

Photo by Diane Hagaman/Special to The Washington Times

Seattle resident Ivan Doig considers himself a "Western" — not "Washington" — writer whose imaginative base at the moment is in Montana.

DOIG

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become a meticulous craftsman of horizons, causing a reviewer like James Kaufmann of The Christian Science Monitor to call his landscapes living forces.

The land "looms over, under and around this book," Mr. Kaufmann wrote last year of the latest Doig work, "English Creek," the first novel of a projected Montana trilogy that will span the century since statehood in 1889.

"Doig is committed to the Pacific Northwest, and he draws it as lovingly as Thomas Hardy drew Wessex and as accurately as Raymond Chandler limned Los Angeles," Mr. Kaufmann wrote. "He deserves to be better known."

Ivan Doig, 46, red hair thinning aloft but luxuriant along the jaw where it bleeds into gray, lives at this city's north end in a birder's paradise, a suburban valley he calls "one of the wrinkles in the Sound's tremendous timber-green sleeves."

He is compact and Scottishly reticent and, with strangers, retiring: From time to time the blue eyes behind his hornrimmed glasses wear the look of Sir Alec Guinness at bay.

This is a man comfortable being alone. "I say emotional parables are due the alone of this world," he writes in "Winter Brothers," and he brings up short a visitor who complains that in his books "people look out and see just about nothing — nobody for miles around."

"But that's not seeing nothing," he says sharply.

"One reason I have some trouble using the word processor here," he says, pointing to the terminal that sits idle in deference to his manual Royal by the window, "is that I have to be there looking at the screen rather than looking out here at the evergreens, the ferns, the constant birds who use those ferns as their delicatessen and cafeteria."

"So that, and the seascapes along the coast and the mountainscapes in Montana, are their own company for a person."

Yet, as with all the major characters of his books — men who must draw close to a few others because an accident of place isolates them

from the larger world — Mr. Doig is bound to a community, the circle of family. All four walls of one small room of his home are hung with Montana photographs of father, mother, uncles and other relatives.

As if in tribute to that background, Mr. Doig favors rough clothing that gives him the air, self-described, of "a beaver trapper." He once wrote that he owned only one suit, that worn to face down a housing developer planning to bulldoze a hillside across his valley. The developer won.

But don't be fooled: Mr. Doig is no provincial. He's been a newspaperman and magazine editor as far east as Evanston, Ill., and once turned down two East Coast job offers — from The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post — because the grind of daily deadlines was getting to him. He has a B.S. and M.S. in journalism from Northwestern and a Ph.D. in American frontier history from the University of Washington.

Hemmed in by hemlock and fir, the low brown house he shares with Carol, an outgoing New Jerseyan and professor at nearby Shoreline

coastline from the Queen Charlotte Islands south.

Here, from his canoe-chase adventure, "The Sea Runners," is one fragment of the result:

"The night Pacific is little at all like the day's. With the demarking line of horizon unseeable the ocean draws up dimension from its depths, sends it spreading, distending, perhaps away into some blend with the sky itself. If stars ever kindle out there amid the wavetops we need not be much surprised. And all the while every hazard, rock, shoal, reef, shelf, snag, is being whetted against the solid dark."

For all that, he is a "coastie," and he saves his real affections for the Pacific's more inland reaches, for shoreline up and down the Sound and above all, for the mountains, the Olympics.

Standing in "calm, tall files" to the coastline, "their even timbered slopes like black-green fur to shed the wet," the Olympic peaks recall for Mr. Doig what he terms his first shore, "those rough snow-topped headlands which stop the flow of plains in the Montana I was born to."

"In two books I've tried to write about this coastline as a character; I've tried to describe it in its moods and its many forms of life . . ."

Community College, is but a half-mile from Puget Sound.

And that wet mound — 1,350 miles of it by his reckoning, counting every bay and channel — Mr. Doig monitors with regularity.

"In two books, 'Winter Brothers' and 'Sea Runners' both, I've tried to write about this coastline as a character, in a sense; I've tried to describe it in its moods and its many forms of life, its bird life and sea life," he says.

With Carol by his side more often than not, Ivan Doig has climbed every major cape on the Washington-Oregon coast from Blanco to Flat-tory; has walked almost every spit of sand on the American side of the Fuca strait; has sailed from Juneau to Seattle on an oceanography ship; has flown over Canada's Pacific

"From the instant I saw them," he writes in "Winter Brothers" of that primeval Washington range, "I have felt exhilaration from these mountains like a gust down from their glaciers. If they did not exist, I think I would not live here; would need to be within sight of some other craggy western horizon."

High, dry Montana for Washington's drowned coastline is not so much an exchange, then, as an equivalence: mountain for mountain, shore for shore. And by all accounts it enables the writer in Mr. Doig to straddle the reality of space.

For he considers himself not a "Washington" writer but a "Western" writer whose imaginative base at the moment is in Montana. And to judge by the walls of photographs, neither thought nor imagination

ever strays far from those beginnings.

Mr. Doig is the only child of a ranch hand who managed other men's sheep, and who named his son "Ivan" because it was different from "Junior." Grandfather Doig was a Scottish tailor's helper turned homesteader in the harsh hill country of Montana's Big Belts.

His mother Mr. Doig remembers only from his photographs; she died when he was 6 in their one-room herder's cabin in the Bridger Range.

Her death seems central to Mr. Doig's life: With it he opened his first book, "This House of Sky," the bitter-sweet memoir that earned him a National Book Award nomination in 1979.

"Yet of my mother's death, whatever I try, just a single flicker, dim and hurtful, ever is called back: the asthma has claimed her, there are only two breathings in the cabin now, my father is touching me awake in lantern glow, his shadow hurled high up onto the wall, to say *she is dead, Ivan, your mother is dead*, sobbing as the words choke him."

Today, as he guides a visitor among his photographs, he stops longer at those that show the tumbled cabins of wood that marked his parents' stopping places and his mother's death.

The experience has colored the way he sees the world, has made him a man of frontiers and shorelines. An "edge-walker of the continent," he's called himself.

"I think much of the awareness of being at the edge of things comes out of my own childhood, where I was at the edge of an adult society all the time because my mother had died and my dad took me along wherever he happened to go. And a writer in his professional and artistic life is also a person at the edge of his society," he says today.

"Here I am writing about, in Montana now, the east face of the Rocky Mountain Front, just beneath the Continental Divide on the east side. That, too, is a rim, a boundary in some ways. The continent begins to change, change its mood right there, and you can see it."

In talking of Montana Mr. Doig lets words tumble from his lips. That may be natural: The fact of his writing life right now is the ambitious three-novel project whose third

book will climax in the Montana Centennial year of 1989. The work will occupy him almost through the end of the decade.

It's more than a little biographical, this saga of four generations of family come from Scotland almost a century ago.

And in defiance of chronology, its second book, "English Creek," was written first and published last year — simply because, as the story of an adolescent who would be only 15 years older than Mr. Doig in real time, memories and raw material were fresher.

To keep those memories green, Ivan and Carol Doig return to Montana almost every summer; in 1977 they stepped off the dimensions of every homestead Ivan and his family had ever had.

The buildings all stand today in Montana's dry air — empty but for free-ranging cattle and cowpats, floorless, doorless, without window panes, like the 27-by-13-foot cabin Mr. Doig's father grew up in, snapped up in the late Depression by a corporate rancher who wanted more range.

Mr. Doig had gone back there once before.

"I went back with my dad. He went back to cannibalize a piece of haying equipment; he needed an axle or a wheel or something for a hay rake, and he knew there was one on the old place. And so he and I went in there."

"And I remember him crying. Not particularly on the status of the house or anything, but just the emptiness. It didn't mean much to me then, but . . ."

But it meant more later, when it sank in to Mr. Doig that entire communities had lost their homes in the Depression to the ranching giants. And both "English Creek" and "This House of Sky" are tinged on this score with rue that comes out of personal experience.

Perhaps it is memories alone that stay green. By comparison, the here and now tends to the sear and brown. Logging has now disfigured Mr. Doig's once-timbered Montana hills just as it has his Cascades and, before they were folded into the National Park system, his Olympics. One is not long into the air over Seattle before noticing the great snowy patches, precise in their geometry, ripped from the nubby green quilt that covers Washington's mountains.

Would Ivan Doig make the exchange again — mountain for mountain, shore for shore — for good?

He and Carol went back again last summer, to the Drought of '85, the hottest weather he's ever seen in Montana. On July 2 at Great Falls it was 100 degrees at 4 a.m., with a 55-mile-an-hour hot wind, Mr. Doig says. The country had faded. Crops were given up and were being plowed under: too short and too sparse to harvest.

And he watched people try to cope with it. "It's as if somebody said to you or me, 'Well, can't afford to pay you a salary this year.'"

The effect, he says, taking a deep breath, was otherworldly.

"It's heart breaking. Heartbreaking, to be out there."

No, he says, after 20 years of thinned blood from Puget Sound weather, he couldn't go back for good. Back there last summer "you could hear the tree leaves rattle as they dried up."

Once, a friend who had stepped back and forth across the country among writing jobs chided Mr. Doig about his attachment to places. "It doesn't matter anymore where you live in this country," his friend said.

No, Mr. Doig said then and now. "It matters."

ENGLISH CREEK
By Ivan Doig

PACIFIC PIPELINE	August 31, 1984
PUBLISHERS WEEKLY	Sept. 28 - Oct. 4, 1984
WEEKLY	
LIBRARY JOURNAL	October 1, 1984
DENVER POST	October 14, 1984
PLAIN DEALER	October 14, 1984
BOOKLIST	October 15, 1984
OMAHA WORLD-HERALD	October 21, 1984
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SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER	October 27, 1984
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WASHINGTON POST	November 4, 1984
PORTLAND OREGONIAN	November 11, 1984
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SEATTLE TIMES	November 25, 1984
REGISTER-GUARD OREGON	October 28, 1984
WIND & TIDE BOOKSTORE	Fall 1984
SUN-TIMES, CHICAGO IL	November 9, 1984
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FT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM	December 2, 1984
ISLAND PACKET S.C.	December 3, 1984
TELEGRAM ROCKY MOUNT, N.C.	December 9, 1984
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VIRGINIA PILOT NORFOLK VA	January 19, 1985
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TULSA WORLD	February 3, 1985
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AMERICAN LIBRARIES	March 1985
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ASBURY PARK PRESS NJ	March 31, 1985
CHRONICLE HOUSTON, TEXAS	April 21, 1985
SEATTLE TIMES	May 5, 1985
SEATTLE REVIEW	Spring 1985
MONTANA MAGAZINE	Spring 1985
WASHINGTON POST	November 10, 1985
WASHINGTON POST BOOK REVIEW	December 6, 1985
WASHINGTON TIMES	February 5, 1986

ENGLISH CREEK REVIEWS

favorable

- ✓ New Yorker
- Tulsa World
- LA Times
- Savannah News-Press
- Norfolk Virginian Pilot
- Monterey Peninsula Herald
- ✓ NY Times Bk Review
- ✓ Eugene Register-Guard
- ✓ Newsday
- Schenectady Gazette
- Suburban & Wayne Times (same as above)
- Omaha World-Herald
- Anniston (Ala.) Star
- Not Man Apart
- Ft. Wayne Journal-Gazette
- ✓ Grand Rapids Press
- ✓ Ft. Worth Morning Star-Telegram
- Indiana Star (same as above)
- Erie Daily Times
- Hackensack Record
- Wichita Eagle-Beacon
- Island Packet, Hilton Head S.C.
- ✓ Great Falls Tribune
- Christian Science Monitor
- Rocky Mountain News
- ✓ Washington Post
- ✓ Portland Oregonian
- ✓ USA Today
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- ✓ Publishers Weekly
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HONORS
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY
LECTURE



TRYING TO PLACE IT

by
Ivan Doig, Ph.D.

June 8, 1984

TRYING TO PLACE IT

by
Ivan Doig, Ph.D.

*For the Shoreline Community College
library, in appreciation of the help
on this and my other works*

Ivan Doig

Honors Night Program
Montana State University
June 8, 1984

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IVAN DOIG

Ivan Doig was born in White Sulphur Springs, Montana, in 1939 and attended school there through the eighth grade when his family moved to the Valier, Montana, area where he graduated from high school. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Northwestern University and a doctorate from the University of Washington. Doig is the author of *English Creek*, *The Sea Runners*, *Winter Brothers* and the critically-acclaimed *This House of Sky*. He lives in Seattle with his wife Carol who is a professor at Shoreline Community College.

This is the second in a published series of annual Montana State University Honors Lectures. The first, The Paradoxes of Achievement, by Dr. Marvin Shaw, was delivered on June 10, 1983.

TRYING TO PLACE IT

MOST likely I shouldn't admit this until I have the honorary degree safely in hand tomorrow, but part of the plot of *English Creek*, my novel that will be published this fall, involves a Montana family of the 1930s, who badly want their son to go to Bozeman to college—and he just as badly doesn't want to go. Had I known I was going to be asked here for this commencement weekend, I might have made that boy more reasonable toward this place.

Place is in fact what I want to talk about here tonight—a Western writer's sense of place, in the literary currents of the world; and my own sense of place from having been born and raised in Montana.

Fairly often these days, contemporary writing about the West of America is called a literature of place. A literature, I suppose that means, which focuses on the land, rather than on people. Often the book titles themselves have seemed to say so: *The Big Sky*. . . *Wolf Willow*. . . *Winds of Morning*. . . *A River Runs Through It*. (Put them together right, you could make a kind of sagebrush haiku out of these titles of Western literature.) The critical notion, as I savvy it, is that the immensities of the West, its extremes of landform and its powerful weather and the distances which flabbergast travelers from elsewhere in this country—these immensities overwhelm the fact of the people thinly salt-and-peppered across the expanse.

"Place," in terms of landscape, backdrop of mountain and of plain and of hard weather, *does* figure large in the work of a lot of us who are trying to write about the West. But I don't particularly think it's at the neglect of the people, the human stories, the Westerners who carry on their lives against the big bold landscapes of those books. Norman Maclean's flyfishing brother of *A River Runs Through It*; no one who has read that story and has any imagination at all can wet

a line in a trout stream now without seeing, in the shadow on the water, Paul Maclean making his powerful, beautiful cast. Ellen Webb of Mildred Walker's novel *Winter Wheat*, stepping straight from a wheatfield to a university campus. Jim Welch's men of the reservations, Jim Loney and Myron Pretty Weasel, and Lame Bull, and the never-named narrator of *Winter in the Blood*. I hope, maybe also on the list, Charlie Doig and Bessie Ringer of *This House of Sky*—all of them, characters of modern Western literature who seem to have found a continuing life in the minds of readers.

In short, a geographic sense of place is a flavorful ingredient in Western literature, but let's don't think it's the whole supper.

For there are other senses of place than the merely geographic. A bunch of them. The word *place* has so many meanings it takes up about three-and-a-half pages in the Oxford English Dictionary—and in my own American Heritage Dictionary that I instantly retreated to, thirteen different definitions of *place* as a noun, twelve usages as a verb. A word that sprawls all over the place—which is a phrase I didn't find anywhere amid all those definitions.

So, I have my own senses of place, as a writer with a Montana upbringing. Let me try to bring out three of them, and to think out loud at you about how they seem to affect me.

Begin with the beginning. I come from a place. I originate, as an American, from a place in a specific Montana sense of the word—another usage which doesn't seem to have reached the dictionary-makers of Oxford and Boston. Place, meaning an abandoned homestead. Small ranch or farm, either one, but abandoned, given up on, because of the winter of 1919 or the bank failures that rippled through Montana in the early 1920s or the Depression, or death or disgust or any other of a hundred reasons.

I tried to explain this locally prevalent use in this passage of *House of Sky*:

By the time I was a boy and Dad was trying in his own right to put together a life again, the doubt and defeat in the valley's history had tamped down into a single word. Anyone of Dad's generation always talked of a piece of land where some worn-out family eventually had lost to weather or market prices not as a farm or a ranch or even a homestead, but as a place. All those empty little clearings which ghosted that sage countryside—just the McLoughlin place there by that butte, the Vinton place over this ridge, the Kuhnes place, the Catlin place, the Winters place, the McReynolds place, all the tens of dozens of sites where families lit in the valley or its rimming foothills, couldn't hold on, and drifted off. All of them epitaphed with that barest of words, place.

The Doig place, in the Big Belt Mountains not all that many miles north of here, is where my Scottish grandparents seeded this family into America. My father and four of his five brothers, and his sister, *all* were born on that homestead—the last of them in 1910—and being careful, slow-marrying Scots,

most of them were around there, off and on, through the late 1920s and even on into the 1930s. Part of my own boyhood on ranches was within a few miles of that original Doig homestead. So, in my growing up, what history the family had was mostly of that place. By now, nobody has lived there for forty years or more—yet it perseveres in us. When Annick Smith and Beth Chadwick were looking for somewhere to film their movie *Heartland*, they phoned me in Seattle and asked if I thought the Doig place would be suitable. I told them I didn't know—the house was still standing, but the site is awful damn remote and high and winterish, and they were calling late in the year—but if they wanted to take a look, they should get in touch with my Dad's cousin, Walter Doig, who I knew still went fishing back in there. They did, and Walter tried to take Annick and Beth in there, but had to give up when their four-wheel-drive started bulldozing snow over the top of its radiator. A homestead over by Harlowton was chosen instead for *Heartland*—the Doig place not for the first time missed its date with destiny—but as Beth Chadwick wrote me in a Christmas card, "I want to thank you for leading us to Walter Doig, who although he couldn't show us the old homestead, was full of wonderful words and stories, some of which I couldn't resist sticking in the script."

So, there is in me *this* sense of place—an awareness of that homestead, that Doig place, as my family's first footprint in America—and that though it leads away from that snow-catching basin high in the Big Belt Mountains, we've been busy ever since with words and stories of it.

A second sense of place, this one from my *own* growing-up years in the West, rather than my family's. Which place is mine? Any of you who have worked on a ranch or farm crew may recognize this one. The first day on the job, the first meal you go to there, breakfast most likely, you are fifteen or sixteen or seventeen, plenty big enough to hire out to pile bales of hay or pick rock or summer fallow, but awfully young socially, and you troop in with the rest of the crew, who begin seating themselves along the twenty-foot table, and you stand there with your face hanging out, until the cook or the boss's wife finally points to a certain plate and set of utensils, and says, "Why don't you take that place, there?" And you do, you go ahead and sit down, and it's yours for the summer, unless somebody gets thirsty and quits, and you are moved up into that place. The places, of course, get more and more permanent toward the head of the table. The cook's place, the choreboy's place—you would have to go to the Holy Land to find more sacred spots than those.

And then came the years when I was twenty and twenty-one, and coming home from college to a ranch where I had a different place at the table every time. My father and my grandmother were hired hands on that ranch—my grandmother was the cook, they lived in half of the cookhouse—and so I would come to stay with them between quarters at college, and work there in the summers. I

never liked that ranch, didn't like the way it was run, didn't like being around purebred cattle that were worth more than my father and grandmother and I were being paid in a year, didn't even like that part of Montana after having lived my high school years up in the Dupuyer country. And as a summer hand there I was a bit of a perplexity. Whenever we were rained out of haying, for instance, I'd head on into the cookhouse and read a book, instead of standing around in the machine shop watching it rain. But the rancher put up with me, for the sake of my father and grandmother, and he granted that I did have enough common sense to be able to pile bales of hay.

Through all this, the visits and the summer jobs, I was pretty much a floater at meal times. It was a kind of a hectic ranch, there seldom were the same number of people at any two meals—the rancher himself ate breakfast with us, maybe he and his wife would come down from the big house for supper or dinner and maybe they wouldn't, there might be truck drivers or cattle buyers or mechanics on hand. And so it helped my grandmother to cope with all this by me fitting in at the table wherever there was a place left, after everybody else got sat. I didn't mind—I'd been to college, I knew what the word "peripatetic" meant. And I found it kind of interesting, to have so many different places at that table—to be switched around at random that way. Wondering before each meal, which would be my place?

Then I was twenty-two, home from Northwestern University with my master's degree in journalism, with about a month to spend before going into six months' active duty in the Air Force. My folks were still working at that ranch, so there I lit once again, and this time there was a field of oats to bind. I was given the job of sitting on the binder and tripping a lever to make the bundles fall in a decent row—the rancher himself was driving the tractor pulling the binder. And at one of the first meal times, somebody said to me, "Well, you're doing pretty good on the binder with that master's degree of yours. Maybe if you go get a Ph.D., you can get to drive the tractor." At the time, I laughed with everybody else. (And none of us even knew that someday I'd be over here getting a degree we'd never *heard* of.) But I know now what was happening, in those meal times at that ranch, with the constant question—which place is mine? I *did* get a Ph.D.—but I did *not* go back and ask to drive that tractor. Those places among the hired hands at that table—none of them were mine, or ever going to be, if I could possibly find any way to be on my own in life.

Now to the third and last sense of place I'm aware of in myself, the one that has been making itself known to me ever since I sat down, more than ten years ago, to write something I called my Montana book, which turned out to be *This House of Sky*.

Trying to place it. To place it, first in the sense of identifying—as my dictionary helps out here, "to recollect clearly the circumstances or context of." As

in the phrase, one that I myself have to resort to often, "I remember your face but I can't place you."

That's the first side, of trying to place it. And then the next, trying to place it in the sense of putting something into place. Setting. Arranging. Making it be where it ought to be.

This is the carpentry part of writing. Building a book the reader will want to live in. Hammering together a solid basic structure, then taking care with the finishing-work, making sure you've got the details right.

Time and again in the past couple of years, as I've worked to create a fictional ranching valley called English Creek, up in the Two Medicine country, I've sat at my typewriter trying "to recollect clearly the circumstances of" portions of my Montana past. Some comes easily enough. I haven't been around sheep full-time for twenty-five years and yet when I start to write about how sheep ranching was, I know at once—who can ever forget?—what a sheep rancher's mood was, late in lambing, when his feet were aching from all those weeks of living in overshoes.

But memory is not always enough. In fact, pretty damn seldom is your own memory enough when you're trying to write accurately. I make it a habit to try to check details with people who know more than I do. Two quick examples, again from the carpentry on this English Creek novel. In my own Montana life, I have definitely eaten cake at a Fourth of July picnic, and on other occasions I definitely have had to skin dead sheep. Yet in writing this novel which takes place about the time I was born, I found I had no idea what kind of a cake that might be at a Fourth of July picnic in that part of Montana, back then; and I wasn't dead-sure about the sheep-skinning any more, either. So I wrote to one friend, a ranch wife now living in Great Falls, whom I knew would have been a teenager in the late 1930s and asked her what kind of cake her mother brought to the Fourth of July picnic—and I wrote to another friend, Horace Morgan, who's been a sheep rancher out here by Maudlow, and asked him to give me step-by-step directions for skinning a sheep. The cake turned out to be a chocolate sour cream one, and the details of sheep skinning, you don't want to hear about this soon after supper.

