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**Review of *Conversations with wallace Stegner on Western History and Literature* By Wallace Stegner and Richard W. Etulain**

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*Conversations with Wallace Stegner on Western History and Literature.* By Wallace Stegner and Richard W. Etulain. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983. Photographs, index. viii + 207 pp. \$14.95.

Any new book by Wallace Stegner is a cause for celebration among students of the fiction and history of the American West, and this collection of ten interviews, conducted by Richard W. Etulain in 1980 and 1981, is an event of signal importance to all admirers of Stegner's work. The interviews begin with biographical clarifications, treat the fiction next (with separate chapters on *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* and *Angle of Repose*), and then turn to the Mormons, western literature, western history, and the western wilderness, with a concluding miscellaneous chapter.

The transcripts of the interviews were revised only minimally, so there is some repetition in the volume, particularly in the chapter

on the Mormons. This is a mere quibble, however. One of the most striking things about this volume is Etulain's resourcefulness as an interviewer. His questions indicate thought and care and a thorough knowledge of both Stegner's work and its critical reception. The interviews are comprehensive and well planned but not restrictively so; Etulain frequently follows up on new topics Stegner has introduced.

There are a few surprises in the collection. We learn that the eleven-year hiatus between *The Preacher and the Slave* (retitled *Joe Hill*) and *A Shooting Star* occurred because Stegner "gave up writing novels after *Joe Hill*." His reason was the popular and critical indifference to and misunderstanding of the novel. We also learn that Stegner, an ardent and informed environmentalist, is "not very optimistic about the [ecological] future of the West."

This rich harvest of Stegner's ideas and opinions is an indispensable source book for scholarly research on Stegner's writing. Emotionally and intellectually intimate in a not uncomfortable way, the interviews bring us as close as we are soon likely to come to Stegner the man as well as Stegner the man of letters.

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