Dear Ivan Doig:

Though I'm a former Guggenheim 'fellow' I simply have no luck placing candidates. My people never get awards. So I think you will have to find someone else.... Sorry.

(I liked This House of Sky immensely. Painful, beautiful—hard-hitting!)

Sincerely,

Joyce Carol Oates
Dear Joyce Carol Oates--

Although we've not met, our words have: mine in the form of This House of Sky when it received a National Book Award nomination this spring, yours of course as a portion of the jurors' decision. The decision is not the point of this letter—I count myself fortunate to have been nominated for my first book, and The Snow Leopard is a powerful work—but the fact that you have read my book is. I'll be applying for a Guggenheim Fellowship for this coming year; would you be willing to serve as one of the four references I must have?

I would use the Guggenheim to buy the time to begin a novel. The story is one I've chanced across in a frontier newspaper: the escape of three men from indenturement to a Russian fur-trapping enterprise in Alaska in 1853. The three made their way down the Pacific Northwest coast by canoe for more than a thousand miles. When found near Astoria, "one of the poor fellows was peeling the skin from off his hands and arms and eating it." Their ordeal fascinates me. To base the novel accurately—and I would want to do it with obsessive rightness of detail—there will be expensive travel and time involved in tracing the fur-men's lives—which of course is where the Guggenheim would enter.

That in very short sum is the project. If you would be willing, there is no one whose words would be more valuable to me in seconding the Guggenheim application.

best regards