In the arranging that goes on in the writing of a book—the process of trying to put things into place, make them be where they ought to be—I think a writer's main tool is his eyesight. At least I've always found it a good idea when I'm attempting to write about something to do with the American West, to go out and take a look at it. For my novel of a couple of years ago, *The Sea Runners*, the story of a long water journey from Alaska to the Columbia River, I bummed a ride down as much of that coast as I could, aboard the University of Alaska oceanography ship. The captain let me stand beside him in the wheelhouse—right under the big red sign that said "Crew members only allowed in the wheelhouse"—and from an hour before dawn until after dark, from Juneau to Seattle, day after day I stood and looked at that coast and water, and made notes about it.

For this Montana novel, Carol and I have been back here the past three sum-

mers. Part of that research has been to wander around various towns and choose buildings for my fictional place of Gros Ventre—Carol taking photos for me while I made notes about our home-made town. Gros Ventre, Montana, as we've created it, has the mercantile store from Augusta, the creamery from Conrad, the library from Lewistown, a bar from Choteau, and so on.

So those are a few of the notions that come to mind in me, when "a sense of place" is mentioned. Not just geography, unmatched as so much of the Montana landscape is. But "place" as something to work from, and work on, and work toward. In a forthcoming manuscript I've just read, a book called *Sky People* by a north-of-Spokane writer named Jack Nisbet, there is a story about one of his neighbors, a wiry rancher in years-old blue jeans, sitting around the kitchen with his hat on, drinking coffee, and the rancher says something like, "I haven't been all that many places. But I've seen things where I've been." Do I even need to add, that rancher was a Montanan?

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An Interview with Ivan Doig

Q: Do you distinguish yourself as a "Western" writer? And if so, does that entail more than having grown up in the West, and come from a long line of Scots/Montana sheep ranchers?

ID: I'm a writer first, and probably a writer wherever I lived. Being a Westerner is a pretty close second. I like living out here—we've deliberately chosen to stay on here. I like the handleability of the West, the scope of a place like Montana, where the population of the state is about the size of Seattle, and has the same advantages as a small city this size. When you meet somebody and you get to talking, in two or three removes you've discovered someone in common. So for a writer whose books are fueled by research, as mine are, that's undoubtedly valuable.

Q: But what does it mean to you to be called a "Western" writer? For instance, you mentioned you have recently been invited to a literary conference at the University of Wyoming to talk about the "aesthetic of the West." They obviously considered you a kind of authority on the subject. I'm wondering what you will say.

ID: I think the point of inviting me was to ask why do you base your writing in the West, and where is the "westernness" of writing about the West. The conference has been narrowed down to a symposium called "The Sense of Place: The Western Angle of Vision." So in talking about a sense of place out there, I am bringing some turns on the world "place" which has many Western meanings. There's a passage in **This House of Sky** that tells why abandoned homesteads are called "places." Another sense is, for example, when I was a young ranch hand coming to the first meal on a ranch at a 20-foot table, 15 people around it; which "place" is mine? Simply trying to "place" it is what I'm doing in my writing—trying to create a "place," put it into "place" in the lives of my characters. So I'll use my creation of the fictional town of Gros Ventre in **English Creek**, as an example of this.

Q: Has it gotten easier or harder for you to write?

ID: Well with this particular book, **English Creek**, the voice is easier because it is my first book in vernacular. I am a first person narrator, a person of my father's generation. He tells the book as a Montanan small-town person would talk. In my other books the language has been more highly wrought, and so there have been more drafts in the earlier books. But in making this current guy talk like a Montanan, I had to go through a hellish amount of material in collecting turns of phrase and corresponding with people and interviewing people in Montana to make sure that I have the ring of the language throughout the entire book—the longest book I've written. It will probably be 350 to 400 pages. Q: I hear your new book is a novel, but less historically grounded than was say, **Sea Runners** your first novel. In general, it is difficult to pinpoint what form your books take—what do you call them? For instance, **This House of Sky** reads like fiction, but it's autobiographical in content.

ID: It's a memoir. Although I don't make the distinction myself, I'm told it has fictional techniques in it, but it is a memoir; everything in it is based on research. **Winter Brothers** I haven't know what to call except a journal-biography. Yes, one of the hardest things is to say what any of my books are about

English Creek is entirely made up out of my head, as they say. It's set in the late 1930's in northern Montana, the area along the eastern face of the Rocky Mountains, south of Glacier National Park. It looks at a family at a turning point in their life as a family, and the turning point, as it turns out, of certain members of that family. They've been through the depression, and in Montana the depression started just after WWI—the prices crashed, the drought and the grasshoppers came, and the banks went out of business—so, the parents had been through almost twenty years of hard times before the book begins.

My narrator is a 14-year-old boy in that summer, telling the story from now, so he has both perspectives. The family incident that touches off everything else in the book is the decision by the narrator's older brother, who has just graduated from high school, to go against the parents' wishes. They wanted him to be the first ever to go to college. He decides he will continue working on a local ranch and get married to someone the family doesn't approve of. This happens at the start of summer, setting the book in motion as the family tries to sort through this and sees what will happen.

It's a book about what we do to each other and for each other and can't manage to do.

The following is an excerpt from **English Creek**, by Ivan Doig, to be published by Atheneum, Fall 1984.

ONE

*This time of year, the report from the
dust counties in the northeastern part
of the state customarily has it that
Lady Godiva could ride through the streets
there without even the horse seeing her.
But this spring's rains are said to have
thinned the air sufficiently to give the
steed a glimpse*

--Gros Ventre Weekly Gleaner, June 1

That month of June swam into the Two Medicine country. In my life until then I had never seen the sidehills come so green, the coulees stay so spongy with run-off. A right amount of wet evidently could sweeten the universe. Already my father on his first high patrols had encountered cow elk drifting up and across the Continental Divide to their calving grounds on the west side. They, and the grass and the wild-hay meadows and the benchland alfalfa, all were a good three weeks ahead of season. Which of course accounted for the fresh mood everywhere across the Two. As is always said, spring rain in range country is as if halves of \$10 bills are being handed around, with the other halves promised at shipping time. And so in the English Creek sheepmen, what few cowmen were left, the storekeepers of Gros Ventre, the out-east farmers, our Forest Service people, in just everyone that start of June, hope was up and would stay strong as long as the grass did.

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PW FORECASTS

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FICTION

THE ROOM UPSTAIRS

Norma Levinson. Simon & Schuster, \$15.95 ISBN 0-671-52377-5

While it is labored and obvious in some places, this first novel has many superbly drawn scenes to recommend it. Often hilarious and heartbreaking by turns, it is narrated with ironic gusto by Leah Lazarus, a plump, plain writer who supports herself by tutoring London's afflicted children—the sick and the dying, the retarded, the violent, the psychologically maimed, the physically handicapped. Her adventures with the sometimes pathetic, sometimes horrifying youngsters who are the focus of her empathy alternate with Leah's other life as the landlady of a boardinghouse. As brilliant as Leah is in teaching her charges, she is obtuse in relating to her tenants, especially the middle-aged Jewish man who is beloved of all of them but who grates on Leah's nerves. Of course, romance eventually flowers between Mr. Rosenfeld and Leah, but these chapters, emphasizing her initial antipathy and slowly burgeoning love, are trite and contrived. Not so Leah's encounters with her students and the social conditions that beget their pitiable existences. So piercing and poignant are these passages that readers will find them almost Dickensian in their impact, and virtually unforgettable. [October 3]

THRESHOLD

Nancy Henderson. Doubleday, \$15.95 ISBN 0-385-18304-6

Beautiful Soren Benedict, a 32-year-old department store window designer in Manhattan, has had a number of love affairs, most of them disastrous; she has never managed to achieve a lasting relationship. Although at first she thinks that Ramón Pérez, the handsome news anchor on a local Spanish-language TV station, is the answer to her romantic dreams, eventually she understands that she can never really be a part of his world. This self-realization is the "threshold" she must cross

in order to reconcile her fantasies to the realities of modern life, and while she is on vacation to recover from her broken heart, the right man finally appears. Billed as a "contemporary love story," this novel is filled with shallow and sometimes irritating self-analysis, as Soren attempts to cope with her tendency to be "down on herself." Henderson wrote *Full of Grace*.

[October 12]

THE SCHOOL FOR SECRETARIES

Gilbert Preston. St. Martin's, \$14.95 ISBN 0-312-70146-2

Isabel Encarnacion, the Puerto Rican heroine of this improbable first novel, yearns for the safe, secure and respectable life she imagines can be found in the Bronx. She tells her father, a fisherman on her native island, that she leads a quiet existence and goes to a school for secretaries. In fact, her life in Harlem with Mario, a cat burglar and junkie, is anything but quiet: she works as a prostitute; has an abortion; watches her mother go insane; is raped and beaten; sees her husband OD and suffer a stroke; and, once she makes it to the Bronx and the realization of her dream, develops breast cancer. In a final incredible scene, she discovers that her dying mother is in the bed next to hers in the hospital. Meant to be gritty and realistic, this novel is more often just stark and depressing. The author, a physician, writes atmospherically of Puerto Rico, but seems most at home with the hospital scenes. [October 18]

ENGLISH CREEK

Ivan Doig. Atheneum, \$16.95 ISBN 0-689-11478-8

In the Two Medicine National Forest of Montana (known locally as Two Medicine Country), 14-year-old Jick McCaskill recalls "that last English Creek summer" before another war in Europe changed his life. As his older brother, Alec, declares his intention of setting out on his own with his girl, Leona, Jick begins harvesting local and family history from the fertile minds of the rangers, herders and cowboys of the Two. By summer's end Alec has distinguished himself at the Fourth of July

rodeo but lost Leona; fire has threatened the livelihood of all; and Jick has learned the secret his father and an old campjack have kept from the rest of the community. Doig (*The Sea Runners*, *This House of Sky*) again catches magnificently the flavor of the speech and life in the Northwest (coffee is "stout enough to float a kingbolt"; a woman, her hair faded from gold to silver, feels "time cut my value"). The rodeo and barn dance are a beautiful and amusing piece of Americana, while the pioneering and human spirit of Jick and his clan echo throughout. This is the first book in a proposed trilogy about the McCaskills. [October 24]

CALIFORNIA

Leland F. Cooley. Stein and Day, \$17.95 ISBN 0-8128-2987-5

In the hands of an accomplished novelist, the story of a California family, beginning in 1839 when a young New England sailor, John Lewis, jumps ship at Monterey Bay and ending in the 1980s when Howard D. Goodwyn, a country and western singer, runs for governor to save thousands of acres of the family's valuable land, should be a good, solid read. The elements are here: the Northern Department is anxious to achieve independence from the Republic of Mexico and the U.S. wants to acquire it; renegades roam the land; there are riches, in the form of gold, lumber and crops, to be taken by hard work and high risk; the culture attracts greedy evangelists; railroads must be built; mob lynchings are common; later, Cesar Chavez helps laborers to achieve dignity; and, to climax it all, there's Haight-Ashbury. But the author, a fifth-generation descendant of the real John Lewis, is a historian and has come to his task lacking a novelist's skills. Initially, he dwells too long on the nuts and bolts of political maneuvering and, later, on financial wheels and deals, when we'd rather read about the hopes and fears of the human beings involved. This book was first published by Avon in 1973; Cooley has added a new last chapter to bring the plot up to date. Our review of the original edition noted: "The action never stops,



FALL/WINTER 1984-1985

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IN MADELEINE'S KITCHEN

Madeleine Kamman. \$19.95 through 12/31/84. \$22.95 thereafter. (11485-0)

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A novel by Ivan Doig. \$15.95 (11478-8)

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Carroll, James. *Prince of Peace.*

Little, Nov. 1984. c.488p. ISBN 0-316-13014-1. \$17.95.

Carroll's new offering explores the complex world of faith, action, and personal conviction revealed when 50-year-old Benedictine lay brother Frank Durkin returns to 1982 New York to bury his best friend, renegade ex-priest Michael Maguire. Durkin's narration places Maguire firmly in the forefront—as athletic seminarian in Washington, D.C., as antiwar demonstrator and spokesman, as "other man" to Durkin's ex-wife Carolyn (an ex-nun), and, finally, as symbol of moral integrity wronged when church authorities forbid his burial in consecrated ground. The narrator's prolonged introspection, observation, and analysis also detail the changing political ideology of the Catholic Church throughout the 1960s. A thoroughly effective, warm, and thought-provoking study of human nature, well-conceived and well-written.—*Rex E. Klett, Anson Cty. Lib., Wadesboro, N.C.*

Doig, Ivan. *English Creek.*

Atheneum, Oct. 1984. c.352p. LC 84-45051. ISBN 0-689-11478-8. \$16.95.

In the summer of 1939, in the high country of western Montana, 14-year-old Jick McCaskill wants to understand who he is and why. He lives in a boy's dream of wilderness, mountains, sheep ranches, national forests, and an amazing variety of small-town characters. His father is a forest ranger, his mother a practical, hard-nosed local woman; his brother wants to forego college for a girl and a cowboy's life. The summer climaxes in a forest fire that leads Jick and his father to discuss and understand some painful hidden events of their personal histories. Jick learns a lot about himself and his surroundings, and in the process we become entirely absorbed in his recollections of a hard, unforgiving, rewarding country life. An excellent coming-of-age novel, superior to Doig's *The Sea Runners*.—*Edwin B. Burgess, U.S. Army TRALINET Ctr., Fort Monroe, Va.*

Dubus, Andre. *Voices from the Moon.*

Godine, 1984. c.99p. ISBN 0-87923-532-2. \$12.95.

MacLavery, Bernard. *Secrets and Other Stories.*

Viking, Oct. 1984. c.130p. \$13.95.

Dubus' novella, like most of his work, addresses themes of family strife, Catholicism, love, guilt, and the effects of divorce. A father falls in love with and plans to marry his son's ex-wife. Characters in the compact, deeply felt domestic drama—sons, daughter, ex-

wives—give eloquent voice to their roles, in particular one 12-year-old son bound for the priesthood; the wife-to-be recalling her first marriage; father and daughter dancing to Sinatra.

MacLavery's characters—Irish priests and housewives, laborers, philanderers, drunks and schoolboys—are similarly memorable. The range of this collection is broad, from the gentle, irreverent irony of "The Miraculous Candidate" to the pathos and shame of "Secrets." The longest story, "Hugo," communicates a direct and tragic, almost documentary effect, while "A Pornographer Woos" is playfully domestic. The talented stories of both of these authors have earned them a well-deserved following.—*Mary Soete, San Diego P.L., Cal.*

Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine.*

Holt, Oct. 1984. c.272p. LC 84-3774. ISBN 0-03-070611-4. \$13.95.

Love Medicine might be characterized as a series of short stories rather than a novel, for any one of its 14 chapters can be read on its own merits. Loosely linked by a common setting, cast of characters, and theme, these stories deal with love—mother love, which compels a woman to surround herself with cast-off children; sibling love for a deranged older brother; passion, which drives a woman to potions and magic to insure the faithfulness of her senile husband. Set on a Chippewa reservation in North Dakota, *Love Medicine* focuses on two Indian families and spans 50 years, presenting an authentic and revealing impression of modern reservation life. A first novel by a writer who is herself a Native American, *Love Medicine* makes good reading.—*Thomas L. Kilpatrick, Southern Illinois Univ. at Carbondale Lib.*

Flynt, Candace. *Sins of Omission.*

Random, 1984. c.304p. LC 84-42629. ISBN 0-394-53955-9. \$14.95.

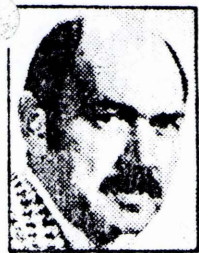
Set in Greensboro, North Carolina, this novel presents a bizarre *ménage à trois*: Robert Carter, a passive music student; his wife, Molly; and Suzanne Cox, a demented waitress in a pancake house. Suzanne's seduction of Robert begins a relentless campaign against Molly and the middle-class comfort she represents to Suzanne. Suzanne slices Molly's tires, harasses her with phone calls and letters, taunts her with a faked pregnancy. At first helpless against Suzanne's malevolence, Molly begins to challenge Robert (who retreats into another affair) and finally her marriage. Suzanne is a masterful creation, clever and utterly convincing. Flynt contrasts the selfish expectations of Robert and Molly with the almost selfless madness of Suzanne in an intriguing character study. Recommended.—*Mary-Ellen Mort, Oakland P.L.*

Gedge, Pauline. *The Twelfth Transforming.*

Harper, Oct. 1984. c.416p. LC 84-47570. ISBN 0-06-015338-5. \$16.95.

Akhenaten was one of the most controversial pharaohs ever to rule Egypt. The 17 years of his reign were a period

BOOKS

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Book Editor

Keeping track of his brother

Let me belabor the obvious for a minute: It's one thing for a well-meaning white to sympathize with the awful frustrations of the black ghetto experience, and another thing entirely for him to really understand them, way down deep where true knowledge lies.

The more militant black writers have been telling us this for years, of course — often in tones of derision, while they point out the ways in which we have misunderstood their anguish and thus failed in even the first steps toward achieving anything like true brotherhood. Their accusations are certainly understandable, as well as their fury, but they don't really help matters much. What we have had for some time isn't a lack of will, at least among the more compassionate and open-minded whites; rather it's a failure to communicate.

How do you possibly go about addressing the subtle problems of cultural repression and second-class citizenship when you can't always pretend to see, from so far outside, just where and in what insidious ways the distinction exists?

And having said that much (cautiously, I'll admit; it's a topic that encourages a statesman-like approach), I'll go on to say that I've just finished a book, "Brothers and Keepers" by John Edgar Wideman (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$15.95), that did more to open the doors for me to an understanding of the black ghetto experience than anything I've read before.

Admittedly, this wasn't Wideman's intention — or at least not his *primary* intention. A professor at the University of Wyoming and a highly regarded novelist (his latest, "Sent for You Yesterday," was a recent recipient of the national P.E.N./Faulker fiction award), he actually set out to write a far more personal story, in effect a confessional of sorts.

Wideman, a product of the black ghetto of Homewood in the heart of Pittsburgh, escaped it in a time-honored way: he won a basketball scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League school, then capped it with a period of study at Oxford University as a Rhodes scholar. His first novel, "A Glance Away," published when he was only 26, was hailed by the critics and immediately launched him on a most promising literary career.

Meanwhile, his kid brother Robby, a product of the same loving parents, the same environment, became involved with drugs and petty

Big Sky, big id Ivan Doig's 'En

ENGLISH CREEK. By Ivan Doig. Atheneum. \$15.95.

Reviewed by Bryan Di Salvatore

Where, what might we be without the West and its furious empty, its emblems of the absolute, its ability to expose the strong and poor and fine within us? What sort of place can still quiet our flutterings, true our unfractuous selves?

Perhaps someplace like Ivan Doig's Two Medicine country, his land of scree, timber, meadows and rim-rocks — reefs, he calls them — hard along the east side of the Montana Rockies. Doig has returned here, the setting for much of "This House of Sky" (1978), his pure and soaring family chronicle, to rework his extraordinary and rich claim to American letters.

The result is "English Creek," a novel, a portrait of place and family rendered acutely and surely.

It is a book of grace and high purpose about a single summer, one after which nothing would ever be quite the same. It tells its story — the family is the McCaskills, the year is 1939 — without rudeness or flash or grotesqueries.

Indeed, "English Creek" is all but devoid of violence, sexual warpitude or even profanity. Doig is a novelist less concerned with the weird and grabby, with twists and surprises, than he is with being faithful to a season's unfoldings of a land and its people.

As a result, the pace of the book is old-fashioned — steady, reassuring, pre-industrial even. We listen to the steady clop of a horse along a mountain ridge at dawn; we watch clumps of hand-spaded earth as they arc from what is becoming a hole to what is becoming a mound. Things are quiet in Two Medicine country, and clear. There is no need to shout or wave one's arms to be heard.

The sidehills are green that summer and the coulees are "spongy." The long drought which has throttled Montana seems to be preparing to think about ending itself. "A right amount of wet could sweeten the universe," say Jick McCaskill, the book's narrator who, now 60, is reliving the sights and sounds of his 14th year.

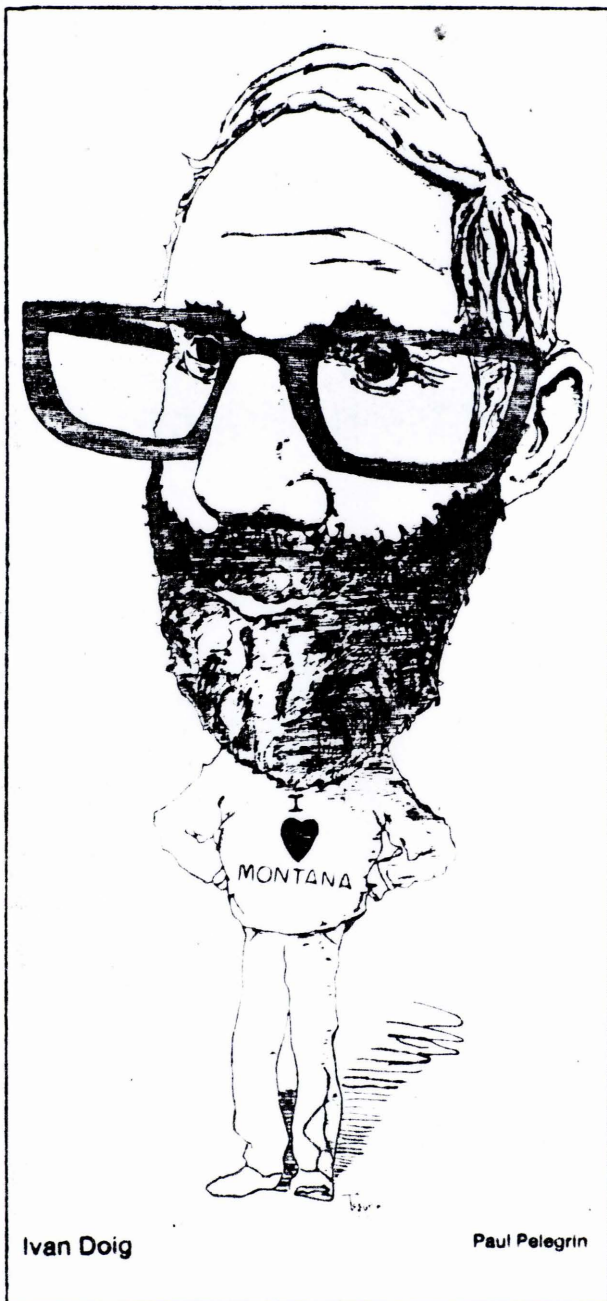
Then the world begins to tilt. Jick's older brother Alec, in that long-ago time, announces his plans to forsake college for cowboying and marriage to Leona Tracy. Words between Alec and his parents are thrown down, words which cannot be retrieved, and for Jick, the summer's long-anticipated events — the annual sheep count on the summer ranges with his forest ranger father, the Gros Ventre town Fourth of July picnic and rodeo, the afternoons of lazy fishing and the weeks of haying at a neighboring ranch — are thrown into a blinky new light.

