

Winter Brothers
By Ivan Doig
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980

Ivan Doig's book *Winter Brothers* has convinced me that James Gilchrist Swan is one of the Northwest's most important writers.

Winter Brothers is all about Doig's fascination with Swan, one of the Northwest's early white settlers and a prolific diary writer. "I have felt my pull toward him ever since some forgotten frontier pursuit or another landed me into the coastal region of history where he presides, meticulous as a usurer's clerk," Doig explains.

The Swan that emerges in *Winter Brothers*, through passages taken from the diaries he kept from 1862 to 1890, is not only fascinating historically, but also is a good writer. So good, in fact, that Doig's own writing becomes weak in comparison.

Winter Brothers is structured like a journal. For 90 days Doig faithfully reads Swan's journals and records his impressions, often as he explores the places Swan describes.

"Here is the winter that will be the season of Swan," Doig says. "Rather, of Swan and me and those constant diaries. Day by day, a logbook of what is uppermost in any of the three of us."

Doig's mission is mainly that of the historian: "It is a venture I have mulled these past years of my becoming less headlong and more aware that I dwell in a community of time as well as of people. That I should know more than I do about this other mysterious citizenship, how far it goes, where it touches."

But Doig is also insistent in understanding the relationship of the Northwest to this: "More and more it seems to me that the westernness of my existence in this land is some consequence having to do with that

Recent Northwest literature in review

community of time." Doig's book is a success, both as an exploration of the region and as a purely historical re-creation of Swan's life. Doig's use of quoted material from Swan's diaries is both generous and creative, and he consistently and gracefully joins Swan's words with his own.

However, Swan more often than not emerges as the better writer.

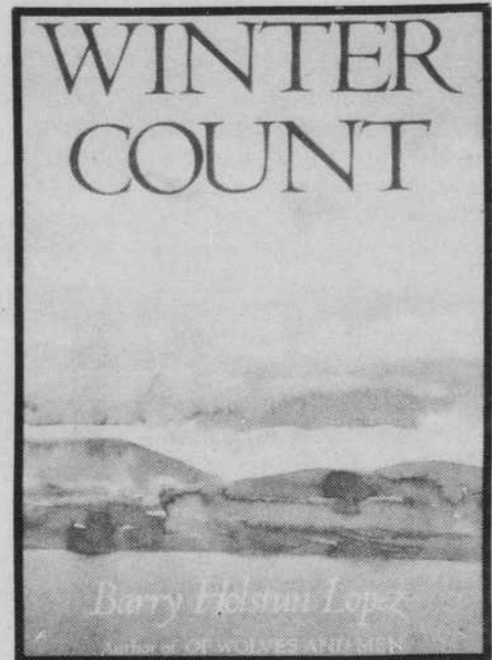
Swan's writing style is cleaner, more direct. His careful observations are a joy to read: "I saw a kingfisher fluttering in the brook and supposed he had a trout which he could not swallow. On going to him I found he had driven his bill into an old rotten stick with such force as to bury it clear up to his eyes... hard and fast," Swan writes.

Swan's observations of the Northwest Indians he lived with at various times are some of the best moments in the book: "During the spring, when the flowers are in bloom and the humming birds are plenty, the boys take a stick smeared with the slime from snails, and place it among a cluster of flowers... if a humming bird applies his tongue to it he is glued fast. They will then tie a piece of thread to its feet and holding the other end let the birds fly, their humming being considered quite an amusement."

In writing *Winter Brothers*, Doig must have realized the difficulty of making his own writing and observations match the force of Swan's. Although Doig is not altogether successful, the skill and

creativity he shows in re-creating Swan's life should stand as an invaluable contribution to contemporary Northwest literature.

— Glenn Boettcher



Winter Count
By Barry Lopez
Charles Scribners Sons, 1981

Oregon writer Barry Lopez' new book *Winter Count* is characterized by its relative abundance of human characters. The characters in Lopez' earlier stories, such as those in *Desert Notes* and *River Notes*, were often animals or geographic features rather than humans.

In *Winter Count*, the presence of an increased human population demonstrates Lopez' skill in

meticulously developing human characters.

In the story "Restoration," the craftsman Edward Seraut is restoring a collection of books on natural history that has been found in an old mansion in North Dakota. Lopez' precise description of Seraut at work makes the character come to life:

"He had beveled a frayed corner clean and then anchored a new piece of book board to it with tiny steel pins, like a bone fracture. When he covered the corner with leather, the match of line and texture was so deft the repair seemed never to have been made. Indeed, like the other corners, it appeared slightly rubbed from use."

The narrator's growing friendship with Seraut leads him to become immersed in a study of Rene de Crenir, the Frenchman who owned the collection of books Seraut is restoring. With Seraut's help, the narrator discovers that "de Crenir believed a cultural and philosophical bias had prevented nineteenth-century European naturalists from comprehending much of the plant and animal life they saw in North America."

