

barons could not withstand the cannon of the royal artillery train. Fortresses, in short, were central not only to the imposition of Norman power over England and Wales but also to the emergence of the centralized monarchy and nation-state.

David Anthony's book is a masterpiece. A professor of anthropology, Anthony brings together archaeology, linguistics, and rare knowledge of Russian scholarship and the history of climate change to recast our understanding of the formation of early human society. *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language* begins with perhaps the greatest unanswered question of prehistory: How, when, and why did the Indo-European family of languages emerge and spread to dominate Eurasia from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean?

A couple of insights from Anthony's remarkable book may give some of its flavor. DNA studies show that all the world's domestic horses developed from at least 77 ancestral mares, but quite possibly from a single stallion. A relatively docile stallion would have little hope of reproducing in the wild, as he would have to compete with violent and dominant males, but he would appeal to people looking for a manageable breeder for a domestic bloodline. In Anthony's perceptive summation, domestication meant that "from the horse's perspective, humans were the only way he could get a girl. From the human perspective, he was the only male sire they wanted."

The strong likelihood of one sire for the world's entire population of horses suggests a single point of origin for the horse-dependent nomads of the steppes. A person on foot with a dog can herd about 200 sheep, Anthony observes, but on a horse can manage about 500. That is half of the key to the growth and spread of the steppe peoples. The other half is that once they had wheels, they could carry their own supplies and thus stay on the move indefinitely, fighting where they chose or running away if necessary. They could roam from the steppes above the Black Sea east into Siberia and west into Europe, and when warm and cold periods made the climate untenable for the early agrar-

ian and urban settlements of the Mesopotamian region, the people of the steppes moved in. Language followed the carts.

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ARTS & LETTERS

Landscape Artist

Reviewed by A. J. Loftin

WE DEPEND UPON OUR FAMOUS writers to drink too much, marry too often, backstab their rivals, and sleep with their students. Wallace Stegner

(1909–93), despite a long life at the center of things, never did any of that. He taught conscientiously, published abundantly, and sustained a monogamous marriage for 59 years. The only familiar note is his gradual disillusionment. As the American West that had forged his character and reputation vanished, Stegner found himself literally alone on a hill, surrounded by the garish manses of Silicon Valley. In the end he became attached to Vermont, where, as he observed, nature heals faster.

Stegner once said that Americans were "expected to make the whole pilgrimage of civilization in a single lifetime," which was "a hell of a thing to ask of anybody." His own trip started with an impoverished childhood in Iowa and points west and finished with more literary prizes and accomplishments than anyone could want. He started Stanford's creative writing program in 1946 and ran it for decades; among the students influenced by his exhortation to "write what you know" were Wendell Berry, Edward Abbey, Ken Kesey (whose flippant philosophy—"write what you don't know"—enraged Stegner), and Larry McMurtry. He served on the board of of the Sierra Club and helped to shape the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' environmental policies.

Best known for his Pulitzer-winning novel *Angle of Repose* (1971), a multi-generational saga based

WALLACE STEGNER AND THE AMERICAN WEST.

By Philip L. Fradkin.
Knopf. 369 pp. \$27.50

on the life of writer and illustrator Mary Foote, Stegner wrote 12 other works of fiction and nine books of nonfiction. Among his most autobiographical novels were *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1943), drawn from his childhood, and *Crossing to Safety* (1987), a close study of the friendship between two married couples. Stegner also wrote a biography of conservationist John Wesley Powell and other works about the West. But Stegner didn't like being labeled a "western writer," and with good reason: While attentive to the landscape, his novels were also psychologically probing, nuanced, and painfully honest.

Two previous academic biographies treated Stegner's literary contributions. Philip Fradkin, an environmental writer based in northern California, aims instead to look at "the whole man—or as close as I can get to him—set against the passing backdrops of his life." In an epilogue, he describes visits to Stegner's childhood homes. Not much had stayed the same—which, of course, is Fradkin's point. To be western is to relinquish everything that was once familiar.

"I was born on wheels," Stegner wrote of his itinerant frontier childhood. His mother and his only sibling died young; his father, a bootlegger and gambler, killed himself after shooting a girlfriend. Reacting to the instability of his early years, Stegner drove himself to succeed. After graduating from the University of Utah in 1930, he got a master's and a doctorate at the University of Iowa. There, he met his wife, Mary, by all accounts an extreme hypochondriac, who nonetheless supported her husband's ambitions "in the manner of a traditional politician's wife . . . as buffer, filter, cook, hostess, and social secretary." The Stegners' only child, son Page, has said it was tough to find his own space in that equation.

Stegner never allowed teaching at Stanford to consume his whole life. He and his wife built a house in Los Altos Hills in 1949, amid pig farms and orchards. There he wrote for several hours each day. Over the next four decades, Stegner witnessed the population explosion that eventually drew him into the national conservation debate. In 1960, in an impassioned and widely circulated let-

ter, he advocated for a national wilderness preservation system. While his phrase "the geography of hope" became the environmental movement's war cry, the West became, Fradkin says, Stegner's geography of despair. Stegner's greatest failing, in Fradkin's view, was his inability to deal with the rapid change that is a constant of western life.

Fradkin's environmentalist background makes him the right person to re-create Stegner's physical landscape, and to understand Stegner's contributions as a conservationist. He's not always able to penetrate Stegner's emotional landscape. Fortunately, for that readers can turn to Stegner's fiction, where the writer laid bare his soul, as wide open as a western sky.

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Still Happening

Reviewed by Andrew Starnier

IT'S THE '60S ALL OVER AGAIN!

Anyone who has frequented modern art museums in the last decade has seen numerous exhibitions of experimental art from a period that intended to make museums obsolete. "Kunst als Leben—Art as Life,"

a traveling exhibit that opened two years ago in Munich and closes this fall in Genoa, is one of the most successful shows to engage with the ambivalence of the avant-garde toward museums. The exhibit is devoted entirely to the work of Allan Kaprow, who is credited with inventing the term "happening" to describe performances that blend painting, sculpture, and theater. Kaprow has been called the most known unknown artist of the 20th century (he referred to himself as an "Un-Artist/Non-Artist"), but a spate of attention is the bittersweet result of his death in 2006.

Kaprow characterized his work as action painting that left the canvas behind. His happenings—in which multiple events take place together in space and time, and can never be repeated in exactly the same way—are poised between the abstract expressionism of the '50s and the pop art of the '60s. Performance art wasn't invented in the '60s, but it

ALLAN KAPROW— ART AS LIFE.

Edited by Eva Meyer-Hermann, Andrew Perchuk, and Stephanie Rosenthal.
Getty. 358 pp. \$55