Why would Alex want to marry? Why have his parents become so sad and preoccupied? Will he, when older, follow in Alec's footsteps? Why does he blush so, looking at Leona as his father speaks of everyone "keeping their shirts on"?

Jick chews on these questions and decides that lately he feels as if he has been "looking through the

deals

'English Creek' defies categories



Ivan Doig

Paul Pelegrin

Toggery window in Gros Ventre at a fancy suit of clothes and saying, by the Christ, they'll never catch me dead in *those*. But at the same time noticing that they seem to be your exact fit."

"English Creek," however, is neither a dreary interior set-piece of adolescent posings nor, despite Jick's brushes with death, adults and drink, some "bittersweet tale of a boy who becomes a man." Thank God.

In fact, it's a bit difficult to classify this book at all. As fiction it breaks many rules. Neither the initial

conflict, that of Alex and his family, nor its few ensuing brush fights, are resolved. Jick's questions aren't really answered. Even though the book's climax — a terrible and freakish forest fire — would seem a likely place for truths to out and hatchets to be buried, this isn't the case.

Doig seems less interested in any arrival than he is in the passage itself. And that passage in "English Creek" finds conflicts and turmoil in short supply. One wants the characters to push harder against each other, to have enemies. It may be that Doig the chronicler is being too faithful to local histories. In "This House of Sky" he calls memory a "set of sagas we live by." But occasionally "English Creek" reads less like saga than documentation. It's history chasing after fiction and overtaking it.

These and a few other narrative seams show here and there. They, along with the book's somewhat limited scope, might stop it from being a masterpiece, but they do so by a mighty small margin.

Doig's glorious, sure and lovely prose carries us miles, sustaining and fulfilling and even weakening us with its power.

He evokes pre-World War II Montana brilliantly. It is a world of true grassaroos, campjacks, river pigs, cow chousers, Scotch lawsuits, hammerheads and hiring bars. "Coffee nerve" horses with pin ears and hog eyes watch cowboys danding ropes nearby. It is a world of both generosity and restraint; everywhere is evidence of the protocol of asking and offering, of sacrifice for and non-interference in the lives of others.

The more beautiful the land is in Two Medicine country, the "more hostile to settlement" it becomes. It is a land so large that one can stand and watch other people's weather develop and a land so harsh that a house painted robin egg blue looks utterly defenseless. It is a land which demands endless, brutish chores, and guarantees, despite its closeness to God, no respite from despair and defeat.

This is Doig's West, his Two Medicine: no hell-roaring, no exclamation, no flippancy, no need for insistence. Just another exquisite brush-stroke.

And this West is, perhaps, what we require in a world in which we have become more fond than we may care to admit of blast and screech in our reading matter. I would like "English Creek" to rise to the top of various book charts and remain there through winter and deep into spring. I don't expect this to happen. This is a slow and delicate book, and its way may be made difficult by books thick with impossible sketches of large, furious, pivotal people.

Jick recalls a special day of his summer by saying it was "a set of hours worth the price of the rest of the life." He could easily have been speaking, albeit extravagantly, of the experience of reading "English Creek."

Bryan Di Salvatore, who writes for a number of travel magazines, lives in Missoula, Mont.

Growing up American in hard times

ENGLISH CREEK. By Ivan Doig. Atheneum, 339 pp., \$16.95.

By MAUDE McDANIEL

"Thinking back," Jick McCaskill, 14, wished that "someone among us then had the talent to paint (a) portrait "that would convey every one of those people at once and yet also their separateness." Like a painting he once saw of flowers, that seen together yielded up another picture entirely, "they seemed to me all distinctly themselves and yet added up together too."

Luckily the portrait gets painted, but with a pen instead of a brush. Jick does it himself, some 40 years after that haunting "last" English Creek summer, in a colorful vernacular that never once trips over itself, as sometimes happened to the language in Doig's first, unforgettable novel *The Sea Runners*. *English Creek* lollygags here and there, but it sums up so much more than the total of its incidents that it looks a lot like being Doig's second unforgettable novel.

Abandoning *Runners'* survival-adventure suspense, Doig turns to the subtler excitements of the late depression years in Montana, his native state, already superbly evoked in *This House of Sky*. Jick is a daydreamer who shares his forest-ranger father's love for stories of the past. His sensible mother believes that "the past is a taker, not a giver," but Jick gobbles up his heritage of history as hungrily as he observes the unfolding details of his growing-up world.

It's a natural, unforced American coming-of-age that is rarely possible nowadays. Without turning Jick into Huckleberry Caulfield at the OK Corral, Doig makes it authentic, too.

The worst of the Depression is over ("Anyplace you looked you saw people who had put 20 years into this country and all they had to show for it was a pile of old calendars"), and the real damage that summer happened between generations, as Jick's older brother Aleck chooses gorgeous Leona and his own ill-considered independence over his parent's love and plans for him. "The fracture of a family is not a thing that happens clean and sharp" and the breakage of relationships has been repeated over generations, as Jick discovers at summer's end.

Meanwhile, Jick himself takes on new responsibilities and wisdom as he assists his father, nurses a drunken old friend of the family, digs an outhouse hole, rakes hay, attends the July 4 picnic, rodeo, and square dance. Often funny and always made up out of the whole cloth of human experience, these all give way finally to a mountain forest fire which cauterizes some festering wounds, burns up lingering lies, and clears the way to a world that will never be the same again.

Doig writes without artifice here, warmly, sometimes beautifully, with the cadences of speech, and images as apt to life as breath. The events are mostly ordinary, but the distillation of the people, the glorious country, and the truths that inhabit them is extraordinary.

(She looked "as if she'd been sanded down repeatedly;" "all the faces in that Hebner family rhymed," "those dawns taught me that beauty makes the eyes greedy." The humor is rooted in life. Glacier Gus got his name because he was "so slow that it was said he wore spurs to keep his shadow from treading on his heels"). The songs are spontaneously bawdy ("about the gal named Lou and what she was able to do with her wingwangwoo"). The history is of people and mountains, of old roundups and buffalo hunts legendary dust storms and forest fires, all colored personal by the ones who lived them, or knew those who did.

His 14th summer, says Jick, was like "when you open a new book... its pages linger against each other, pull apart with a reluctant little separating sound. They never quite do that again, the linger or the tiny sound." Maybe so, but along with Bubbles the packhorse and Phony Nose Gorman, Jick will always live fresh on these pages, a small fine flower in a very large portrait.

McDaniel lives in Cumberland, Md., where she is a newspaper columnist.

Too much talk about Montana in Doig's novel

Montana-legend Wallace Stegner advises us that *English Creek* "is not a book to be read in a hurry."

The implication is that we should bide our time as we travel step by step with Seattle author Ivan Doig as he recounts a summer in the life of John "Jick" Angus McCaskill.

"Leisurely" is Stegner's definition of Doig's fictional narrative. But other definitions apply: plodding, protracted and self-consciously Western. Jick is 15 years old in the summer of 1939.

"In my life until then I had never seen the sidehills come so green, the coulees stay so spongy with runoff," he says of Montana's Two Medicine country. "A right amount of wet evidently could sweeten the universe."

Jick's idyllic life is one of two major problems with *English Creek*. There is little tension in the novel. Even though Jick's older brother goes against his parents' wishes and decides to marry — his parents want him to attend college — the conflict doesn't seem to have any more importance than the weekly family crisis on "The Waltons."

Problem two is that Jick McCaskill is in his '60s when he begins his memoirs. By now he suffers from the standard problems of senility: the ability to remember vividly the tiniest detail as well as the biggest events of a summer 45 years in the past, and the inability to distinguish the difference between them.

The summer of 1939 is when Jick believes that his brother Alec's "grammar seemed to be cowboyifying, too." But at 60-plus years, Jick is a wordy, reminiscent old man whose entire vocabulary has countrified to the point where he parodies much of what is regarded as old, rural and Western.

Conscientious research

Jick doesn't hear someone speak. Instead, "It registered on me that there had been a comment from Ray's direction." Loving the sound of his own voice, Jick transforms the ideal into an ordeal as he rides into the mountains, attends a picnic, rodeo and dance, digs a new pit for the outhouse, helps bring in the summer hay and fights a forest fire. Our mind keeps calling: Get on with it!

I suspect one reason for this is Doig's conscientious research into farming and ranching life in Montana. There are times in Doig's account of haying season when the reader can feel the sun burning on his neck, the strain of the reins as two horses pull a rake, the great appetite that comes after a morning in the fields.

At one point in his memoir, Jick McCaskill observes, "I suppose sheep have caused more time to be whiled away than any other creatures in the world. Even yet on any number of Montana ridgelines there can be seen stone cairns about the height of a man. Sheepherders' monuments, they are called, and what they are monuments to is monotony. Just to be doing something a herder would start piling stones, but because he hated to admit he was out there hefting rocks for no real reason, he'd stack up a shape that he could tell himself would serve as a landmark or a boundary marker for his allotment. Fighting back somehow against loneliness."

Doig has distinguished himself as the author of *This House of Sky* (1978), *Winter Brothers* (1980) and *The Sea Runners* (1982). He's always had an enviable ability to relate fact and idiom. Still, I think he erred in trying to capture the panorama of a country, a life, a people and their occupations. In many respects *English Creek* has the feel of a documentary — perhaps what Studs Terkel would find if he took his tape recorder to Big Sky country. But in a novel the reader generally seeks action, conflict and tension — not talk.

BOOKS
Michael
Conant



English Creek

By Ivan Doig

Atheneum, 333 pages \$15.95

adult fiction

Contributing reviewers are George Cohen, Margaret Flanagan, Connie Fletcher, Roland Green, John Jacob, Cynthia Kooi, Wes Lukowsky, Penelope Mesic, Mary Ellen Quinn, Peter L. Robertson, and Patricia Searry.

The best science fiction of the year #13.

Ed. by Terry Carr. 1984. 384p. Baen Books; dist. by Simon & Schuster, paper, \$3.50 (0-671-55901-X).

Carr's *Best Science Fiction of the Year* series continues under the sponsorship of Baen Books, and it remains an invaluable source of good short sf for collections of any size. Noteworthy pieces include Michael Bishop's "Her Habiline Husband," John Sladek's savage satire "Scenes from the Country of the Blind," Greg Bear's Nebula winner "Hardfought," and Connie Willis' "Sidon in the Mirror." Carr has added a list of recommended reading, and Charles Brown has contributed his usual concise summary of the year in sf. While not as comprehensive as *The Year's Best Science Fiction* (Booklist 80:1440 Je 15 84), this collection stands up very well beside the *1984 Annual World's Best SF* (80:1439 Je 15 84); larger collections should seriously consider having all three. RG.

Burns, Olive Ann. Cold Sassy tree. Oct. 1984. 391p. Ticknor & Fields, \$16.95 (0-89919-309-9). Galley.

Burns' first novel is a humorously poignant coming-of-age story set in turn-of-the-century Georgia. After the sudden death of his wife, the delightfully eccentric E. Rucker Blakeslee scandalizes the entire population of Cold Sassy by eloping with the town milliner. Rucker's grandson, 14-year-old Will Tweedy, inevitably develops a crush on his grandfather's comely young bride and struggles to maintain the peace between his mortified family and his rejuvenated grandfather. Torn by conflicting loyalties and a bewildering array of emotions, Will eventually learns some very valuable, bitter-sweet lessons about life, death, and the vagaries of love. An authentic period piece brimming with charm, sentiment, and local color. MF.

Carver, Jeffrey A. The infinity link. 1984. 540p. Bluejay Books; dist. by St. Martin's, \$16.95 (0-312-94233-8). Galley.

This panoramic but somewhat sprawling novel concerns a near-future crisis provoked by the receipt of faster-than-light tachyon transmissions from an intelligent source in outer space. Carver handles the large cast of characters and the complex intrigues caused by both government action and individual psychological quirks with considerable skill. The book seems somewhat inflated by the author's determination to omit nothing; however, it is certainly Carver's major work to date, and it combines a credible mixture of hard science and characterization with an astute use of the "first contact" theme. For larger sf collections. RG.

Cisneros, Sandra. The house on Mango Street. 1984. 103p. Arte Público, Revista Chicano-Riqueña, Univ. of Houston, Houston, TX 77004, paper, \$7.50 (0-934770-20-4).

These vignettes of autobiographical fiction by

the Hispanic writer Sandra Cisneros, written in a loose and deliberately simple style, halfway between a prose poem and the awkwardness of semiliteracy, convincingly represent the reflections of a young girl. Occasionally the method annoys by its cuteness, but for the most part *Mango Street* is refreshing and authentic, vivid in its metaphors, affectionate in its treatment of the young girl and others, exact in its observations, and full of vitality. For example, a short chapter called "Hips" is just right: it shows us four girls improvising jump-rope rhymes on the subject of having hips: "The waitress with the big fat hips / who pays the rent with taxi tips. . . ." The youngest girl skipping, who is jeered at for using traditional rhymes, is described as the "color of a bar of naphtha laundry soap; she is like the little brown piece left at the end of the wash, the hard little bone, my sister." A gift of observation so unflinching amounts to an expression of love. Highly recommended. PM.

[OCLC]

82-072278

Dennison, George. Shawno. Oct. 1984.

84p. Schocken, \$10.45 (0-8052-3917-0). Galley.

Dennison tells the story of a dog—rather, a dog and his effect on the people with whom he comes in contact. Although this charming little novel, composed primarily of vignettes, employs the sentimental tone common in dog stories, the author generally avoids overt moralizing. Shawno, adopted by the narrator, his wife, and his three children, comes to inform their lives with his own simplicity and lack of guile. Dennison recounts how the dog came to be adopted, how it formed a special relationship with the narrator's daughter, Ida, and how it adapted from country to city life. Shawno's loving nature is contrasted, inevitably, with the less-benevolent behavior of humanity, as the book moves toward its tragic conclusion—the dog's death in a hunting accident. An affecting tale, written with understated eloquence. JJ.

[CIP]

84-1434

Doig, Ivan. English Creek. Oct. 1984.

[352p.] Atheneum, \$15.95 (0-689-11478-8). Galley.

Ivan Doig writes about Montana with an ingratiating combination of lyricism and precise description, as readers of his remarkable first book, *This House of Sky* (Booklist 75:22 S 1 78), will recall. In his fourth book (and second novel), Doig has again chosen Montana as his setting, this time for the coming-of-age story of Jick McCaskill, the 14-year-old son of a forest ranger in a fictional region of Big Sky country called English Creek. It is the summer of 1939 and Jick has a lot on his mind—his brother, Alec, who has decided to forgo college and get married; a bourbon-soaked ex-ranger named Stanley Meixell, whose past seems somehow embroiled with that of Jick's father; and the history of the McCaskill family, which is inextricably linked with the settling of Montana. While Doig doesn't always do the best job of integrating his historical set pieces with the plot of his novel, he writes as vividly as ever about Montana life. The coming-of-age story is affecting if familiar, but the real hero here is Montana itself, from its hayfields and sheep ranches to the grandeur of its towering mountains. BO.

[OCLC]

84-45051

Drake, David. Birds of prey. 1984. [352p.]

Baen Books; dist. by Simon & Schuster,

\$14.70 (0-671-55909-5); paper, \$7.95 (0-671-55912-5). Galley.

In third-century Rome, the secret agent Aulus Perennius becomes involved in a strange mission for a time traveler from Earth's distant future. Drake is a master of using historical material as a background for sf/fantasy and of narrative technique; he also handles his large cast of characters with considerable skill. This is a welcome addition to the body of sf derived from historical material and another step forward in Drake's career. RG.

[OCLC]

84-6185

Gehman, Christian. beloved Gravely. Oct.

1984. [208p.] Scribner, \$12.95

(0-684-18233-5). Galley.

This work has been awarded the 1984 Maxwell Perkins prize, though it is not as strong a novel as the previous winners (Stephen Wright's *Meditations in Green* and Margaret Mitchell Dukore's *A Novel Called Heritage*). It concerns a young rock star, Carl Phillips, who comes home to the Blue Ridge Mountains after a failed romance. Carl is surrounded by eccentric friends—a spy, a sculptor, an anthropologist, various free-spirited women, and a St. Bernard. The story meanders along as Carl begins to sing again and takes up with different women who help him forget his lost love. There is a certain whimsical charm here, and a naive style that calls to mind a child's crayon drawing. But the novel is too precious, self-conscious, and unfocused to be rated a complete success. Still, Gehman is a writer to watch. MEQ.

[OCLC]

84-10608

Recommended by Booklist

Parachutes & Kisses BY ERICA JONG

Following [*Fear of Flying*] and its sequel, Jong returns again to the fortunes of heroine Isadora Wing. Now 39, Isadora is working mother to three-year-old Amanda, ex-wife to the threatened Josh, and, much like her creator, a writer whose public persona has overshadowed the validity of her work. Running counterpoint to this juggling act is Isadora's search to make sense of and give meaning to her obsession with the primordial ooze of physical sensation. . . . If today's readers are less fazed by Jong's randiness than those of 10 years ago, they will be no less touched by the humor, acuity, and humanity in this examination of romance in 1980s America.

Booklist.

ISBN 0-453-00466-0/\$16.95/\$20.95

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OCT 21 1984

A Love for the Big Sky Country Fills New Novel by Ivan Doig

English Creek
by Ivan Doig
(Atheneum, 339 pages, \$15.95)

By Tim Anderson
World-Herald Staff Writer

Though author Ivan Doig now lives in Seattle, it is clear his heart remains in Montana.

Montana is where he grew up with his father and grandmother, the wild and rugged land he described in his 1978 memoir, "This House of Sky," a book later nominated for the National Book Award in contemporary thought.

Montana is again the setting, this time for "English Creek," his second novel and apparently the first in a trilogy.

The locale in this novel is Doig's native ground — Montana along the

Rocky Mountain Front — but the immediate environs are his creation. The Two Medicine National Forest, the town of Gros Ventre and English Creek are fiction, but the story they support certainly rings true.

It is, simply, the story of Jick McCaskill, "age fourteen and eleven twelfths," and the summer of 1939. It's a summer in which young Jick is set to "gain one more rung towards being a grownup," a season one day to be remembered as the one in which all four members of the McCaskill family "made their bend."

For along with Jick there are his father, Varick "Mac" McCaskill, forest ranger for the Two; his mother, Beth, practical and quick to chastise the other McCaskills for their tendency to live in the past; and his older brother, Alec, the center of the

family's struggle this summer.

Alec, burdened by his parents' hopes that he and Jick "will know better times" and trapped by his own quick intelligence, has decided to forego college to marry his high school sweetheart and be a ranch hand. Worse, he intends to be a cowboy for the Double W, a conglomerate of a ranch that has grown to unequaled size by gobbling up all the smaller cattle and sheep spreads.

The elder McCaskills are opposed to Alec's choice, and this break in the family harmony occupies Jick's mind through the summer as he travels up into the mountains with his father.

The family struggle, however, is not the only battle going on; there also are the daily worries of a ranger and his family as they watch the summer heat bake their forest into

acres of kindling, their very fight for survival in a land as rough as Montana.

It is here, when describing Montana, that Doig truly excels.

"It never could be said that this country of the Two didn't offer enough elbow room," Jick offers. "For that matter, shinbone and cranium and all other kind, too. Try as you might to be casual about a ride up from English Creek into these mountains, you were doing something sizable. Climbing from the front porch of the planet into its attic, so to speak."

Montana, as Doig paints it, is a land that, as it becomes more beautiful, also becomes more hostile. Take its mountains away, young Jick says, and Montana "would just be Nebraska stretched north."

As Jick's father tells him early on: "Anyplace you looked you saw people who had put 20 years into this country and all they had to show for it was a pile of old calendars."

It is, then, a proper setting for a young man to face the elements, his family, even himself.

At one point, Jick comments, "Lord, what a wilderness is the thicket of family." Another time he finds himself "no more enlightened than when I started. The chronic condition of Jick McCaskill, age fourteen and eleven twelfths, prospects for a cure debatable."

But, as he faces it all, Jick's cure does come. He learns his lessons, among them "that a person could do what he thought was right and yet be never comfortable about it."

Boyhood in Montana

REVIEW

Scouting out grown-ups' territory

English Creek
By Ivan Doig
Atheneum, 339 pp., \$15.95

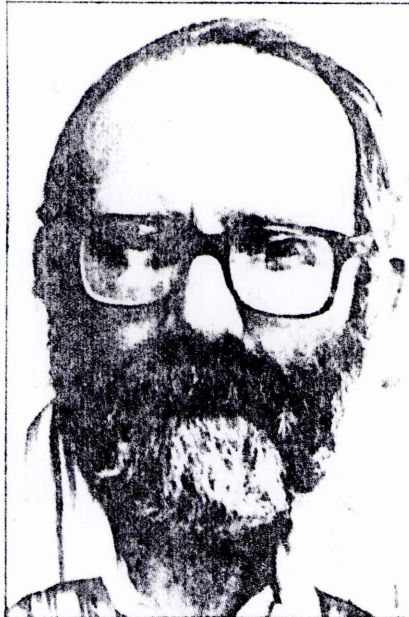
By Carol Van Strum
Special for USA TODAY

Ivan Doig has a rare, uncanny skill for bringing history to life. Shadows of the past animate the landscapes of his non-fiction, and his first novel, *The Sea Runners*, reads like an eyewitness account of a desperate 1853 voyage. In *English Creek*, his second novel, Doig again achieves a flawless weld of fact and fiction.

Drawing on the same heritage and landscape he celebrated in *This House of Sky*, Doig tells *English Creek* through the reminiscences of Jick McCaskill, the second son of a forest ranger in the fictional Two Medicine National Forest of northern Montana. The time is 1939. Jick's story of his 14th summer, a time of discovery and turning points, is a vivid portrait of a family, community and nation perched on the exhilarating brink between Depression and war.

