around some with the chapter you've been dreading most -- and you'll have written a helluva lot of the book. Hope we'll get down your way this ~~an~~ summer, but it looks less likely. See you sometime, anyway.

best wishes

p.s. Excuse, but ~~another~~ another bit of psychology just came to mind. I get to reminding myself how much time I've already spent on a project, and what a shame it would be not to have anything to show for it. By the time I've badmouthed myself into feeling like the poor little match girl, I either have to start writing or die of excess remorse.