"The resulting confusion, he believed, had kept them in ignorance of something even more profound... in North America the indigenous philosophy grew out of the lives of animals."

This insight is typical of the level on which Lopez' characters deal with the world around them — most often the natural world. And like the

narrator in "Restoration," the narrators in the other stories are similarly characterized by a driving intellectual curiosity about the non-rational aspects of life.

The best example of this is the story "Winter Count 1973: Geese, They Flew Over in a Storm."

The narrator in this story, a scholar in the Winter Counts of the Indians who lived on the high plains north of the Platte River, has reluctantly accepted an invitation to discuss the topic at a scholarly convention. (Winter Counts are "personal views of history, sometimes metaphorical, bearing on a larger, tribal history.")

His reluctance is based on the difference he perceives between himself and his colleagues: "In all these years he had delivered so few papers, had come to enjoy much more listening to them, to the stories unfolding in them."

When he addresses the conference, the reception is lukewarm: "The applause was respectful, thin, distracted. He could no longer make a final point."

He returns to his room, and the story ends with the image that explains the title: "The storm howled through his room and roared through his head. He breathed the wet air into his lungs. In the deepest distance, once, he heard the dog-barking sounds of geese, running like horses before a prairie thunderstorm."

Similarly, each story in the book becomes in its own way a Winter Count.

— Glenn Boettcher



Backbone 2
New Fiction by Northwest Women
The Seal Press, 1980

Backbone 2, a collection of stories by Northwest women, blends scraps of lives together like a quilt — plaid alongside plain, dark sewn to light. The finished product is a sampler that tells of people struggling to get by. Sometimes they make it. Sometimes they don't.

In "Grace" by Constance Cormier, the relationship between a mother and daughter is etched out during a hunt for a cat on the daughter's visit. The sophistication and ease of the mother makes Martha feel like an awkward teenager.

The mother seems to breeze through life perfectly, or at least capably. When the daughter returns to her co-op shop in the city, she feels restless, stifled and shut in by the drabness of the store. A friend's glib advice, "Let yourself out," only

makes her feel more like a child. More helpless. More incapable of living her life as her mother does, confident with who she is.

In "Amanuensis" the life of a secretary is told in staccato beat of the office machine's tap-tap-tap. It's a stark rhythm that just fills time like the lukewarm coffee the secretary drinks throughout the day — it's something to do.

"I don't want this to be a story of victimization," the secretary tells the reader. "I bend all day over this machine so that the tap-a-tap-a-tap-tap is part of my dreams at night, a rhythm that governs my walk, how I move across the acrylic carpet, hit the file to avoid a static shock."

"There is no meaning here. I could not find my vision on the mountaintops and I have lost my dreams the rustle of file folders, the rhythmic

throb of the Xerox machine, the hum of the IBM."

Yet, she is content to stay in her dreamless world. It's empty but safe.

In "A Brief Encounter" Kate is an old lady struggling with years she refuses to acknowledge. "We are what we will ourselves to be," she says. "Time doesn't destroy us, we destroy ourselves."

But when an 81-year-old jogging doctor keels over, Kate's inner strength is sapped and she becomes paralyzed by the reality of death.

She is revitalized when she learns her friend refused to take his medicine. Relief. *She* takes her medicine. So once again she strides through life, her head held high, confidently moving toward the end she won't acknowledge.

Backbone 2 is a curious peek into lives of ordinary people — sometimes triumphing, more often just struggling.

— Sally Hodgkinson

Coming events

Miming for the people of El Salvador



Photo by Michael Bry

The San Francisco Mime Troupe comes to Eugene with its latest original production, *Americans, or Last Tango in Huahuateno* Wednesday at 8 p.m. in the EMU Ballroom. This fast-paced comedy of intrigue takes a serious look at United States foreign policy in Central America. The Mime Troupe treats this timely subject in a high comic melodrama style, with lavish helpings of Latin music and dance. America's oldest and best known theater of political comedy, the company's performance is a benefit for the people of El Salvador. The production will not be one of silent pantomime. The company's 18 actors and musicians rely on dialogue — and refer the reader to the dictionary which defines mime as an ancient dramatic entertainment representing scenes from life usually in a ridiculous manner — to discuss the major issues of our time. Over the group's 22-year history, it has taken on such subjects as racism, nuclear power, housing, and the war in Vietnam. Tickets, available at Book & Tea, Mother Kali's, Folk Ways and the EMU Main Desk, are \$6 general, \$5 Student/low income, \$3 children under 12. For more information, call 345-1138.

Speaking of...