Jick's summer begins with his older brother's defiant declaration of independence from his parents and inexplicable rejection of a promising future. Thrust suddenly into the unfamiliar role of eldest and only son as he ventures into the mountains on his father's business, Jick struggles to understand the rift his brother has caused in their family. An unexpected trail ride with an aging alcoholic, the memorable — and exquisitely funny — events of a 24-hour Fourth of July celebration, and a forest fire high in the Rockies mark the passage of what Jick calls "that summer where all our lives made their bend."

Warily scouting the outermost boundaries of adulthood, Jick explores the lives around him with fresh curiosity and awe. Overnight, it seems, his brother and parents acquire separate and fascinating personalities, half the world's population sud-



IVAN DOIG: A vivid portrait of a boy's 14th summer, just before World War II

denly becomes female, and the rambling tales of old-timers hold vital clues to the mysteries that baffle Jick at every turn. He emerges from his landmark summer with a deeper love and understanding of the forces that have shaped his existence. As the summer ends, the world plunges into a war that will reaffirm Jick's discovery of home.

English Creek evokes the sturdy, generous spirit of an era when survival — of child or adult — demanded quick wits, hard work and humor enough to fuel both. Jick's energetic summer of discovery contrasts keenly with the entropy that afflicts his modern counterparts, and Doig's gift for idiom — the inventive, exuberant language of the frontier — is sheer magic in a world of Newspeak. Like Mark Twain, he captures the essence of a faded heritage in the voices of the people who lived it; for its language alone, *English Creek* is simply a national treasure.

"All the people of that English Creek summer of 1939," Jick McCaskill says, looking back from middle age, "they stay on in me even though so many of them are gone from life." They stay on, too, long after the book is closed, more colorful and enduring than the history that inspired them. No more can be asked of the storyteller's art.

Carol Van Strum is the author of *A Bitter Fog: Herbicides and Human Rights*.



Some area residents who came to get an autographed copy of Ivan Doig's new book 'English Creek' took time out for reminiscences. (Tribune Photos by Wayne Arnst)

Visit becomes a homecoming

Those who helped shape Doig's books drop by to say 'hi'

By J.M. SWANSON
For the Tribune

Looking like an English professor, Montana-born author Ivan Doig came to town a hero on a Wednesday afternoon, and all the sons of sheepherders and ranchers came from miles around to see him and his new book, "English Creek."

"The fastest pen in the West," Doig's wife, Carol, calls him. Indeed, he scrawls best wishes and autographs swiftly in fine black old-fashioned script.

"It's like following a national monument around," Carol says later, half-wryly. No doubt she means a Montana monument on this tour.

A pert, rosy-faced and bright-eyed New Jersey native with short salt-peppered hair and casual manner, Carol percolates good cheer.

"This is fun!" she exclaims at one point before continuing her rounds.

Meanwhile, Doig contemplates the possibility of writer's cramp before this Montana tour is done, as he signs about 270 copies of a new book and countless copies of older ones at a bookstore in Times Square in Great Falls.

And the next day? A Bozeman bookstore had ordered 800 copies for Thursday.

Doig, an unabashed red-haired Scot with hairs thinning a trifle on top and flecks of white in the beard, sits straight, almost prim in a well-tailored brown suit with shirt and tie.

For all the finger work, Doig is at home.

These are the natives of the land, the descendants of the characters that helped to make Doig's first book, "This House of Sky, Landscapes of a Western Mind" so haunting and so popular.

Doig's memoirs of growing up around White Sulphur Springs and Dupuyer was nominated for the National Book Award in contemporary thought, received other awards and was named one of five best books

about Montana in a 1981 poll.

Montanans are still reading and buying it, says Doig.

Returning to Great Falls is like a homecoming, as locals from White Sulphur Springs, Choteau, Stanford and Dupuyer line up to reminisce with Doig or tell him how he has touched their lives.

This fourth book, after two books set on the Northwest Coast, is Doig's first piece of Montana fiction, and the first of a planned trilogy.

"Thanks for having Johnny for a father so I could steal a few stories," Doig tells one woman.

"This is the first person I met in Grade One," Doig explains with beaming pleasure as he stands to give a woman a hug. He greets another high-school classmate. "Valier, 1957!" he proclaims.

"Charlie Doig, we knew by stories," one couple tells Carol Doig.

Even Sen. Max Baucus' uncle shows up to talk. And here's a deputy county attorney and over there are the library workers and the media.

"A land office business!" Doig tells one enquiring fan.

"Waiting for the Hunchback of Notre Dame to come out with all these bells," he mutters in aside later, as bells ring periodically close by.

Meanwhile, chatting with Carol is George Engler of Great Falls, retired as Lewis and Clark National Forest supervisor since 1976, and a chief source of information on the forest ranger and forest fire in Doig's new book.

Also stopping to talk are the Hamletts. Joy advised Doig on sour cream chocolate pie for dessert on the Fourth of July in "English Creek." It would have been angel food cake, if there were lots of eggs, she explains.

Obviously, Doig, who has degrees in journalism and a Ph.D. in history, does not lack for research. Generally his books take two years to write, he

says.

In August of 1982, the Doigs spent a month in Montana interviewing "survivors" of the Depression and cataloguing data from the drought and grasshopper infestations of the 1930s.

Carol took scenic photographs, which Doig then put in a holder by his typewriter, along with notes, to jog his memory as he wrote.

That fall, "The Sea Runners," Doig's first fiction, partly set in Alaska was going into publication. Doig's work won him the Royal Order Tusk, a pin making him an honorary Alaskan. He wore it proudly Wednesday.

Doig's earlier book, "Winter Brothers, A Season at the Edge of America," from 1980, based on the journals of James Swan, won the Pacific Northwest Bestsellers Award and was adapted for a public television documentary.

In 1982, Doig drew back into the Montana heartland and set his sights on the Hi-Line, that larger-than-life area where the Rockies greet the plains.

Now that "English Creek" is out, Doig has begun research on the next book. He has visited "the Scandinavian coast of Scotland" for background research.

"English Creek" the middle book of the trilogy, focuses on the Depression; Doig is now at work on the "first" of the trilogy.

The new book will focus on the homesteading days from 1889 and statehood to the winter of 1919. A final book will follow the family to the Centennial.

The Doigs plan to return for research during the next few years.

Doig, who has focused on the past in his first four books, partly because of his interest in history, says he is not restricted to the past.

"I try to look at each generation

See DOIG, 6-A

Doig

From 5-A

somewhat on their own terms. Various generations have their own sets of courage. The Depression generation looked at both ends of the spectrum. They had a grim situation with a lack of cash, since life was so rural. They remember that they got through it by the generosity of neighbors and friends."

Carol says that A.B. Guthrie Jr.'s well-known "The Big Sky" trilogy may have influenced Doig in a distant way. "Ivan grew up and read Guthrie's books and — I don't think it's too much to say — idolized him."

Like Guthrie, Doig worked for newspapers. After he received his Ph.D., he never taught. Instead, he became a magazine free-lance writer for the next 10 years, "twice as long as I should have," he admits now.

"Making a living became worse and worse, considering the effects of inflation," Doig says. So he tried writing books instead.

"I try to be a grown-up about it and write stuff that will last," he says. He's been a full-time writer now for 13 years.

Asked about his move to fiction, Doig says, "I never thought of it as a departure in that my fiction is so closely based on historical detail. With fiction there's the freedom of being able to make up the characters and not be bound by iron fact."

So far, Doig says "English Creek" may be the best seller of all his



Ivan Doig

books.

He has promoted his own books, beginning with "House of Sky." "Nobody knew who I was. It's a hard book to describe."

Adds Carol, "Ivan thinks that you'd better be interested in the business side of book publishing if you're going to succeed."

While in Montana this week, the

Doigs visited Kalispell and Helena, and were to travel to Bozeman Thursday, the Montana Historical Conference in Lewistown Friday and the University of Montana homecoming in Missoula Saturday.

In June they hope to return for "a real vacation," Carol says.

When the Doigs finally return to Seattle, where they have lived the past 18 years, Carol says they will resume a quiet life.

She teaches journalism at a community college in the mornings and Ivan writes from 7 to 11 a.m., doing editing and correspondence in the afternoons.

"Ivan's a morning person," says Carol. "Surprising, the amount of correspondence and the details!" she marvels.

"We try and lead a rational life," she says. At 5 p.m., they listen to National Public Radio and they usually turn in early.

With all this reception, have the Doigs ever considered uprooting their Seattle lives and moving to Montana?

"Yes, we think about it. We'd love to do it, at least seasonally," says Carol. Doig explains the immediate problems of Carol's Seattle job and their preference for the Seattle climate.

"We'd both like to spend more time here. We're not quite clear about how to do it," he adds.

*You're invited to
a champagne party announcing
"English Creek"*

*Ivan Doig's new Montana book
Meet the gifted northwest author at
Edmonds Bookshop*

*Sunday afternoon, November 4th
2:00 p.m. until 4:00 p.m.*



Ivan Doig has written "This House of Sky-Landscapes of a Western Mind", "Winter Brothers" and "The Sea Runners", books which have won high praise not only in the northwest but nationally. Montana-born, Mr. Doig presently lives in Seattle. His new novel, "English Creek", is part of a projected trilogy about Montana settlers and their descendants.

FROM THE AUTHOR OF *THIS HOUSE OF SKY*

A novel as luminously American as Andrew Wyeth's painting, A. B. Guthrie's writing, and Aaron Copland's music

"A portrait of a place and family rendered acutely and surely...a book of grace and high purpose about a single summer, one after which nothing would ever be quite the same. Ivan Doig's glorious, sure and lovely prose carries us miles, sustaining and fulfilling and even weakening us with its power. Jick McCaskill [the book's narrator] recalls a special day of his summer by saying it was 'a set of hours worth the price of the rest of the life.' He could easily have been speaking, albeit extravagantly, of the experience of reading *English Creek*."

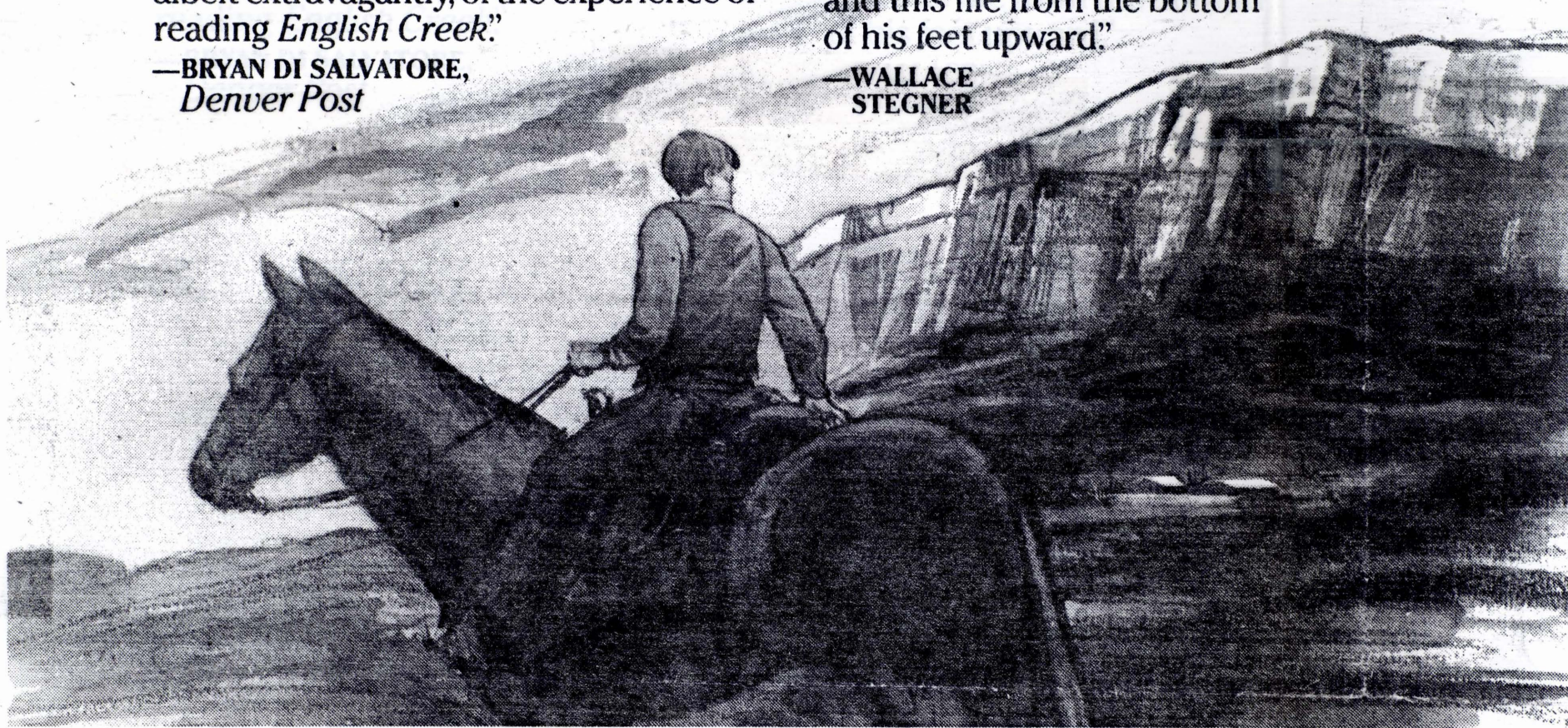
—BRYAN DI SALVATORE,
Denver Post

"A marvelous stretch of writing from the heart of the big sky country, at once an homage and a celebration of a way of life that is passing." —WRIGHT MORRIS

"Catches magnificently the flavor of the speech and life in the Northwest...The pioneering and human spirit...echo throughout." —*Publishers Weekly*

"Here is the real Montana, the real West, through the eyes of a real writer...This is *loved* life, and loved country...Mr. Doig knows this country and this life from the bottom of his feet upward."

—WALLACE
STEGNER



ENGLISH CREEK

by Ivan Doig

Now at your bookstore



One member of that corps is Geoffrey Sawtell, a veteran of World War I who is now in his early forties. He hates war but loves soldiering, and after a hiatus of two decades he now finds himself once again doing both: "So, he thought, it is ten past eleven on a spring day in the Year of Our Lord, 1943. I am riding with my mate Frank Counihan, I have lost my wife, but I have valuable possessions and skills and I shall join the Englishman, Major St John Jackson, to see what shall be done. Like Counihan ahead, he started to sing:

"We'll wander over mountains and we'll gallop over plains—For we scorn to live in slavery, bound down by iron chains."

Soon there are five of them: Sawtell, Counihan, Jackson, a British padre named Sergius Donaldson and Kevin O'Donohue, a young Australian. They have little in common except: "We are all soldiers and we have a common enemy." They have no specific orders, so Sawtell chooses a mission for them: "To sabotage the Zinc Corporation Mine at Broken Hill. It's a prime military target." Thus they set out, on horseback, across the outback on what is for Donaldson, and

land," occupied now only by the Aussies and by a ghostly enemy whom they imagine and fear more often than they see and encounter. Beyond that it is an essentially quixotic mission, inasmuch as the sabotaging of the Zinc Corporation Mine cannot have any significant effect on the Japanese occupation; yet in the same spirit that moves the Resistance in France, half a world away, they press on.

NOT MERELY is it a journey toward a military target; gradually it becomes a journey through Australia itself, which Sawtell fancies to be "the best place in the world" but Donaldson can see only as a wasteland: "Are there any cities? I haven't seen them. Are there any cathedrals? I haven't seen them. I sometimes think God has forsaken this place, it's like no other country I've ever known." As a civilian, an engineer working for the Country Roads Board, Sawtell had seen himself as "helping to build Australia." Now, as a soldier, he is not merely help-

tion of the bonding of unlikely allies it recalls *Seven Years War*; Hooker's warriors, like Kurosawa's, are united by personality or education or background but by their common commitment to a soldier's honor.

Yet they all yearn for peace: "They stopped at a garage and found the remains of a Hupmobile. Sawtell looked at the big American car and thought of the years after the war, of picnics, of Marcia and playing tennis on country grass courts." The sense that permeates the novel is of deep, irrecoverable loss; the passages in which peacetime is recalled positively ache with longing and regret, with a desperate desire to rip away the terrible present and somehow to be happy again. But for Sawtell and his warriors that is not to happen. They accomplish their mission and move on, deeper and deeper into the unknown Australia, farther and farther away from any hope of rest. It may seem a sad, cruel way to end this splendid novel, but Hooker is an honest writer and he knows he has no other choice. ■

Coming of Age on the Continental Divide

ENGLISH CREEK

By Ivan Doig
Atheneum 301 pp. \$16.95

By Reid Beddow

IN MONTANA, Ivan Doig tells us, the mountains are the calendar. When the snow line shrinks along the peaks, deer return to the high ground and youngsters work on their saddles lengthening the stirrups to account for the past winter's growth. So it was the fateful summer of 1939, the time of Doig's second novel, *English Creek*, the splendid story of a boy's coming of age in the American West.

June that year came in wet, and was remembered long after for its green high-grass by *English Creek*'s narrator, 14-year-old Jick McCaskill. As the novel opens, Jick is much puzzled by the behavior of his older brother, 18-year-old Alec, who has fallen in love with a town girl. Their father, a U.S. forest ranger, oversees part of Two Medicine National Forest, a fictitious wilderness bordering Glacier National Park on the south. Their mother, a former school teacher, carefully watches over her menfolk and the household expenses. This is a family "scraping along better than many" after years of hard times and drought.

The McCaskills live where the great plains reach the east face of the Rockies, in what they call the Two Medicine coun-

try, and we quickly learn what a Montanan means by "country": the terrain all the horizons around, a landscape bounded by the breathtaking grandeur and hundred-mile vistas of the Continental Divide.

When Alec proclaims his intent to marry the curvaceous Leona, instead of attending college, his parents object. Alec rebels and leaves home to be a cowpoke on the Double W Ranch. Unexpectedly, Jick makes a pack trip into the moun-

"'English Creek', just like 'Kidnapped,' can be read by both old and young with equal pleasure, fascination and excitement."

tains with the seedy Stanley Meixell, an alcoholic ex-ranger with a mysterious background. The novel closes at summer's end, on Labor Day weekend, as war breaks out in Europe. There is an epilogue and Jick, now threescore years, reveals how that summer changed and shattered his family forever, despite boundless love. In that time, Jick learned, and would continue to learn, the terrible lesson of growing older: "The past is a taker, not a giver."

What sustains this unexceptional plot is some very exceptional writing. Indeed this is not a conventional western novel at all. The high points are muted: there is a Fourth of July picnic, a square dance, a rodeo. They are all treated satirically. The forest fire at the novel's climax is described through the eyes of the firefighters' cooks—a really brilliant narrative tactic. In between we learn quite a lot about raising sheep, making hay, digging a new pit for an outhouse, naming horses, and much else:

"My earliest memory of this brother of mine was the time, I must have been four and him eight, when he took me into the pasture where the ranger station's saddle horses were grazing and said, 'Here's how you mooch them, Jick.' He eased over to the nearest horse, waited until it put its head down to eat grass, then straddled its neck. When the horse raised its head Alec was lifted, and slid down the neck into place on its back and simultaneously gripped the mane to hang on and steer by. 'Now you mooch that mare,' Alec called to me and I went beside the big chomping animal and flung my right leg over as he had, and was elevated into being a bareback rider the same as my brother."

ADMIRERS OF Doig's beautiful memoir of Montana, *This House of Sky*, and his adventurous first novel, *The Sea Runners*, will have high expectations for *English Creek*. They will not be disappointed. Doig seems to be one of those enviable

—Continued on page 13

Reid Beddow is an assistant editor of *Book World*.

English Creek

Continued from page 3

writers whose every book is better than the previous one. The new novel is full of good writing and the sweat and tears and laughter of hardworking plain people—people whose lives are shaped by a land which as it grows more scenic becomes more hostile to human habitation, the incomparable Big Sky country of western Montana.

The McCaskills' world is the vanished one of prewar rural West, evidently a place where the brooks are always full of trout and the lodgepole pines are as straight as the local morality. But rural and western do not mean simple, and in fact *English Creek* makes fun of the rustic trappings we associate with western life: when young Alec shows up in a rodeo outfit which includes a red bandana around his neck, his father mercilessly asks, "What, is your Adam's apple cold?" It is the heroic old-timers whom Doig honors, the first ranchers and the surviving cowboys who can ride a horse but not drive a car, true cowboys like Toussaint Rennie, out of place even in 1939 but who can dimly remember the roundup of 1882 when the cowmen fanned their crews "north to the Canadian line and brought in a hundred thousand head" and a great buffalo hunt when the prairie "looked burnt, so dark with buffalo, the herd pinned into place by the plains tribes."

Commonly compared with Paul Horgan and Wallace Stegner, other writers of the American West with distinctive styles, Doig seems something else. He is more virile than Horgan and less romantic than Stegner. A truer comparison might be with Robert Louis Stevenson because of Doig's magical welding of history with fiction, of adventure with everyday life, of legend with lore. *English Creek*, just like *Kidnapped*, can be read by both old and young with equal pleasure, fascination and excitement. It just might become—one must be cautious—something of a western classic.

It surely will become a classic for those readers who know what Doig means when he writes, "I cannot even safely say what the weather was, one of those brockled late afternoons under the Rockies when tag ends of storm cling in the mountains and the sun is reaching through wherever it can between the cloud piles." ■

The Brain

Continued from page 8

researchers are now women, only NIH's Candice Pert rates so much as a small portrait among the 17 modern scientists pictured. Of the 232 individuals in the index only 13 are women, and the bibliography is exclusively male. It's at least a five-fold under-representation of the women already in the field, and probably worse. The lone portrait, all the quotes, and all other indirect references to the work of women scientists occupy less than 1.5 of the 361 pages. Furthermore 70 percent of the American and Canadian researchers mentioned in *The Brain* are located in the Boston-to-Washington corridor, a three-fold over-representation as only 24 percent of the brain researchers work there.

The complaint here is not uneven treatment (which is unavoidable in a limited selection), nor the quality of the science selected (which is excellent). It's that no attempt seems to have been made to compensate for understandable initial selection bias. Asking your friends is indeed the natural place to start—it's just not where you should finish.

The author, producers, WNET, the Annenberg/CPB Project, PBS, and Bantam Books all had the opportunity to spot the obvious biases and failed to do so. One expects better, of all concerned, when both book and television series aspire to educational excellence and a national audience. ■

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13

NORTHWEST

Words That Dance to a Mountain Tune

ENGLISH CREEK. By Ivan Doig (Atheneum, \$15.95).

