

an excerpt of

RIDING TOWARD EVERYWHERE. By William T. Vollmann. New York: Ecco, 2008. 270 pp. \$26.95.

Reviewed by Robert Rebein

“Freight train rides are parables,” William T. Vollmann declares at the beginning of *Riding Toward Everywhere*, his fascinating book about hopping rail cars in the American West. “Why have we chosen to live behind walls and windows?”

This is an interesting question, promising as it does to confront the many ways we Americans have traded huge chunks of our freedom for comfort and safety. At the same time, it raises another, no less intriguing question: why anyone, let alone a fifty-year-old National Book Award winner with balance problems and a recently fractured hip, would risk life and limb in pursuit of what can only be described as a bizarre hobby—for hitchhiking long ago supplanted freight hopping as the preferred travel method of the destitute and lost, and Vollmann is neither of these anyway. Although *Riding Toward Everywhere* is more travelogue than memoir, Vollmann does a fairly good job of answering the second of these questions. The first, however, in true parable fashion, he leaves for readers to grapple with on their own . . .