Reb Zalman Schachter, rabbi, teacher, author and storyteller in the Hassidic tradition comes to Eugene May 25 at 8 p.m. at Temple Beth Israel (25th Avenue and Portland Street) — one block west of Willamette Street) to present his synthesis of current political and spiritual consciousness using story, song, movement and chanting to weave his way into your heart and mind. As Zalman says: "When the soul surprises the mind, we have a good story." Tickets are \$3, and children get in for free.

Noted Oregon author Ken Kesey will be the guest speaker at the annual meeting of the Friends of the University of Oregon Library at a brunch on May 31. The 11 a.m. event is open to the public, and will be held at the Valley River Inn. Kesey is expected to give a lively talk about his experiences with books, libraries, librarians and life.

Museum art for an MFA degree

At the University Museum of Art, student exhibitions open Tuesday for a three-week run. The downstairs main galleries and the "Photography at Oregon Gallery" will feature the work of 18 students who will receive master of fine arts (MFA) degrees from the university in June. The exhibits, which run through June 14, fulfill the final degree requirement for an exhibition of the terminal project.

A variety of styles and media will be represented in the exhibit, providing a cross-section of the visual arts that includes painting, ceramics, sculpture, printmaking, photography, graphics, jewelry and metalsmithing.

Included in the exhibit is a show by advanced art student Willie Osterman entitled *Waterworks* — "the result of investigating water as found in nature, in the studio and under the microscope."

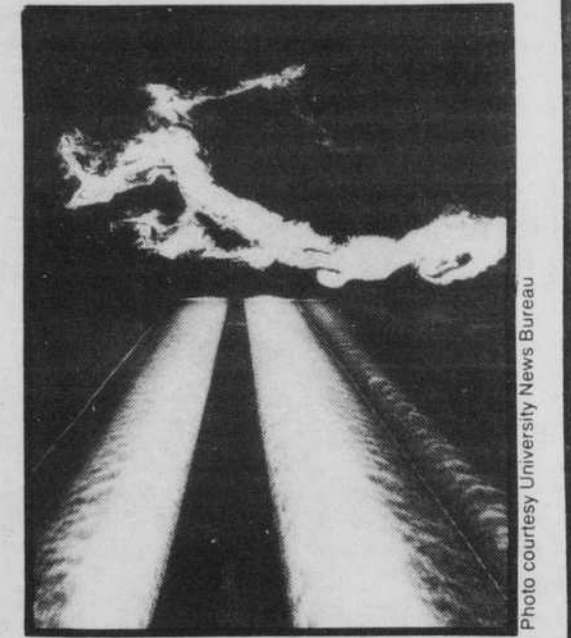


Photo courtesy University News Bureau

Childhood days

The Oregon Repertory Theatre presents a special young people's theatre production, *Step on a Crack* June 6 at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. The play, by Susan Zeder of Seattle and the University of Washington, captures the irresistible sweet sadness of growing up and the maturing of love and understanding between people. *Step on a Crack* will continue June 7 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. and June 13 at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Tickets are \$3 for adults and \$1.50 for children. Call the ORT box office at 485-1946 for reservations. Says director Kelly Ray, "Step on a Crack is a unique approach to children's theatre as it is totally suitable for audiences of all ages."



Photo by Jimmie Harris

STUDENT RALLY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Join Students from other State System Campuses

at the State Capitol on

Thursday, May 28th.

Lobby against: Sky-Rocketing Tuition

Department Cuts

Firing Staff Members

TRANSPORTATION provided.

Buses leave Mac Court at 9:00 a.m.

Sign-up in Suite 4, EMU

Cole Porter's ANYTHING GOES

RESERVATIONS 686-4191
TICKETS 4 AND 2 TO 15 STUDENTS
SALOONS, ALSO OTHER STUDENTS

8 pm, 10 pm
MAY 22, 23, 27, 30
ROBINSON THEATRE

GATE PASS

THIS AD Good for 2 admissions one time only Value \$1.50

GREYHOUND RACING
MAY 8TH THRU AUG
POST TIME 7:30 PM

Racing Monday thru Saturday
No Racing Sundays
No Children Under 12 Admitted
Portland
NE 223rd and Halsey St.
U of O Fairview near Gresham
Phone 685-2191

MULTNOMAH KENNEL CLUB

SUNDAY CHAMPAGNE BRUNCH

A La Carte Selections with Champagne from \$4.25



SERVING FINE FOOD & SPIRITS

5TH AND WILLAMETTE
(503) 485-4444 DOWNTOWN EUGENE

LIGHT, COLOR, VISION, and ILLUSION

plus
"A Hologram is Worth a Million Words"

A Lecture on 3-D Images
Opens New Exhibit at

WISTEC

Friday, May 22, 8 PM

Exhibit Open 7-10

regular admission

484-9027

Next to Autzen Stadium