By Paul Pintarich

Ivan Doig's fictional "English Creek" lies on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, where the streams flow toward the Mississippi and the lives of his characters take their own sweet time moving through a pastoral part of Montana's recent history.

Here, surrounding Two Medicine National Forest, between the small town of Gros Ventre and the mountains, lives a gathering of sheepherders, ranchers and farmers weary of struggling with the Great Depression, which has tightened their existence to the belly-scraping limits of survival.

Though the friends and neighbors along English Creek are unaware of it, World War II's saving prosperity is just around the corner, and this particular summer, the summer of Jick McCaskill's 14th year, is expected to be a good one. "That month of June swam into the Two Medicine country. In my life until then I had never seen the sidehills come so green, the coulees stay so spongy with runoff. A right amount of wet evidently could sweeten the universe."

Anyone who has read Doig's masterful first book, "This House of Sky," an autobiography of his own growing up in this same country, will be familiar with the temptation to quote profusely this Montana emigre, who now lives in Seattle. "This House of Sky" went on to become a nominee for the National Book Award. Doig also received well-deserved accolades for his first novel, "The Sea Runners," an historical tale of Swedes escaping from 19th-century Russian Alaska.

Now, safe on his home turf again, Doig has brought forth the first in a trilogy of novels that ultimately will profile his fictional landscape from pioneer days to the present, giving readers a genealogy of the McCaskill clan as well. Doig, in fact, recently returned from Scotland, where he researched 19th-century Scottish migrations, and he explains that the English Creek novel was purposely out of sequence — perhaps as a reflection of more recent hard times. Beautiful in its simplicity and warmth, the story conveys a folksiness the author pulls off skillfully, without being too maudlin or Disneyesque. At the risk of sounding corny: This is the kind of novel you didn't think they wrote anymore.

Doig has taken a "rites of passage" story and honed it to what surely will be an epic, a kind of Montana "Honey in the Horn." The days of Jick McCaskill's adolescent summer are reflective and revealing. Not only does the boy watch his youth dissipate, but he also witnesses the end of a drowsy era inhabited by real homesteaders, real ranchers and real cowboys — a period when life's values were real as well.



Ivan Doig

Jick's father, Varick McCaskill, the descendant of Scottish immigrants, is the ranger in charge of Two Medicine National Forest. Jick's mother, Beth, a former schoolteacher, is half-Scottish, half-Danish; his brother Alec, four years older, is half-horse, half-alligator, a romantic youth who wants to make a career of being a cowboy on the Double W ranch. The drama infused into this otherwise restful novel comes from Alec's conflict with his parents over his desire to marry Leona, an act that would keep him in the saddle and perhaps out of college in the fall.

A mysterious loner, Stanley Meixell, is a wrangler and packstring operator who was Two Medicine's first ranger back when the Forest Service was formed. Combining Jick's seeking of clues and Meixell's enig-

matic persona with a major forest fire, Doig has written a tightly told tale, as harmoniously humorous and macho as a John Ford movie. Imagining Maureen O'Hara and the late John Wayne playing Jick's parents is easy.

The assorted denizens of the nearby countryside would require a cast of scores of character actors. These characters perform in a historical museum of the late 1930s, in accounts of sheepherding, of haying with horses, of Fourth of July picnics and of dusty back-yard rodeos lubricated with washtubs full of iced-down beer.

Like any quality writer, Doig makes readers hungry with the food and follows Hemingway's important advice: "Don't forget the weather." The weather is catalyst for life along English Creek in Two Medicine country. When he observes fluffy white clouds floating overhead, an oldtimer comments, "Those are empties coming over from Seattle."

The language of the times — the profuse homilies and aphorisms, the parables and epitaphs preserved from frontier Montana and held in Doig's mind — conveys the personality of people whose innate wit and indigenous wisdom colored dull, dusty, workaday lives. Wonderful expressions — "Tidy as spats on a rooster"; "He's so tight he wouldn't spend a dime to see Christ ride backwards on a bicycle"; the description of a post-rodeo crowd in the Medicine Lodge Saloon: "... it sounded like hell changing shifts in there." — show that Doig has lived and worked in this country. He knows his people well.

Doig underscores his chapters with real news items from local papers of the times, and he lets it be known that he was a sensitive, romantic youth (he's now 45) with an ear for the dialogue of his elders.

The novel's highlight is a grand Fourth of July square dance that incorporates and enhances the sense of timelessness and enduring melancholy for the past that is the fabric of the trilogy. Here, also, is some of Doig's best writing: "Can it be that all kinds of music speak to one another? For what I always end up thinking of in this dancing respect is a hymn. To me it is the one hymn that has ever seemed to make much sense:

"Dance, dance, wherever you may be,

I am the Lord of the dance," said he,

"And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be.

And I'll lead you all in the dance," said he.

"I almost wish I had never come across those words and their tune, for they make one of those chants that slip into your mind every time you meet up with the circumstances they suggest. It was so then, even as Ray nudged me to point out the Busby brothers going through a fancy twirl with each other instead of with their wives and I joined Ray and everybody else in laughing, and it is so now. Within all else those musical words, a kind of beautiful haunting. But I suppose that is what musical words, and for that matter dances and dancers, are for."



WICHITA, KS.
EAGLE-BEACON
D. 124,000 — S. 181,000
WICHITA METROPOLITAN AREA

NOV 18 1984

Ivan Doig Pulls Off Story About Boy Coming

"English Creek" by Ivan Doig (Atheneum, \$15.95)

By Bob von Sternberg

Staff Writer

Here we go again: Boy comes of age during a crucial summer of his life, gleaning insights to himself, the adults around him and the world he inhabits.

Yes, all too many novelists have tackled that subject, with varying degrees of success. But Ivan Doig has pulled it off in "English Creek."

No mean feat, but it's easy to see how he did so. Doig is a clean, restrained stylist with a good ear; he has assembled a strong plot to shoulder his tale; and he

has set the story in the magnificent world of the Montana foothills.

It doesn't overstate the case too much to say that the setting of "English Creek" — a fictitious name for the country just this side of the Continental Divide in northern Montana — is the dominant character in the book.

The land shapes the people in deep ways, guiding their life's work, the way they live with each other. Most of the characters couldn't live anywhere else.

The place Doig writes about is, arguably, one of the most beautiful on the continent, where the high plains give way to the mountains, where drought exists alongside deep forest, where al-

most no one lives. And those who live best there take the land on its own terms, respecting it and learning from it.

But even if you have never set foot in Montana, Doig's writing takes you there. It isn't the kind of writing in which a few show-off lines can be plunked into a review to prove the point. He does it in snippets, little descriptions that accumulate to the point where a full-fledged portrait of the place emerges.

Montana has shaped Doig's writing, ever since he took the long leap from journalism into books. In fact, "English Creek" is a fictionalized companion of his first, best-known book, "This House of Sky," a memoir of growing up in Montana. The new book takes off from there.

It's about the 14th summer of Jick McCaskill, who has lived all his life on English Creek in the shadow of the Rockies. He idolizes — he thinks — his older brother, who is going to turn himself into a cowboy, the desire of his parents be damned. His father has lived his life as a forest ranger, his mother has lived hers as a pioneer woman who has knitted her family together.

It may seem like the stuff of the 1880s frontier, but the story unfolds in 1939, with the Depression still hanging on and the worry of war in the air. Rather than being an anachronism, the story has a poignancy for all that is being diminished and lost to the realities of the 20th century.



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Jick heads into the mountains for the annual sheep hunt, basks in a memorable small-town Fourth of July celebration, encounters a monster of a forest fire and comes to realize a whole laundry list of truths about life.

His position in all this is that he is "old enough to be on the edge of everything and too young to get to the middle of any of it."

"English Creek" is a welcome reunion for anyone who has read any of Doig's three previous books; for those who haven't, it's an ideal place to get acquainted.

And best of all, Doig says this is just the first part of a trilogy about the McCaskills and their wonderful country.



CHICAGO, IL
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D 651,579 - S 677,681
CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA

NOV 23 1984

'Detectives' probe the body human

BEST-TELLERS

By Henry Kisor

Doctors know a good deal less about the human body and its secrets than we laymen have been led to think. But that also means their jobs are harder than we'd thought.

That's the ruling premise of the "Annals of Medicine" pieces Berton Roueche has written for the New Yorker since 1947. *The Medical Detectives, Vol. II* (Dutton, \$20) is the second collection (the first appeared in 1980) of these fascinating articles, many cannily crafted in the form of mysteries with epidemiologists as the sleuths (and sometimes culprits) and symptoms as the clues.

We learn how an outbreak of salmonella poisoning was traced to tainted watermelons, how a rickettsial pox that infested a Queens neighborhood came in via mites from Egypt (the heroic investigator

was a modest pest exterminator, not a physician), how epidemics of all kinds come and go.

Except for one or two articles, however, Roueche does not postscript his tales, bringing us up to date on the states of the art of healing the disorders described. That's the only lack (and it's a minor one) in a consistently stimulating and entertaining book.

Other good weekend reading:

Dungeon Master, by William Dear (Houghton Mifflin, \$16.95). Dallas Egbert was a friendless, maladjusted 16-year-old computer prodigy and *Dungeons & Dragons* fanatic who in 1979 vanished into a labyrinth of steam tunnels on the Michigan State University campus. Dear, a renowned private eye, went hunting for the boy, and tells the tragic story in a book that is both suspenseful and compassionate.

English Creek, by Ivan Doig (Atheneum, \$16.95). Set in 1939, this story of the 14th summer of a Montana forest ranger's son plunders the rich heritage of the Big

Sky country, linking people, land and history with a muscular prose style and a grandly westering spirit. It's the first in a promised trilogy.

The Grizzly Bear, by Thomas McNamee (Knopf, \$18.95). So what if the grizzly bear disappears in Glacier and Yellowstone parks? There's plenty of room in Canada and Alaska, isn't there? If the grizzly lives, McNamee shows in elegant but vigorously colloquial style, so will our wilderness: they need each other and we need them both.

Getting to Know the General, by Graham Greene (Simon & Schuster, \$14.95). Made up of equal parts of memoir, biography, travelogue and spy novel, Greene's portrait of his chum, the late President Omar Torrijos of Panama, is an almost unclassifiable book. But it is crisp, skillful and convincing.

Home Before Dark, by Susan Cheever (Houghton Mifflin, \$15.95). Novelist John Cheever was alcoholic, homosexual, cranky and secretive. His daughter forgave him and tells his story affectionately.



NOV. 23, 1984

A fresh look at familiar rites

Coming of age in Montana

By Gary Ricciardi
Staff Writer

Told from the vantage of a man who remembers his Depression youth brightly, "English Creek" is built upon a formula as worn as a riverbed: a boy's coming of age. In his 14th summer, Jick McCaskill learns to cuss and drink, and by novel's end, he matures and learns "that a person could do what he thought was right and yet be never comfortable about it."

"English Creek," named for the stream by which the McCaskill family lives, is a touch "aw, shucks," but it succeeds because it has the firmest sense of time and place. Jick's fresh perceptions of both figure immediately as the novel opens:

"That month of June swam into the Two Medicine Country. In my life until then I had never seen the sidehills come so green, the coulees stay so spongy with runoff. A right amount of wet evidently could sweeten the universe."

The Two Medicine Country is a fictional amalgam of Montana geography, and it is as much a character as any person in "English Creek." Ivan Doig, author of "This House of Sky," a much-praised memoir of life in Montana, re-creates the sights and smells of the land. Like a character, the preserve, also called the Two Mountain National Forest, is transformed. The agent of change is fire, and this fire is the occasion for Jick to learn something of the history of his father, who is ranger in the forest, and that of an old ranger whom the boy variously sees as "a behind-the-bush bottle tipper" or "a warbling boozehound" before coming to respect him.

"English Creek," by Ivan Doig. Atheneum. \$15.95. 333 pp.

The fire is described convincingly, and the pages Doig devotes to it seem founded on research. (A reference that a burning forest at night resembles a "lighted city" is dutifully credited to a historical source in the book's generous acknowledgments.)

Doig wants not only to tell a story but to document a time and style of living. The ostensible subjects of "English Creek" — Jick, Jick's father, a man who is most at home outdoors; Jick's brother, who stubbornly wants to marry and work as a ranch hand rather than enroll in college, and Jick's mother, a strong woman who speaks her mind — are all well-drawn, but they are not what gives the most pleasure.

What does, for instance, is a description of a Fourth of July picnic, rodeo, and square dance, created with leisurely detail: There are the dishes that are served, the inanities of an announcer enamored of his own amplified voice, and the reeling feel of the dance:

"Probably if you climbed the helmet spike of the Sedgwick House, the rhythm of those six squares of dancers would have come quivering up to you like spasms through a tuning fork. Figure within figure within figure, from my father's outlook over us, the kaleidoscope of six simultaneous dance patterns and inside each the hinged couple of the instant and comprising those couples friends, neighbors, sons, wife with flashing throat."

"English Creek" is meant to be the first installment in a trilogy about the McCaskill family. It is sentimental and, at its end, too neat, but it is cleanly done. The McCaskills are good company.



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NOV 25 1984

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The rhythms of life in Montana, summer of 1939

ENGLISH CREEK

By Ivan Doig
Atheneum, 339 pp., \$15.95

By Henry Mayer

'ENGLISH CREEK" is a love song to Montana that confirms Ivan Doig's reputation as the most eloquent Western writer of our generation. If you've ever driven home from a mountain trip late at night singing songs learned 'round a campfire long ago, you'll appreciate at once the glowing spirit of this novel, which re-creates the life of a Montana ranching community with grave and tender care.

The narrator is 60-year-old Jick McCaskill, recalling "the summer when . . ." he turned 15, his older brother argued with his parents about becoming a cowboy rather than a college student, and his father (the district forest ranger) had to confront the most stubborn fire of his career. While the family's concerns offer a narrative thread, the story of a boy's coming-of-age is melded neatly into a more panoramic account of the changing ways in which the generations are shaped by the powerful landscape they inhabit.

Doig, who grew up in northern Montana along the front range of the Rocky Mountains where "English Creek" takes place, has transformed his native ground into a remarkably compelling fictional world. Readers won't find his Two Medicine National Forest or the town of Gros Ventre on any map, but they will live in the mind a good deal. The best parts of the book are set pieces, really, which

describe the landmarks of a country summer: counting sheep on the forest grazing allotments; haying in the lush bottomlands; the Fourth of July rodeo; the contentment of a mountain sunrise and the anxiety of the fire watch after a thunderstorm.

Doig's quiet style — measured, yet lyrical — suits the leisurely pace of the story, yet he knows how to fit a world of emotion into a single phrase. Here is young Jick "grinning open-eyed into the darkness" as he remembers the events of his "immense" Fourth of July: "Scene by scene they fell into place in me, smooth as kidskin and exact as chapter and verse, every one a perfect piece of that day

**... smooth as kidskin and exact
as chapter and verse . . .**

and now of the night; a set of hours worth the price of the rest of the life."

Loving and faithful description, however, is turned into drama by a compelling set of characters, whose worn faces, laconic ways, and hard-won wisdom are given authentic voice. From the rodeo announcer's corny jokes and the taciturn shame of the mentor-turned-alcoholic to the solemn speech Jick's mother makes at the town picnic and the way in which his restrained father calls a robust square dance, this novel is perfectly tuned to country talk — its pitch, its rhythm, its economy.

"English Creek" is Ivan Doig's fourth book in six years. His first book, "This House of Sky" (1978), a poignant memoir of his own Montana boyhood, won a National

Book Award nomination; his second, "Winter Brothers" (1980) probed the imaginative border between past and present by mingling the biography of a 19th century Puget Sound pioneer with Doig's own exploration of the same territory.

Both books take the special quality of the western experience as their underlying theme. They have a ruminative power that was missing from "The Sea Runners" (1982). Doig's well-told yet disappointing first novel, which dramatized the daring escape (by canoe) of four Swedish indentured servants from a Russian fort in Alaska in 1852.

"English Creek," however, demonstrates conclusively Doig's talent as a historical novelist, one who understands the cumulative impact of time as well as place. The novel is set in 1939, the year of the writer's birth, and Doig conveys the feeling of life at the tag end of the Depression with sympathy and force. At the same time he attends to the links with a previous generation with stories of the family's pioneers in "the Two" and the time when the national forest itself was laid out.

The novel is said to be the first in a projected trilogy about the McCaskill family and the Two Medicine country, and I wonder which way Doig will go next — back a generation for a deeper look at the early settlers, or forward into his own day and the radically altered conditions of ranching life? Perhaps both; perhaps he'll offer a cumulative portrait of provincial life that, given the rich humanity of "English Creek," might just add up to the Montana equivalent of "Middlemarch." ■

Historian and critic Mayer lives in Berkeley

S.T. 11-25-84



Ivan Doig

Author of 'English Creek'

Interest lags as Doig novel lacks momentum

"English Creek"

by Ivan Doig.

Atheneum.

\$15.95.

by Lucile McDonald

Usually I have enjoyed Ivan Doig's books, but this one keeps the reader waiting too long for something to happen.

Listed as a novel, it is more a chronology of events during one summer spent by a forest ranger's son in the Montana mountains in the 1930s.

Granted that the characters and setting are interesting, but we live with them through the first 50 pages while they are counting sheep grazing on the forest reserve and the characters' regrets that the older brother, Alec, is no longer with them. He has left the family circle in the expectation of getting married and has accepted employment on a cattle ranch, an enterprise that the sheep raisers deplore.

Next we are involved with young Jick McCaskill, the narrator, while he spends three days digging a pit for an outhouse, yet it has little or no significance, and halfway into the book we are still waiting for a hint of a plot. We witness a rodeo, absorb an abundance of mountain-country profanity and continue to anticipate a conflict with the hated cattle enterprise.

The summer is nearly over, and so is the book, when an electric storm and fire precipitate a climax. It's a rewarding picture of remote country living and a family struggle, providing you can stay with it. "English Creek" gives one the feeling that the author has been there himself and experienced some of his story.

■ Lucile McDonald is a regional historian and free-lance writer.

For this novel, start at the back

List of sources is good indication of why 'English Creek' is special

English Creek. By Ivan Doig.
Atheneum. 339 pages. \$15.95.

By KEVIN MILLER
Of The Register-Guard

The place to start "English Creek" is in the final five pages, where Ivan Doig thanks his sources for this remarkable novel.

It is the standard, "This is a work of fiction" disclaimer, followed by perhaps 150 acknowledgments that make it clear "English Creek," set in the Two Medicine area of northern Montana's sheep- and cattle-ranching country in the summer of 1939, flows along the boundary between truth and fiction.

Doig, whose other works include "This House of Sky," "Winter Brothers," and "The Sea Runners," pored over old newspapers, personal memoirs, firefighters' logs and other written records. He scoured his own mem-

ory for tales told in his growing-up days along the Rocky Mountain Front, called "the Front" and not "the eastern slope of the Rockies" for reasons obvious to anyone who has seen it.

He interviewed others who heard the tales told firsthand, and he interviewed a few who told them firsthand. He then wove the collected anecdotes into his tale, creating a novel that is as much a passing on of precious lore as it is a work of fiction.

The story of those three months at English Creek is recalled by 60-year-old Jick McCaskill, who gazes back on his 14th summer with that mixture of nostalgia and befuddlement that glories and plagues a person who feels compelled to keep looking back, to try to re-sort his life.

"Some mornings," Jick confesses early in the book, "I will catch myself with a full cup of coffee yet in my hand, gone cold while I have sat here stewing about whether my threescore years would be pretty much as they

are by now had I happened into existence in, say, China or California instead of northern Montana."

Jick sees that summer of '39 as a summer of turning points, the most important of which was his realization that the tensions that had always seemed to hold things together, namely those that bound the McCaskill family, could just as easily pull in opposite directions. Told as it is by a 60-year-old looking back through the eyes of a 14-year-old, the story becomes a fascinating study of how and why lives get changed.

Jick's father, Varick "Mac" McCaskill, is a recalcitrant forest ranger trying to keep sheep ranchers happy and his forest from burning down. He and his wife, Lisabeth, have big plans for older son Alec, who is too smart to spend the rest of his life herding sheep or cattle in the Two Medicine country. Alec will go to college and be an engineer, and will become the first of this family of hardscrabble Scots to escape the beautiful yet stifling confines of "the Two."

That sounds fine until Alec announces that he and Leona are getting married, and that he intends to hang

around the Two and try to work his way up from cowboy to cattle rancher. Alec's decision rends the family in ways that Jick can't understand decades later, and it creates a tension that lasts beyond the final page of "English Creek."

As always, Doig's writing is peopled with keenly drawn characters and is imbued with a crystalline sense of time and place. His descriptions of a small-town rodeo, an out-of-control forest fire and a Rocky Mountain thunderstorm create mental photographs that are so full of detail that a reader can examine them weeks later and see new things.

Although it often delves into the most painful of human experiences — the tearing apart of families and friends — and is set against the dark backdrop of the tail of the Depression and the beginning of World War II, "English Creek" is leavened with dry country humor, with wisecracks and nicknames and inspired put-downs that are evidence of Doig's love for the regional language. It is a story well-told and one worth reading.

Register-Guard reporter Kevin Miller used to live in Montana.



Wind & Tide

Occasionally

Fall • 1984

Vol. 1 No. 2

ENGLISH CREEK

Ivan Doig's Best Book!

The obvious way to begin a review of *English Creek* by Ivan Doig is to call it a fictional version of his first book, the National Book Award nominee *This House of Sky*. And while there are elements of truth in such a characterization, it fails to tell the whole tale.

The similarities make the new novel from Atheneum (\$15.95) Doig's most satisfying book since his memoir of growing up in central Montana surrounded by sheep, by mountainous beauty, and by clear-eyed descendants of American pioneers. Those pioneer characters are here in *English Creek*. So are the mountains. So are the sheep. Doig is writing about a landscape and a time that he obviously loves and therefore observes and renders with close concern and extraordinary clarity.

"That month of June swam into the Two Medicine country. In my life until then I had never seen the sidehills come so green, the coulees stay so spongy with runoff. A right amount of wet evidently could sweeten the universe."

Thus Doig begins his description of Jick McCaskill's fourteenth summer in the Two Medicine country. (The novel's fictional geography is actually placed near Dupuyer, Montana.) The novel is divided roughly in thirds with young Jick narrating in turn a camp-tending pack trip, a Fourth of July rodeo and dance, and a forest fire which threatens to blacken large areas of the national forest where Jick's father is the supervising ranger. While the plot is singularly lacking in sex, violence, and existential turmoil, it is driven by the familial and social tensions encountered by real people in real situations. When such tensions are as surely drawn as they are here, the result is a plot as gripping as any thriller. As readers, we care strongly for these people because their problems are familiar from our own lives. This, of course, is one of the truest tests of quality in fiction.

Another such test is stylistic. Ivan Doig has established a reputation as one of our finest craftsmen. At times, though, his ear for colorful dialogue seems to be working overtime in *English Creek*. It is hard to accept that each and every character speaks with the same folksy phrases. There are "crowbait's" and "churnhead's" to burn here. Yet just when the reader thinks he has swallowed the last "flibberty" he can stomach, along comes a paragraph such as when Jick's mother admonishes him and his friends from mocking one of the town's eccentrics.

" 'Lila Sedge is not to be laughed at' she said, not in her whetstoned voice but just sort of instructively. 'The clouds have settled on her mind.' "

Normally, writers are taught to avoid constructions such as "sort of" in sentences like the above. Yet the really good writers know when a phrase sharpens the characterizations rather than dulling the hone of a sentence. Doig also knows when to use sentence fragments. (As a former English teacher, it's a lot to admit that *anyone* can get away with that sin.) All in all, the writing is eloquent and moving.

Continued on back page.



*New
for
Fall*

New in Hardback

Tough Guys Don't Dance	Norman Mailer
Crescent City	Belva Plain
Fourth Protocol	Frederick Forsythe
Loving Each Other	Leo Buscaglia
First Among Equals	Jeffrey Archer
The Talisman	Stephen King & Peter Straub
English Creek	Ivan Doig
God Knows	Joseph Heller
The Good War	Studs Terkel
Superior Women	Alice Adams
In Love and War	Jim & Sybil Stockdale
Jitterbug Perfume	Tom Robbins
Iacocca	Lee Iacocca
Strong Medicine	Arthur Hailey
Pieces of My Mind	Andy Rooney
The Bridge Across Forever	Richard Bach
The Hunt for Red October	Tom Clancy
Love and War	John Jakes
Moses the Kitten	James Herriot
Heritage: Civilization and The Jews	Abba Eban
Miss Manners' Guide to Rearing Perfect Children	Judith Martin

New in Paperback

Outrageous Acts & Everyday Rebellions	Gloria Steinem
Gentlemen of Adventure	Ernest Gann
Bowdrie's Law	Louis L'Amour
In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens	Alice Walker
Poland	James Michener
Never Sniff a Gift Fish	Patrick McManus
In Search of The Far Side	Gary Larson
Doonesbury Dossier	G. B. Trudeau

Ivan Doig Due November 29th

Ivan Doig will be at the Wind & Tide on Thursday, November 29th from 3:30 until 5:00 p.m. to sign copies of his new book *English Creek* (Atheneum, 15.95). We will also have copies of his earlier books, *This House of Sky*, *Winter Brothers*, and *Sea Runners*. All three of these last titles are available in paperback at the shop.

ALBION PIG



ROLLS ALONG

October was a busy month at the Wind & Tide. Not only did October 1st mark our fifth anniversary of ownership, it was also the official publication date of staff member Mary Hofstrand's picture book for children, *Albion Pig*. The book was published by Alfred Knopf, a division of Random House.

Sales of the book have been very strong throughout the Northwest and, of course, Mary has signed stacks for our own customers.

An additional boost came from *Publisher's Weekly*, the most influential periodical covering the publishing and bookselling business. Unlike many library journals and *Kirkus Reviews* which review every book on every publisher's list, *PW* is much more selective. Its review in the September 28 issue was most gratifying to Mary as a first time author/illustrator.

Making a notable entry into children's books, Hofstrand tells an enticing story in rhyme and illustrates it with delicate pastel paintings.

So begins *PW*'s review. Following a plot synopsis, the review concludes, "Hofstrand's pig tale will be a help to parents, tucking their toddlers into bed at naptime or nightfall."

Mary has been scheduled to sign copies of *Albion Pig* at several area bookstores including the University Bookstore in Seattle, but Wind & Tide regulars know that she can be found at her regular duties on Sundays from 12 until 5 and on Mondays from 10 until 5:30 minding the bookshop. Please stop by to examine *Albion Pig*. We are sure you will find it as charming as *Publisher's Weekly* did and while it is recommended for ages three to six, we know many grownups who would appreciate its charm.



Jingle Bells, Jingle Books, & Jingle Cards!



This is the last Occasionally to be printed before the holiday so we want to remind you of some of the lovely books available this season. Many old favorites are back such as Tasha Tudor's *Take Joy* and *A Williamsburg Christmas*. These are joined by such new titles as *The Nutcracker*, illustrated by Maurice Sendak, *The Night Before Christmas* with new pictures by Anita Lobel, Tommie de Paola's charming pop-up *The First Christmas* and his illustrated version of *Miracle on 34th Street*. There are also some beautiful songbooks and Christmas craft books.

You'll also enjoy looking through our selection of unique holiday cards. Designs from the Museum of Modern Art join the more traditional fine art cards from Portal and Sunrise. The best ones go first so don't delay.

We've also uncovered a cache of advent calendars at 1970 prices. Start a family tradition with these. □

EXTRA! EXTRA! Read All About It!

In addition to the Wall Street Journal, we are now selling the New York Times daily edition. Now you can read "all the news that's fit to print" on the same day it appears in New York.

For all the news that might not be fit to print we'll also have USA Today every day.

Sunday editions of the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, and the San Francisco Chronicle will be arriving on Mondays.



TROVES OF THE PACKRAT

The Wind & Tide is displaying a rack of books produced by Oak Harbor's own Packrat Press.

The Packrats, Mark and Ann Adams, compose, print, and bind their books in a hobby shop across from their house at 4366 N. Diana Lane in Northgate Terrace near Deception Pass. Besides publishing their own books, they offer these services:

1. A Studio Plan under which self-publishers may print books in the Packrat shop. They offer lessons in printing, technical assistance, editing, and design counseling.

2. Typesetting through the camera-ready proof stage for publishers who have their printing done elsewhere.

Books from each of these categories are available at Wind & Tide.

ENGLISH CREEK. By Ivan Doig. A review. continued from front page.

The effect of young Jick as narrator reminds the reader legitimately of Huckleberry Finn although it is an adult voice remembering back over the years. The times, the character, and the country itself are reflected in this voice and it compels the reader's attention and concern.

Since I have mentioned Huck Finn, I may as well inch farther out on the critical limb and compare parts of *English Creek* to *Moby Dick*. These parts are what could be called vocational prose. Just as Melville spends whole chapters describing in almost government-manual detail the processes involved in whaling, so Doig includes many passages describing such Two Country pastimes as skinning sheep, digging a new outhouse hole, driving a scatter rake at haying season, and cooking double lunches for a seventy-five man forest fire crew. Work is thus a strong thread in the fiber of this novel as in Melville's and as in American life. But there is play here too: the rodeo ritual, the intricate patterns of square dancing, and the elemental joy which a boy feels while riding a man's horse.

This review began by stating that *English Creek* is more than a fictional version of *This House of Sky*. The novel transcends the memoir in the same ways that fiction always transcends fact. The issues confronting Jick as he comes of age are sharpened by the selection of Doig's artistic eye. Decisions Jick must make during the course of the novel will determine the values which he carries throughout the rest of his life. There is no equivocation here as there always is in memoir or biography. The reader therefore feels a closure at the novel's end; it is the totality of an artistic and satisfying whole while leaving the reader richer for the experience.

I plan to send this book to my father for Christmas. He grew up on a horse in Wyoming thirty years before the actions of this novel. Dad's childhood stories and the incidents from *English Creek* reflect each other like mirrors into infinity. Thus is fine fiction more true than mere history.

N.S.

Colophon Quiz

Close browsers of the world, unite! Identify the publishers who are represented by the colophons. Write them down and bring them by. If there are some which stump you, feel free to come in and browse the shelves until you've found them all. If your list is among the first ten, you'll win a beautiful poster. Answers will be posted in the store the week of December 10th.

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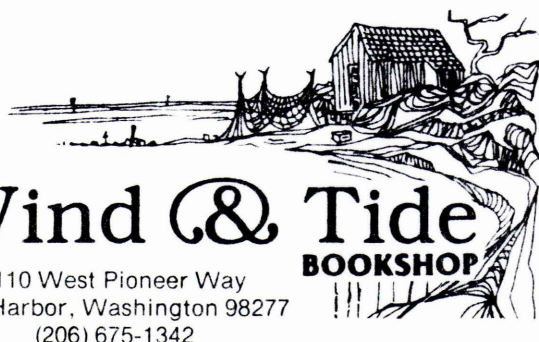
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CHICAGO, IL
SUN-TIMES

D. 651,579—S. 677,681
CHICAGO METROPOLITAN AREA

NOV 9 1984

A boy comes of age in Big Sky country

BEST-TELLERS

By Henry Kisor

The Montana writer Ivan Doig should be better known. Few novelists from any region can match his strengths: a grand westering spirit, a muscular prose style and a knack for novel scenes of historical detail.

His second novel, **English Creek** (Atheneum, \$16.95), is set in 1939. It's the deceptively simple story of the 14th summer of Jick McCaskill, son of a Montana forest ranger. Much more than the usual coming-of-age novel, it plunders the rich heritage of the Big Sky country, linking people, land and history cleanly and clearly. Among its best passages is one on fighting forest fires in the Depression and another on the clean, sweaty work of haying.

English Creek, the first in a promised trilogy, is a novel you'll long remember.

Newsday (LI) 11-11-84

Proustian View Of Montana

"ENGLISH CREEK," by
Ivan Doig (Atheneum, 339
pp., \$15.95).

Reviewed by Wendy Smith

American history is a palpable, living presence in "English Creek," Ivan Doig's evocative novel of Montana in 1939. His proud, determined characters act according to a code of self-reliance, respect for the land and each other that is as old as the American frontier. The West is changing, has already changed a great deal in 1939, but there remains a strong sense of continuity with the past. Old men still working in the fields tell stories of their days as cowhands during the famous roundup of 1882; the protagonist's mother, herself less than 40 years old, remembers a childhood wagon trip where she ate food from the same chuckwagon box that provisioned that roundup, a box that carries her son's sandwiches during the 1939 haying. "English Creek" is almost Proustian in its concern for the ways in which "pieces of time leap in and out of each other."

The reason this living past is important, Doig suggests, is because it acts as a moral force on the present. In a speech at the Fourth of July picnic, the mother (Beth McCaskill, whose explosive integrity is lovingly drawn in one of the novel's finest portraits) passionately defends the traditional values of those who "honored the earth instead of merely coveting it." Doig depicts the West in transition, setting the unchanging grandeur and harshness of the land against the social transformations of the 20th Century and the tentative beginnings of one boy's entry into adulthood.

Jick, the youngest son of Beth and Varick McCaskill, is nearly 15 in the summer of 1939. In his nature the strength — some would say stubbornness — of the McCaskills is tempered by a deep vein of reflectiveness. ("Sometimes maybe you think too much," his best friend tells him.) He is increasingly conscious of and curious about the complex interaction between the choices people make in life and the ones that are made for them — "how home ground and kin together lay their touch along us as unalterably as the banks of a stream direct its water."

Jick wonders what led his father to become a forest ranger instead of a



sheep rancher, and why his older brother rejects parental plans for a college degree in favor of the dying trade of cowboy. As Jick participates in the tasks and rituals of a Western summer — sheep counting, haying, the superbly rendered Fourth of July picnic, rodeo and square dance — he observes the adults around him, reflecting on the forces that shaped their lives and wondering how his own destiny will be formed.

Despite its setting in the most mythic of all American landscapes, "English Creek" is neither nostalgic nor simple: It's too concrete and detailed in its evocation of the past, too tough-minded in its evaluation of human behavior for that. There are no truly evil characters, but there are

weak ones, and Doig makes it clear that the West is cruel to those who can't stand up to its demands. At the climax of the novel, after Varick McCaskill and his crew have beaten back a potentially dangerous forest fire, Jick learns that years ago his father was responsible for the firing of another man in the forest service, a man who drank and let a fire get out of control but who was also Varick's mentor and friend.

"I suppose here was my first inkling," says the adult Jick who narrates the book, "that a person could do what he thought was right and yet never be comfortable about it." The honorable code by which the McCaskills live, he realizes, has a price tag. His confrontation with the moral com-

plexity of adult decisions almost immediately by the first time that the w Montana has impinged story, and the end of this his life.

Firmly anchored in the West, "English Creek" resembles a 19th Century novel in its leisurely pace, tone and focus on understatement rather than action. In its spare prose as terse and yet with meaning as the speciosa, Ivan Doig grapples with universal issues of character and morality.

Wendy Smith is a free-lance writer.

✓ When 'Beauty Makes The Eyes Greedy...'

English Creek

By Ivan Doig

Atheneum

339 pages, \$15.95

Ivan Doig's "This House of Sky," a brilliant and bittersweet memoir of the author's youth in Montana, was nominated for a National Book Award in 1978. His first novel, "The Sea Runners," is a beautifully crafted tale of adventure, as understated and convincing as a Norse saga.

In his second novel, "English Creek," Doig returns to his boyhood home — the land along the eastern face of the Rockies — and gives us another tale of growing up.

Doig has invented both a family, the McCaskills, and a fictional country for them to inhabit, the Two Medicine National Forest. He notes that his town of Gros Ventre shares with the town of Dupeyer, Mont., on which it is based only their common origin as stopovers for freight wagons and his "love for the place."

A deep but unsentimental love of place permeates "English Creek."

The story takes place during the summer of 1939, a watershed in the history of the world and of narrator Jick McCaskill, who at 14-going-on-15 is tormented by being "old enough to be on the edge of everything and too young to get to the middle of it."

Jick is the younger of two sons of Mac and Beth McCaskill. The father is a cowboy turned forest ranger who now has responsibility for the vast Two Medicine country.

At the beginning of "the summer when," as Jick's mother later dubs this epochal period, Jick's idolized older brother, Alec, creates a crisis by asserting that he has decided not to attend college and instead will marry and try ranching. Since this is no sinecure in an area where

livestock prices have been depressed since the end of the First World War, the parents are far from enthusiastic.

The tension created by Alec's decision and his resulting estrangement from his family remains as a kind of threatening undertone to the exciting events of Jick's summer, sharpening his appreciation of patterns of life that he suddenly realizes are not eternal.

Jick would be a superb observer at any time — an eager early riser who explains that "Dawns taught me that beauty makes the eyes greedy." But his adolescent narcissism, his fear that his "every moment was visible to people anywhere, like a planet being perpetually studied by one of those California telescopes," gives each episode a heightened significance.

Jick's vision of his world vividly combines disillusionment and a Homeric quality.

At a "never can be forgotten" Fourth of July celebration, a drunken rancher in the midst of his annual quarrel with his wife, performs heroically in a rodeo. And Jick has a memorable dance with his sharp-tongued, "white throated" mother.

In "English Creek" Doig has laid a splendid groundwork for the trilogy he plans on the McCaskills. The Two Medicine Country is a beautifully evoked and encyclopedically detailed stretch of fictional geography (there's even a well-drawn map in the book).

Doig has furnished a large and brilliantly rendered supporting cast for the McCaskills. And in Jick, questioning odd-man-out of his adored family and possessor of a fluent McCaskill tongue and "greedy" eyes, we have an extraordinarily attractive and convincing narrator.

—Fitzgerald Higgins

BOOKS

Ft. Worth Star-Telegram

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1984

Regionalism in its glory

Reviewed by
JEFF GUINN

While earning celebration by critics for having created one nonfiction classic (*This House of Sky*) and two other fine books, Ivan Doig has become one of this country's most dependable writers. Those already familiar with Doig will rejoice even before reading *English Creek*. Newcomers will finish this book and hurry to sample earlier Doig works.

Doig's great gift is an ability to take the places and events of his childhood in the American northwest and create through deceptively simple means a story that totally captures the spirit of characters and their ways of life. *English Creek* is fiction, yet it is impossible to doubt that Doig has created this particular tale from events he saw and/or experienced himself.

The story is narrated by Jick McCaskill, "fourteen hard on fifteen" and a youngster totally at ease with his life in rural Montana in 1939. While the Great Depression still crushes the nation and many McCaskill neighbors, Jick's family has been spared deprivation through his father Varick's job as a Forest Service park ranger.

The problems faced by Jick and his family stem from non-economic causes. Oldest McCaskill son Alec has decided to forsake his college plans to work as a cowboy at a nearby ranch and marry Leona, town belle of nearby Gros Ventre. Varick must contend with his son's intransience even as he faces almost sure summer disaster through forest fires after the Forest Service economizes by eliminating most of McCaskill's support staff. Mother Elizabeth is about to emerge as the area's first outspoken opponent of the big ranchers, and Jick is beset by the usual problems of adolescence along with what passes as a major English Creek region mystery: trying to find out the real life story of drifter

FICTION

ENGLISH CREEK

By Ivan Doig
Atheneum: \$15.95

Stanley Meixell and what Stanley's mysterious ties to the McCaskill family might be.

It is not Doig's style to rush a story. Jick takes his audience through the entire 1939 summer, interspersing hay mowing, mountain adventures, a gloriously-related community Fourth of July picnic, the always intricate relationships between family members, and finally the inevitable forest fire which sets in motion other events of terminal nature.

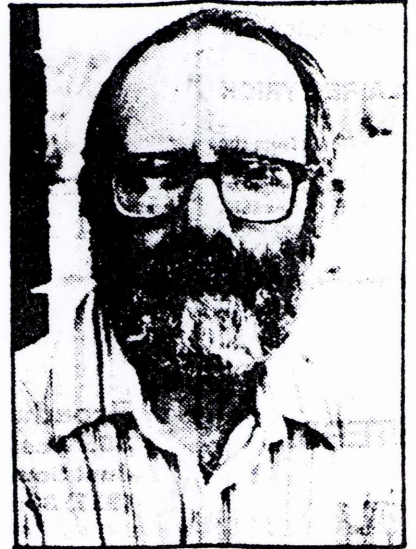
Throughout, Doig captures regional flavor without condescension. If life around English Creek has a certain seasonal pattern, that pattern offers stability and not monotony. The author writes of his region and his people with love, yet remains able to recognize foibles and the limitations of isolation. Jick dreams of going to the state capitol, not Paris. To him they are both simply great cities and probably equally unreachable.

Jealousies and doubledealing are evident, too. Doig makes no attempt to convince readers that all Montanians in 1939 were saints.

English Creek is the first of a planned trilogy of books about the McCaskill family. It will be interesting to see how Doig approaches this task, because for the first time he may be forced to take his characters away from Northwestern surroundings. No doubt he'll prove equal to the task, but he'll be challenged.

Meanwhile, the McCaskill family's summer of 1939 is available to be shared by you. Their company would be hard to improve upon.

(Jeff Guinn is a Star-Telegram writer.)



Ivan Doig



Book depicts classic rite of passage

ISLAND
PACKET
Dec. 3, 1984

"English Creek," by Ivan Doig
(Atheneum, \$15.95).
Review by KAY CADE

"English Creek" depicts the coming of manhood of young Jick McCaskill against the panoramic and almost epic background of the fictitious Two Medicine National Forest in Montana's Big Sky Country. It is an American classic.

Although the principal action covers the summer of 1939, this novel is no "Summer of '42." It grants only a passing nod to an adolescent's in-

herent interest in the physical aspects of sex. Instead, it examines serious questions in the family life of a sensitive, inquisitive, resourceful and intelligent 14-going-on-15-year-old, who tells the story as a husband and father looking back on both his life and the early history of Montana.

The son of a ranger in the National Forest Service and grandson of a Scottish immigrant sheep herder, Jick is extremely conscious of the past and its influence on the present.

(See REVIEW, Page 10-A)

(Continued from Page 9-A)

Jick's rites of passage begin in June, 1939, with what for him are two significant events. First, his older brother Alec rebelliously informs his parents, Varick "Mac" McCaskill and his wife Beth, who speaks in Capital Letters, that he will continue his summer job as a cowboy permanently and marry Leona, a vivacious beauty who has not finished high school.

In so doing Alec overturns his parent's dreams of college for him, attainable only because of years of frugal living. Jick as yet cannot comprehend his older brother's stubborn refusal to consider his parent's hopes, especially since Alec seems more than capable at anything he attempts. This sudden breakdown of family stability profoundly troubles the boy.

The second event is a definite and successful initiation into the hard life of survival in the Rockies. Accompanying his father on the annual trip into Two Medicine National Forest to count sheep pasturing there, the pair meet Stanley Meixell, a family friend Jick remembers from childhood but unaccountably has not seen in years. Despite a puzzling strain in relationships between the elder McCaskill and Meixell, Jick's father sends him to help the other man in his job of campending, delivering supplies to sheepherders in the mountains.

Jick soon finds himself with the onerous job of skinning dead sheep for an inept sheepherder. Within a day Meixell's drinking and being injured force the boy to make one pack trip alone with responsibility for two somewhat incompetent pack horses and their burdens. When one of the horses slips down a steep incline and nearly loses his load, Jick's reaction on sliding down to the horse is a blasphemous obscenity, which, he says, "...wasn't too bad under the circumstance, for the situation called for either hard language or hot tears, and maybe it could be pinpointed that right there I grew out of the bawling age into the cussing one."

That night, reunited in a mountain hut with Meixell, Jick receives for the first time the ministrations of Meixell's physician, "Dr. Al K. Hall." During this session, Jick learns the astonishing fact that

Meixell was the founding ranger of Two Medicine National Forest. Why, Jick wonders, has he descended to his present state?

Next morning, the boy suffers his first hangover, mercifully mitigated by his partner's hot coffee and excellent breakfast. Jick's comment at the end of the trip: "...it's all been an education."

Jick's maturation continues through the eventful summer of 1939, culminating in that act of nature most dreaded by all forest rangers, a forest fire. Combat with the fire and the interplay of human events involving both Alec and Meixell with Jick's father answer some questions and further complicate others, as life itself will do. Jick emerges from the summer more than a few months further into manhood and learns that "They've started another war in Europe." The rest is epilogue, in which the adult narrator ties up all loose ends.

The accomplishment of "English Creek" is Ivan Doig's keen insight into human nature in general and into the developing mind of a sensi-

tive teenager in particular. The glory of it is the visual and very nearly physical experience of the demanding but exhilarating life in the Rockies imparted to the reader.

Doig is master of both his subject and his art. "English Creek" deserves ranking with the classics of Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, Mark Twain, and other masters of the novel in the English language.

Scarl

'English Creek' Brilliantly Captures A Special Time

ENGLISH CREEK by Ivan Doig, Atheneum, publisher. 339 pp. \$15.95.

"English Creek" takes place in Montana in 1939 — as the clouds of the Depression are vanishing and the clouds of war gathering. It is the story of one summer in the life of 14-year-old Jick McCaskill as he approaches adulthood, "old enough to be on the edge of everything and too young to get the middle of any of it."

With a keen eye and fine sense of humor, Jick recounts the events of that summer — from the annual sheep count with his father to a July 4th rodeo and picnic, from long days stacking hay ("It occurs to me: does everybody these days think that hay naturally comes in bales?") to the high drama of an end-of-summer raging forest fire.

And he brings to life people — his forest ranger father, his brother Alec who, against his parents' wishes, wants to forgo college for a girl and cowboy life; Stanley Meixell, a hard-drinking ex-ranger who seems

Gypsy Rose Lee Is Unveiled

GYPSY & ME: At Home and On The Road With Gypsy Rose Lee. By Erik Lee Preminger. Little, Brown. \$17.95. 277 pages.

The son of stripper Gypsy Rose Lee was 6 months old when he started trouping with his mother. Erik Lee Preminger opens "Gypsy & Me" 12 years later in 1956 in a so-so Florida nightclub as his mother categorically states, "I've had it, Erik...I'm 42 years old. Too old to be taking off my clothes in front of strangers."

So Gypsy had to find other means of maintaining her high style. The book by her only child is full of the schemes she chose, including writing, film-making, and hyping her best-selling autobiography and the long-running Broadway play it spawned.

Underlying Preminger's tales of the excitement of assisting his mother is a fierce resentment of her absolute control over him. He writes movingly of the various means she used to subjugate him (including constant cries of poverty) and of his eventual rebellion — which ranged from raiding her deposit box to abusing drugs during his brief stint in college.

Life, however, was not all grim. Preminger recalls ogling "all those red breasts... an adolescent's dream" while at a performance at the Folies in Paris.

"But I was careful to maintain a wise attitude for the photographer," he reports. "The last thing Mother

BOOK BROWSING



with
Bell

mysteriously linked to his father's past; and a host of other colorful characters.

As the story unfolds against the beautiful and awesome Montana landscape, Doig once again brilliantly captures a special time and place.

Ivan Doig grew up in northern Montana along the Rocky Mountain front where "English Creek" takes place. "One of my first memories," he writes, "a few months before my sixth birthday, is of hearing my parents and their neighbors discuss the radio news of the death of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in April, 1945. Thus it is very nearly 40 years now that I have been listening to Montanans. But never with more benefit than during the writing of this novel."

Doig has worked as a ranch hand, newspaperman, magazine editor and writer. His 1978 book "This House of Sky" was nominated for a National Book Award in contemporary thought, and it was also honored with a Christopher Award, the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award.

"Winter Brothers" published in 1980, was also a winner of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award, and was adapted for a public television documentary.

Born in White Sulphur Springs, Mont., in 1939, Doig received a B.S. and M.S. in journalism from Northwestern University and a Ph.D. in history from the University of Washington. He lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol, and is currently at work on the second novel of a trilogy about the fictional McCaskill family and their Two Medicine country.

'STUTTERIN' BOY: The Autobiography of Mel Tillis by Mel Tillis with Walter Wager. Rawson Associates, publisher. 270 pp. including notes and index. Illustrated. \$15.95.

When Mel Tillis was named Entertainer of the Year by the Country Music Association in 1976, the most coveted award in the country music field confirmed his place as one of the most popular and successful entertainers in America.

As a performer, recording artist, songwriter and music publisher, Mel Tillis continues at the top of his field. But as he recounts, the road to success has been far from easy.

Mel was born on Aug. 8, 1932, in Tampa, Fla., and grew up in the small town of Pahokee. He almost died from malaria when he was three years old and after his bout with the disease developed a stutter, although he didn't realize it until he went to school. He also realized very soon that he didn't stutter when he sang.

He was 10 years old when he first heard Bob Wills, the king of western swing, and became a fan immediately. Not long after, he knew what he wanted to do.

This book tells how with an unfailing sense of humor and fierce determination to succeed, Mel went from a little boy picking strawberries for three cents a quart to help his family, to owning a 1,400 acre working farm near Nashville; from a teenager struggling to overcome his stutter, practicing talking alone to Lake Okeechobee, waiting for his stutter to go away, to a recording artist whose many hits are always in the top ten; from a young songwriter who had to supplement his income by driving a cookie truck, to a performer so much in demand he is on the road for 250 days each year.

"Stutterin' Boy" is filled with anecdotes about Mel's hilarious escapades (including the true story behind why he was wearing a skimpy negligee when his wife surprised him in an Atlanta hotel room) and encounters with famous friends and associates such as Burl Ives, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson, Robert Redford and Minnie Pearl, who encouraged him to talk on stage as well as sing.

Mel is totally candid about life on the road (the women, the loneliness, the boredom, the strain it put on his first marriage), his happy marriage to Judy, and his delight in his children and grandchildren.

The book is also a picture of country music, the wheeling and dealing, the feuds and the friendships, from the wild and woolly days of Nashville in the 1950s when on any given night you could find Mel, Willie Nelson, Hank Cochran and a host of other stars hanging out at Tootsie's next to the Grand Ole Opry to the big business it is today.

Walter Wager was a regular visitor to Nashville's music world during the 11 years that he served as director of public relations for ASCAP and public relations counsel to the National Music Publishers' Association. He is the author of some 25 books.

— Mae Woods Bell

TAKEAWAY FOR CHRISTMAS AT SASIOW'S

Top Sheet Tip Sheet

Highlights for the week from Scribners, Atheneum, and Rawson

December 14, 1984

send

WE LOVE SAN FRANCISCO

Why? Because San Francisco loves us! On Sunday December 9, 1984, 4 of our books appeared on the San Francisco Chronicle best seller list as follows:

ENGLISH CREEK by Ivan Doig (Atheneum/October 24, 1984/\$15.95) jumped on the fiction list at #11 (and moves to #10 on the 16th).

PIECES OF MY MIND by Andy Rooney (Atheneum/October 1, 1984/\$12.95) was at #6 on the nonfiction list (and is #3 on the 16th).

MISS MANNERS' GUIDE TO REARING PERFECT CHILDREN by Judith Martin (Atheneum/October 26, 1984/\$19.95) was at #7 (and moves to #8 on the 16th).

EAT TO WIN by Dr. Robert Haas (Rawson/January 10, 1984/\$14.95) was at #5.

MORE DOIG DOINGS

ENGLISH CREEK by Ivan Doig (Atheneum/October 24, 1984/\$15.95) continues as a bestseller in Seattle, too, and is getting raves all around the country. Here is a small sample:

"ENGLISH CREEK...confirms Ivan Doig's reputation as the most eloquent Western writer of our generation."

--San Jose Mercury News

"Firmly anchored in the American West, English Creek nonetheless resembles a 19th Century European novel in its leisurely pace, measured tone and focus on understanding rather than action. In supple, muscular prose as terse and yet redolent with meaning as the speech of Montana, Ivan Doig grapples with universal issue of character and morality."

--Newsday

"Splendid story of a boy's coming of age in the American West.... English Creek...can be read by both young and old with equal pleasure, fascination and excitement....It surely will become a classic."

--Washington Post Book World

"THE FEMALE EGO" IS SHOWING STRENGTH IN THE MIDWEST

Responding to great demand throughout the midwest, Susan Price author of THE FEMALE EGO (Rawson/November 30, 1984/\$15.95) will tour there in January as follows:

MINNEAPOLIS	January 11 (where her parents live)
CHICAGO	January 14
ST. LOUIS	January 15, THE SALLY JESSE RAPHAEL SHOW, (KSDK TV)
DETROIT	January 16, KELLY AND COMPANY (WXYZ TV), <u>Detroit Free Press</u>
CLEVELAND	January 17, MORNING EXCHANGE (WEWS TV)
PITTSBURGH	January 18, PITTSBURGH 2DAY (KDKA TV)

Anniston, Ala. Star 12/16/84

'English Creek' evocative story

"ENGLISH CREEK," by Ivan Doig: Atheneum, New York, 1984, \$15.95.

Young Jick McCaskill turned 15 late in the summer of 1939, and grew up a good bit in the process, but this poignant, believable story of an adolescent and his family is only the framework, not the heart, of Ivan Doig's beautiful second novel, "English Creek."

For it is Doig's lovingly detailed picture of a small ranching community deep in the mountains of his native Montana that makes the book extraordinary, an eloquent recreation of a way of life he recalls vividly from his own early years.

As Jick and his family face the first, inevitable fraying of the bonds that have held them together, the whole world in which they live is gradually unfolded before us, seen through the eyes of a bright, knowledgeable young boy who is inclined to ask too many questions for his own good.

THOSE OF US WHO remember with pleasure the author's now-classic "This House of Sky" will not be surprised at this fine new book — Doig's unpretentious but crystalline prose is the stuff of folk poetry, as beautiful as the mountain setting and as down-to-earth as the hard-working men and women who love high Montana enough to fight for their living.

Young Jick McCaskill, even at 14, is already a man to be reckoned with, one large enough in frame and



Doig

soul to hold his own in any company.

His father, Varick, is the Forest Service ranger for the English Creek section of Two Medicine National Forest, responsible for the welfare of the tree-rich land and the farms and ranches that ring it; his outspoken mother, Beth, carries her part of the load capably and imaginatively without losing her prickly individuality.

JICK (HIS ODD name is a card game term) is still perfectly happy with his horse and the busy, interesting life his father shares with him, but his 18-year-old brother, Alec, is having serious growing pains.

A boy with phenomenal math ability, Alec is scheduled for college this fall, and has been working as a cowboy on a large ranch nearby to earn tuition money.

But now he has fallen in love, and has announced suddenly to his horrified family that he and Leona are going to be married right away — college is off.

HIS PARENTS, remembering their own penniless early marriage, are shocked and angry; Alex, handsome and proud as a young god, is defiant; and Jick is caught somewhere between them, exasperated at his brother for upsetting their peaceful life, but already feeling the stirrings of his own natural declaration of independence.

Still close to his parents, Jick goes on about his usual summer business, riding Varick's rounds with him, beginning to learn some of the secrets of the grown folks of their acquaintance, puzzling over the relationship between the past and the present.

There's that drunken old camppack rider, Stanley

Meixell, for instance, an enigma if there ever was one.

AT HIS FATHER'S unexplained insistence, Jick joins Meixell as his helper on what should have been a routine pack trip, a ride that eventually challenges all the boy's wits.

And he gets wind of the fact, from the close-mouthed reactions of the adults, that Meixell has somehow been associated with the Forest Service years ago.

When the drying heat of late summer comes and the dreaded forest fires begin to break out, the crisis brings an all-out effort, and Jick, proving himself the man he already feels he is, has a chance to unravel this and other mysteries.

But while Alec bucks like a bronco and Jick contemplates his own growing complexities, pre-War Montana is unfolding all around them, as Ivan Doig shows us that wild, beautiful world.

IN THE COURSE of the relatively simple story, we ride miles through the countryside, go to a rodeo, attend a Fourth of July picnic, enjoy a barn dance, and watch as desperate firefighters battle to put out a serious mountainside blaze.

And beside us is the author — interpreting, explaining, pointing out the landmarks, introducing the dozens of people who in the course of the story will become three-dimensional personalities.

Gently-paced and infinitely real, "English Creek," the first volume in a trilogy about the McCaskill family and the Two Medicine Country, is for leisurely reading and reflection.

—BARBARA HODGE HALL

DENVER, COLO.
ROCKY MT. NEWS
D. 205,415—S. 227,100
DENVER METROPOLITAN AREA

DEC 28 1964

'English Creek'

Novel captures the West during a summer in '30s

English Creek.

By Ivan Doig. Atheneum. 333 pages.
\$15.95.

By William Dieter

HERE'S a perfect antidote for winter weekends.

It's a rambling, carefree story of one adventurous summer in the life of 14-year-old Jick McCaskill.

The place is the Two Medicine country along the Rocky Mountain front in Montana. The time is 1939.

Jick's a sort of western Holden Caulfield (he'd be Huck Finn but he's got both parents and they're too sensible to allow it), who's old enough to be on the edge of things and keen-eyed enough to tell us what he sees and how he feels about them.

It's a warm book. It's about roots and growing up. There's a conflict of



Ivan Doig

sorts — the McCaskill family's reaction to older brother Alec's career and marriage plans — but if you don't feel grabbed and shaken by it, don't fret.

This isn't a "gripper" book, it's a marvelously poignant prose poem to a time that is gone.

Doig continues his unique feel for language, what it can mean, what it will do, and his reproduction of the particular patois of rural Montana is faultless.

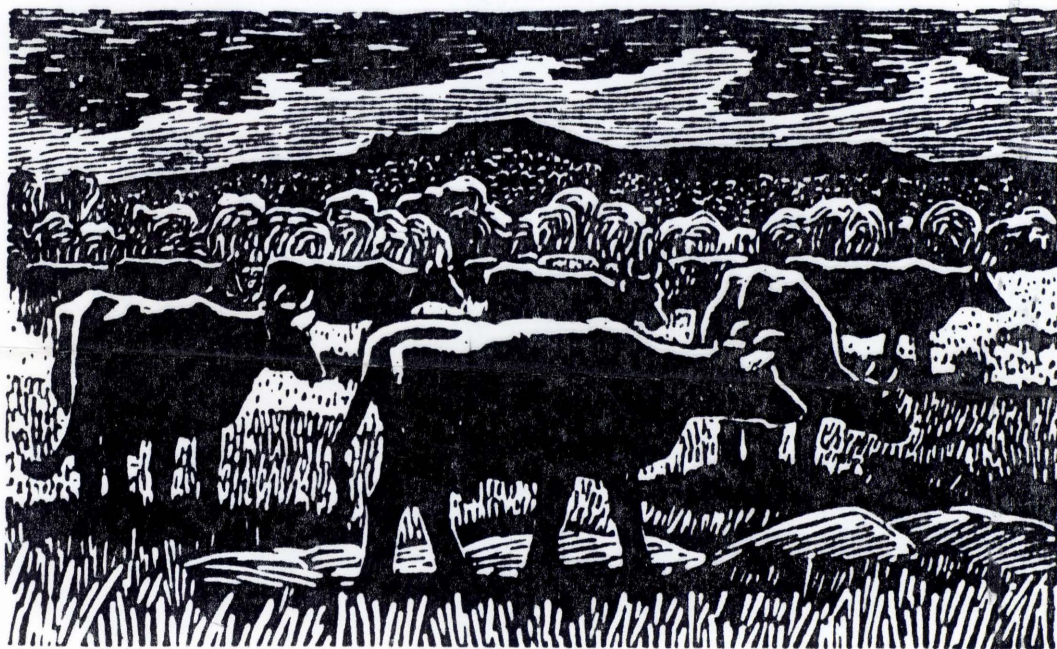
Nor does he rely on the customary suspense devices to pull you into his story. You gladly keep reading because you can't wait for him to introduce a new Two Medicine character.

Like Toussaint Rennie, for example, whose tan face "had crinkled everywhere it could, like a gigantic walnut."

Or the failed farmer Good Help Hebner, whose forehead was marked in its center with "a kind of gully which widened as it went down, as if his nose had avalanched out of there."

Doig is a true chronicler of a real West. His style is full of the earth, full of his beloved Montana, his prose as sharp as the crack of a saddle on a winter day.

William Dieter's new novel "Beyond the Mountain" is due in January. He lives in Denver.



BOOKS

Wild Montana country, a boy coming of age: ingredients for a good, old-fashioned novel

By James Kaufmann.

English Creek, by Ivan Doig. New York: Atheneum. 339 pp. \$15.95.

There are two main characters in Ivan Doig's "English Creek." One is 14-year-old Jick McCaskill: He narrates the novel, and much of the story concerns his coming of age. The other character looms over, under, and around this book; it is the land, the Two Medicine country in western Montana.

Doig has always given land and landscape loving attention. In "This House of Sky" (1978), "Winter Brothers" (1980), and "The Sea Runners" (1982) he demonstrated his devotion to place, and in this novel, the first of a projected trilogy about the McCaskill family, he does so again.

Somewhere just past the middle of "English Creek," Jick is telling us of his ride each morning to put up hay with his uncle, Pete Reese. It is just before dawn when he starts:

The ford north of the ranger station Pony and I would cross; if there was enough moon the wild roses along the creek could be seen, pale crowds of them; and in a few minutes of climbing we came atop the bench of land which divides the two creek drainages. Up there, at that brink of dawn hour, the world revealed all its edges. Dark lines of the tops of buttes and benches to the north, toward the Two Medicine River and the Blackfeet Reservation.

The Sweetgrass Hills bumping up far on the eastern horizon like five dunes of black

Please see **ENGLISH CREEK** next page

ENGLISH CREEK from preceding page

sand. The timbered crest of Breed Butte standing up against the stone mountain wall of the west. What trick of light it is I can't really say, but everything looked as if drawn in heavy strokes, with the final shade of night penciled in wherever there was a gulch or coulee.

Jick is only coming into what we might call an awareness of adult life. His older brother, Alec, has had a fight with his parents and, instead of going to college, is planning to be a cowboy. There are still plenty of them around Montana at this time — 1939. Alec takes off to ride for the Double W Ranch and to think about marrying the lovely Leona Zane, while Jick spends the summer haying, helping his father, Varick, occasionally visiting friends in the nearest town, and generally becoming conscious of curiosities of human nature.

Jick knows the simple pleasures of hard work, day-dreaming, and special days like the Fourth of July, a holiday Doig renders as an extraordinary scene that includes a stunning speech by Jick's mother, Beth, on the history of the land they inhabit.

The end of this novel mustn't be disclosed if a reader is to enjoy the book to the fullest, but one can say it is dramatic, and it unfurls a large lesson for Jick, who comes to know himself through a better understanding of his mother and father.

"English Creek" is old-fashioned in the best sense of the word: Doig is concerned with telling a story that entertains, and he is also concerned with the novel's moral and ethical implications. He mounts no soapbox, however. Doig is a regional writer. He is committed to the Pacific Northwest, and he draws it as lovingly as Thomas Hardy drew Wessex and as accurately as Raymond Chandler limned Los Angeles. He deserves to be better known. If you haven't read him, consider "English Creek" the place to start, then work backward.



TACOMA, WA.
NEWS-TRIBUNE

D. 109,000 — S. 112,000

TACOMA METROPOLITAN AREA

DEC 30 1984

Doig's story of Montana sheep ranch family skillfully told

English Creek

Ivan Doig

Atheneum, \$15.95

Ivan Doig puts his words together as though he were stringing perfectly matched pearls. He is a master of description and a giant at characterization.

These skills are what make *English Creek* worth reading.

Set in Montana's Rocky Mountain Front in 1939, it is the first novel of a trilogy about the McCaskill family.

This first effort is almost entirely about the summer of the 14th year of Jick McCaskill, son of a sheep rancher who doubles as a forest ranger.

Jick's true name is John Angus McCaskill, but the name "Johnny" didn't quite fit and a family friend said he looked like a "jick" (the jack that shares the same color as the jack of trumps).

The hard country life is depicted skillfully in the eyes of a 14-year old boy in the manner such a

youngster would see it.

Meanwhile, readers meet Jick's family. His father is a rabid New Dealer and, in the humor of the Roosevelt era, refers to the family outhouse as "Republican Headquarters."

His mother is quiet, unassuming and with a dry sense of humor which she imparts on occasion.

Jick's brother, Alec, 18, is caught up in a quarrel with the family. He wants to become a cowboy — persona non grata on a sheep ranch. Alec ends up leaving home.

It is against this background that Jick is shown growing up.

Doig, who now lives in Seattle, has worked as a ranch hand, magazine editor and writer as well as a stint as a newspaperman.

English Creek is fictional. There is no such place as this, and there were no McCaskills or the Two Medicine country. But Doig makes all of this come to life.

— JACK PYLE

Doig, Ivan
English Creek
Atheneum, 339p., \$15.95

Best Sellers
1/85

Ivan Doig's *English Creek* is a story of transitions. Set in western Montana in the summer of 1939, its primary concern is the coming of age of Jick McCaskill, the son of a forest ranger. Jick, rapidly approaching his fifteenth birthday, finds his whole view of the world altered when his once close family is torn apart by his older brother's stubborn insistence that he go on to college. At the same time, Jick begins to learn about responsibility when he becomes more involved in his father's work with the Forest Service, and he acquires a sense of the history of the region, the Two Medicine country (in Montana "country" can be synonymous with "area"), from the numerous tales of the people he encounters. His own transition foreshadows the much greater transition that the sweep of technology and world war will shortly set in motion across the world and throughout the country, and even in his own tiny corner of Montana.

Doig manages to write a novel which, in spite of a rather slow pace, effectively holds the reader's attention. It is narrated by Jick himself in a highly colloquial first person, in a style that seems both authentic and sophisticated. The loose, rambling structure creates the impression of someone who is simply describing his experiences rather than trying to create an action-oriented story. Consequently, characterization and description are more important than the plot. The book is full of rich details of everyday life, the history of the area and its physical appearance. The wealth of gracefully explored detail forms a colorful still life which serves as a backdrop to the conflict in the foreground.

Ivan Doig grew up in western Montana, and derived his fictional Two Medicine country both from his own experience and from extensive research. *English Creek* is a sensitive coming-of-age story as well as a portrait of a society still looking to its frontier past, but about to be engulfed by the future. The result is both highly personal and deeply engaging.

JAMES M. MILLIKEN, JR., *College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, Massachusetts.*



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JULY 6, 1989

BOOKS

By Roger Harris

'To Get Rich . . . ' an eye-opener on China

TO GET RICH IS GLORIOUS: China in the Eighties

by Orville Schell. Pantheon, \$15.95

American fascination with China continues unabated. Part of this stems simply from the new open door policy adopted by this giant nation that was largely closed to Western influence and Western inspection for more than a quarter century. But part of it stems from the unusual and intriguing actions of the Chinese themselves.

For example, just a few days ago, an important Chinese official said it was high time that the Chinese put away their chopsticks, which they had been using from some 3,500 years, and start growing accustomed to Western-style forks and knives. Paradoxically, the opening to the West in China has been reciprocated to some extent by an opening to the East here which has led to interest in things and customs Chinese, including the use of chopsticks by some young American diners in Chinese restaurants. The thought of one day walking into such an emporium and seeing all the Americans dining with chopsticks while all the Chinese diners used their knives and forks is the sort of imaginative flight of fancy that makes the China story so fascinating.

Imagination is all very well, but when we want to move from it to fact, we must go to Orville Schell. Schell is an excellent journalist who has written well on many subjects—but when it comes to China he is considerably more than that. He is quite likely the best journalist on Chinese life.

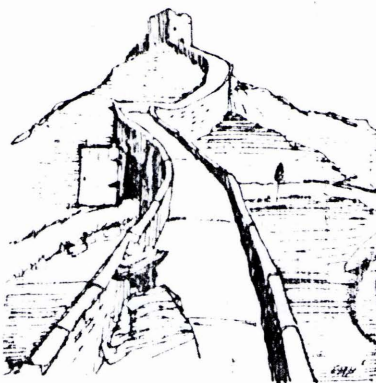
With all the twists and turns in Chinese policy, it is difficult for a book to provide up-to-the-minute information, but Schell comes close to it in this long and fascinating report, most of which appeared previously in "The New Yorker" magazine. The great virtue of Schell is that he not only explains what is happening but he also tells why it is happening and what it means. This is what great journalism is all about but only a writer like Schell, who has traveled frequently to China and has many friends there, is capable of it.

The changes in China go a good deal deeper than ideology or even attitude, Schell notes. For example, one of the most popular tourist attractions in China today is The Great Wall of China. Except, this Great Wall of China, which has been fascinating both the Chinese and the visitors, is not the ancient structure but a giant new hotel, with all Western conveniences, that is named for it, Schell notes.

The Great Wall is just one of scores of new Western-style hotels under construction, and a small part of the over-all effort being made by the Chinese government to lure foreign business and tourism to China with first-class Western-style tourist facilities, which now include such amenities as golf courses, theme parks, deluxe trains featuring opulent German-made sleeping cars and private dining coaches, hunting safaris to bag wild game such as boar, deer, bear and lynx in the virgin forest of Manchuria (some of the few such areas remaining in China), luxury cruises and expensive trekking and climbing expeditions into remote mountainous regions such as the Tibetan plateau or the Karakorum and Pamir mountains.

If these Westernisms and modernisms seem confusing to outsiders, imagine how much more so they must be to the Chinese people, who only a few years ago were committed to the most austere of socialist paths. While it is true that the average Chinese citizen's life is not directly affected by these innovations, Schell thinks it is only a question of time before the Chinese start yearning for some fun, Western style. In fact, some of the interviews Schell conducted showed an unusual amount of hedonistic spirit among the young Chinese.

Schell's reporting is accurate and his interpretation is intelligent and thoughtful. Despite repeti-



suggest, at the end of this most provocative study, that the future of China may be more in theme parks and grand hotels than in Mao jackets and socialist pamphlets. Far more than seemed imaginable, it is we in the United States who may be shaping the China of the future.

Beklan's pride

MAIA

by Richard Adams. Knopf, \$19.95

Richard Adams is a British naturalist who, several years ago, wrote a first novel about some rabbits that was both an enormous best-seller and a charming and fascinating read. He followed that book—"Watership Down"—with another good one, "Shar-dik," in which he switched his subject from rabbits to bears.

This extremely long (1,072 pages) novel is a fantasy of another kind, of human beings and of the mythical empire of Beklan. His protagonist is Maia, a young peasant woman who is subjugated into slavery but who becomes a true heroine, important to the welfare of the empire. She saves the army from defeat, even though it costs her the life of her loved one.

The language that Adams uses to tell his tale is classic melodramatic, with a plethora of passages such as this: "If only she had known anything at all of Zen-Kurel—simply his whereabouts! If she could have been sure of nothing more than that he was alive, then, she thought, she would also have known her answer. But to know nothing—nothing—"

Adams has always been a master of the narrative and he does a good job here of hooking the reader. While not so intriguing a work as "Watership Down," this remains a most entertaining one.

Graft forever

BIBES

by John T. Noonan Jr. Macmillan, \$29.95

Bribery may not be the oldest crime but it must go back nearly to the dawn of what we call civilization. John T. Noonan Jr., a legal scholar who is considered the nation's most authoritative writer upon bribery, has written an enormously thorough study (839 pages) of its past, present and future.

Noonan begins matters with a tale stemming from the year 2400 B.C. in which Urukagina, king of Lagash, made a treaty with his god, Ningirsu, which might be described as the first recorded bribe. The work not only takes us right up to some of the more scandalous present bribery cases, but considers the future of the bribe.

The conclusion by the author is somewhat sur-

to be a constant in human behavior. But Noonan sees a combination of law enforcement and human nature eventually ending bribery as we know it.

"I venture a prediction," he writes. "As slavery was once a way of life and now, whatever analogues in economic duress remain, has become obsolete and incomprehensible, so the practice of bribery in the central form of the exchange of payment for official action will become obsolete."

Big sky

ENGLISH CREEK

by Ivan Doig. Atheneum, \$15.95

For reasons not evident, there has been a spate of novels of late set in the state of Montana. The best of these has been Thomas McGuane's "Something to Be Desired," a hilarious tale of western-style love. But the fine Big Sky novelist Ivan Doig, a Montana-born writer who now lives in Seattle, has also produced an excellent novel.

"English Creek" is set in Montana in 1939, at the end of the Depression and near the beginning of World War II. But all that is far from the life of the novel's protagonist, Jim McKaskill, a 14-year-old boy who has a summer to remember, from sheep herding to a rodeo, to hay stacking to the summer's—and the book's—culmination. A raging forest fire.

Doig captures the language and feeling of country life, in passages such as this about the men whose life is haying: "Long Mike and Plain Mike and a sort of a gorilla of a guy who I figured must be one of the two stackmen of this gang were among the yearners for town. Plain Mike surprised me by being the one to propose that a game of cards settle the matter. But then, you just never know who in a crew will turn out to be the tiger rider."

With this book, Doig augments his reputation as one of the best of the new group of Western writers.

A new voice

OBLIQUE PRAYERS

by Denise Levertov. New Directions, \$12 hardcover; \$5.95 paperback

Denise Levertov has long been one of the major figures in contemporary American poetry. This collection is distinguished, not only because it contains some of her finest lyric work but because it introduces, through her masterful translation, the work of a fine French lyric poet, Jean Joubert.

Joubert's intensely personal lyrics are sometimes compared to those of Miss Levertov. There are 14 lyrics by Joubert in this collection, with the original French version and the translation on facing pages. Joubert describes nature and ties it effectively to human nature, as in this passage, from "Are We Ruled by the Wind?"

*In the newborn orchard each morning
I ponder. And sense the vibration
of bonds that wed me
to the great host of invisible stars,
to the sunken moon,
to the sun whose laughter
flushes the hill with crimson.*

The lyrics of Miss Levertov are also among her best, making this a most rewarding collection.

Briefly noted

• "Mirror Images" by Linda Gray Sexton (Doubleday, \$15.95) is a novel about the strange relationship between an actress and her daughter and the

In Short

FICTION

ENGLISH CREEK. By Ivan Doig. (Atheneum, \$15.95.) Old-timer Jick McCaskill, the narrator of this novel, leisurely recounts the story of his own coming-of-age summer at age 14 in northern Montana; along the way he describes and glorifies such Western traditions as rodeos, square dances, long days stacking hay and even sheep-counting expeditions. It's the summer of 1939, and Jick's older brother Alex announces that rather than becoming the first McCaskill to attend college (a goal toward which Jick's parents have sacrificed for years) he's going to become, instead, a bona fide cowboy in the old tradition. Jick feels betrayed and confused by Alex's decision. In fact, Jick's summer as portrayed by Ivan Doig (author of "This House of Sky," nominated in 1978 for the National Book Award in contemporary thought) is filled with confusion and anxiety. He's just beginning to notice girls; a number of deadly forest fires are breaking out (and his father, a forest ranger, must battle the deadliest fire of all); the eagerly-anticipated Fourth of July dance turns into a brawl (with Jick participating); and a mysterious, grizzled old cowboy named Stanley suddenly appears and keeps appearing in Jick's life. Two things make this nostalgic western novel especially delightful: old Jick's idiosyncratic theories (thrown in, as he reminisces, whenever he darn well pleases) about everything from in-laws to General Custer; and young Jick's reluctance to come of age, coupled with his precocious understanding that that's exactly what he's doing. Readers will also delight in Mr. Doig's evocation of the Montana landscape through language that is tender, lyrical and forceful.

—Janice Eldus

RIDERS OF THE LONG ROAD. By Stephen Brannford. (Doubleday, \$15.95.) Reconciliation — sons to fathers, white men to Indians, slaves to former masters, doubters to God — is the theme in this historical novel about Methodism in post-Revolutionary America. Central to the intricate plot are Jonathan Barratt, the young scion of a Kentucky landholding company, and Silas Will, a renegade sinner turned wilderness preacher who "believed God had personally summoned him to a life-and-death ride against evil." For Silas, evil resides in whisky ("the devil's drool"), unredeemed souls and a murderous villain by the name of Jacques LeFevre, who wreaks havoc among Silas's hard-working Kentucky flock and is the object of his righteous revenge. Ironically, evil for Jonathan is personified by Silas the preacher, who is actually Jonathan's illegitimate father (a fact known to Jonathan but not to Silas). As the story unfolds, the two men travel from the luxurious hot springs haven of Bath, Va., along Daniel Boone's Wilderness Trail and into the lush, untamed land of the Cumberland Valley. Ever present, in addition to the hardships they suffer, are the tensions caused by their peculiar family bond. The book strains toward a grand finale involving settlers held as hostages, rebel slaves, loyal Powhatan Indians and LeFevre's dastardly gang. Ultimately the religious torch is passed on from father to son, and Jonathan attends the first conference of itinerant Methodist preachers in America. "Riders of the Long Road" commemorates with gusto the fervor of belief that led to that historic conference on Dec. 12, 1784.

the country into a state of furious self-criticism." With the Depression piling up social casualties at home, and the overseas dominions, including Australia, growing restive, England was starving for a boost to the national morale. Englishmen — from unemployed miners to Government ministers — aggressively pressured the cricket team to supply it. Judging his players incapable of beating the Australian stars head-on, the team's saturnine captain, Douglas Jardine, insists on a ruthless strategy of "bodyline bowling" — the cricket equivalent of ordering a potential bean ball on every pitch. Relentlessly plunking their opponents with 95-mile-per-hour hardballs, the English bully their way to victory, in the process shedding all pretense of cricket as a gentleman's pastime. "Bodyline" is concerned with more than simply cricket's fall from a state of innocence, of course. The book is also about the misuse of international sports as "merely war continued by other means," but Mr. Wheeler does not roam far afield or strain unduly after such larger themes. An amalgam of adroitly recounted play-by-play action and less compelling off-the-field vignettes, "Bodyline" stays anchored in the game of cricket, whose terms and rules are explained by a glossary. Readers susceptible to the excitement of sports will enjoy the novel's vivid feel for the game; others might do well to wait for the film.

—Richard Nalley

THE ROMANOV CONNECTION. By William M. Green. (Beaufort, \$16.95.) A heroic attempt to save Czar Nicholas II and the royal family from their inexorable fate is the theme that propels this neatly condensed and fast-paced drama. Against the backdrop of the Bolshevik Revolution and World War I, Charles Aldonby, a British officer who frequented the Romanov court in earlier days of imperial splendor, becomes the connection for an ill-fated rescue attempt that involves the Czar's cousin, the King of England. But the connection that really holds the novel together is romance. After Aldonby falls in love with the Czar's daughter Marie, the stage is set for a romantic thriller that shifts from St. Petersburg to London, then back to Russia for exploits of derring-do amid the revolution and through a deadly winter before the tale winds to its foreseeable and tragic climax. (Flashes of "Doctor Zhivago.") Readers will be surprised, though hardly impressed, by William M. Green's gratuitous attempt to make his novel offer

meaningful insight though weakened by cliché and his esoteric Romanov Connection. On the whole it is a

NICODEMUS. By S. Press, \$19.95.) After Alexander has come the life of Michelangelo the Florentine, "were published first 60 years of the artist's life. The last Years of Michelangelo, in which his earlier volumes we can only be called first person, by Michelangelo's closest associates, a peculiarly inappreciable history's masterpiece. Mr. Alexander dropping names as without explanation mind. This does section concerning even Renaissance Italy, is not enough to make most dedicated students religious rivalry.

THE RAGING OF THE \$17.95.) In the context of the British Navy since the antagonist describes traditional song reflects much of what is a realistic scene, best fascinating way. navy and the author's this dim view of the Jannaway, whose naval career. Stevenson duty not only to his

Houses and Barns

Is that little house by the side of the road, flashing by as you speed down the highway, a Flemish cottage or a Hudson Valley Dutch house? If you are in northern New Jersey or parts of Dutchess County, N.Y., it is probably the former, since that is where Flemish cottages are concentrated. But there are nongeographical clues, and in this case a quick glance at the gambrel roof should do it — if the gambrel is strictly angular, it is Dutch; if gracefully curved, Flemish. Both types of house are among the five kinds of Dutch house catalogued in "Houses," the first volume of **WOOD, BRICK, AND STONE: The North American Settlement Landscape** (University of Massachusetts, two volumes, \$30 each) by Allen G.



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FEB 11 1987

Circuit rider's story view of history

RIDERS OF THE LONG ROAD
by Stephen Bransford. Doubleday &
Co. \$15.95.

By Robert Conrad

"Riders of the Long Road" is an eye-opener to a little-known part of American history.

Most of us know little about circuit-riding preachers in early America. They rode shoulder to shoulder with explorers, soldiers and early settlers. They spread their gospel wherever a new frontier was pushing ahead. They lived mostly outdoors, were preyed on by Indians, tolerated ridicule and fought exhaustion, disease and highwaymen.

On horseback they covered from 4,000 to 6,000 miles a year for an annual salary of \$65. So rigorous was the pace that one-fourth of them were dead within five years.

Nearly half of them died before they reached the age of 30. Their story is one of immeasurable sacrifice for the sake of spiritual welfare.

Author Stephen Bransford, the son of a lumberjack preacher, grew up in remote Oregon communities, so he has a feeling for his writing task. His fiction tale concerns a circuit riding lay preacher serving the pioneers around Cumberland Gap, Va., and part of Kentucky.

It's a moody, moving book with strong allegorical undertones. In pioneer America, Johnny Appleseed

planted apples, but that "old-time religion" was planted by circuit riders such as we find in "Riders of the Long Road."

ENGLISH CREEK by Ivan Doig.
Atheneum. \$15.95.

"English Creek" is about a 14-year-old boy named Jick growing up in Montana's Big Sky country in 1939. His dad is a forest ranger and Jick takes on responsible tasks to help him, such as making an annual sheep count, fighting forest fires, stacking hay and digging an out-

house pit. These can be rewarding country chores to read about.

Ivan Doig is one of those rare writers who transport you into their pages. You are there, in the action, with the sights and smells and the feelings.

In "English Creek" there are no good guys or bad guys, no sex or violence to speak of. It is family drama, everyday life Montana style, people doing their jobs, but, like a Norman Rockwell painting, warm to watch.

Doig's keen perceptions and stream of consciousness narration of the little things and thoughts that make up our lives is great at holding the reader's interest. He has captured the flavor of speech and life in Montana the way Mark Twain did with his beloved "Hannibal."

(Robert Conrad is a free-lance reviewer who lives in Shaler.)

BOOK REVIEW

Burton on Books

English Creek by Ivan Doig. Atheneum Press. Fiction. 339 pages. \$15.95.

Montana and "Big Sky" have become synonymous terms. In this beautifully written novel the author brings both to you in its description of soaring mountains, deep forests and openness.

In a switch from the conventional novelistic format, the author does not establish a definite conflict that is resolved as the plot unwinds. Instead, this is a summer in the 1930s as told by an adult who remembers the scenes and action as he experienced them as a likable, perceptive, and inquisitive 14-year-old boy.

In the telling by Jick McCaskill, you learn much about this rugged country and about the sturdy, independent types who live there. The area is sheep country. At one point Jick, whose father is a forest ranger, helps out in sheep herding as a portion of his summer working period. And when Jick has finished that chore, he engages for weeks in the tough task of gathering in the hay. If you're not a farm type, you'll be amazed by what's in-

involved in what seems to be a simple agricultural function.

Your education will be further advanced when you read about a huge forest fire that breaks out in the mountainous slopes that are within the area Jick's father patrols and protects. Once more you learn some interesting lessons from an author whose life has been spent in the Montana area and whose writing reflects his love of the land and his knowledge of the people and events taking place there.

While most of the action centers around the mountain folk at work there is a memorable section of the book that tells of a big picnic that is climaxed by a rodeo, described in accurate detail. And holding the story together is the intertwining of the lives of the McCaskill family with each other and with their neighbors. This is a heart-warming book that pictures Americans as you like to think of them and tells of a big, challenging and beautiful part of America — the Big Sky country.

PHILIP WARD BURTON

QUICK BIBS SPECIAL: A good book these days is hard

Popular opinion has it that books just aren't much good anymore. Whether one talks to curmudgeonly English professors who think that *Ulysses* was our last good novel, or to alternative press advocates who are convinced that today's conglomerate-owned trade houses can't tell books from dollar signs, or to struggling authors who face the Catch-22 of no publisher without an agent/no agent without having been published, the message is the same: books as we know and love them are in danger. And yet, that frail, constantly beleaguered, but somehow resilient species—the good book—usually finds a way to survive, whether its would-be assassin is a computer or a conglomerate.

There is no denying that the doom-sayers, with the possible exception of the curmudgeonly professor, have a point. The obstacles encountered by William Kennedy in finding a home for his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Ironweed* (it was ultimately published by Viking after Saul Bellow interceded on the author's behalf) are eloquent testimony to the problems even established writers can have in selling their work; and anyone who has browsed a few publishers' catalogs lately knows that ephemera—from dead cat joke collections to celebrity exercise books—have become an uncontrollable malignancy. Yes, there is definitely more trash out there today, but does that necessarily mean that there are fewer good books, or that the bad will always engulf the good, like an evil version of Pac-Man? It may offend our sensibilities, but perhaps dead cat books can coexist peacefully with William Kennedy novels. It was Yeats, after all, who observed that "Love has pitched his mansion in/The place of excrement." If love, why not books?

Only time will tell if Pac-Man or Yeats's Crazy Jane provides the more appropriate metaphor for the health of the trade publishing industry, but a fast glance at the recently published books listed below makes at least one thing clear: generalizing about publishing trends is very tricky business. Judging from this selection of decidedly uncommercial but thoroughly captivating reading, it would appear that the accountants haven't yet taken over the book world.

The list includes novel written by veteran fiction writers whose earlier books have never sold particularly well (thus confounding the popular notion that authors whose first works don't sell will be promptly dropped by their bottom-line-obsessed publishers); it also includes "midlist" nonfiction with no particular commercial potential published by large, cor-

porate-owned houses, some of whom are usually associated with splashy best-sellers (another stereotype shattered); and, finally, it includes distinguished books from an impressive array of quality-minded independent publishers (not just the venerable Godine, but also several precocious new kids on the block, among them Carcanet, Algonquin, and Graywolf). The oft-predicted demise of the individualistic, independent publisher would seem to be still another catastrophe whose time has not yet come.

A general reader's biggest problem these days is not the dearth of good books, but the difficulty in finding them. Bombarded by subway billboards and television commercials proclaiming the arrival of yet another weighty tome on thin thighs, it is no wonder that many readers give up in despair.

One of our missions as librarians, of course, is to provide literary sustenance for those shell-shocked victims of trash overkill. It may not be the best of worlds, but there are good books out there, and some of them might even be hiding under a rock owned by Gulf & Western.

Bates, H.E. *My Uncle Silas*. Graywolf, 1984, \$14. (0-915308-62-2, 84-91625)

Small publishers often carve a place for themselves by rediscovering forgotten works. This captivating collection is a case in point: Bates is an acknowledged short-story master, but this volume, originally published in Britain, has never appeared in the U.S. The interlocking stories are testament to the author's ability to evoke character and mood in brief space.

Caufield, Catherine. *In the Rainforest: Report from a Strange, Beautiful, Imperiled World*. Knopf, 1985, \$16.95. (0-394-52701-1, 84-47644)

Although Caufield's survey of tropical rainforests has a definite ecological point to make, it is not the kind of strident tract that creates controversy. Instead, it is an evocative portrayal of the fertile beauty and essential mystery that defines both the rainforests and the people who live in them.

Cole, K.C. *Sympathetic Vibrations: Reflections on Physics as a Way of Life*. Morrow, 1984, \$15.95. (0-688-03968-5, 84-11583)

Science writing for the general reader is thriving today as never before (cf. "Quick-Bibs," *American Libraries*, Oct. 1984), and this engaging essay collection continues the trend. By answering such seemingly simple questions as "What color is air?" Cole unveils the complex relationship between the science of physics and the actual physical world.

Doig, Ivan. *English Creek*. Atheneum, 1984, \$15.95. (0-689-11478-8, 84-45051)



A subtle, comic novel about a man who loves life but craves order.

Doig is among that group of talented writers whose books rarely appear on bestseller lists but who develop a loyal following of readers, especially in public libraries. His latest book is the coming-of-age story of a 14-year-old boy growing up in Montana just prior to World War II. The real hero is the Big Sky country itself, from its hayfields to the grandeur of its towering mountains.

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MA 1985

BROWSING

Mister White Eyes

By Herbert Gold
Arbor House, \$16.95

Ralph Merian is an aging journalist, absorbed in his professional persona, alienated from himself. This novel explores the old bromide that to truly love others you must first learn to love yourself. Merian is forced to self-discovery through his tragic and bittersweet relationships with a British divorcee and with his psychotic younger brother. Herbert Gold gives, as well, a compelling picture of the life of a journalist. It's a beautifully fashioned book, with elegantly written prose.

Basepaths

By Marc Gunther
Scribners, \$14.95

The glitter of being a Major League baseball star is deceptive. What most fans fail to appreciate is the struggle it takes in the low minor leagues to get to the top, the brief moments of success, and the countless unknowns who never make it. Gunther probes the heartache of the professional athlete through interviews with 10 baseball players, ranging from a beginning youth to current stars to those who have retired. There is a common tread binding them all—the combination of hope, confidence and sacrifice, and the book successfully describes what an athlete's life is really like.

English Creek

By Ivan Doig
Atheneum, \$15.95

Ivan Doig, author of "This House of Sky" and "The Sea Runners," here begins a tri-

gy about the McCaskill family in Montana in the late 1930s. The narrator remembers his 15th summer in his hometown of English Creek, and the book becomes not just a Western tale but a classic coming-of-age novel. The tone is totally authentic; Doig combines all of what is best about America in his story: the humor, the landscape, the ancestry of the characters, the poetry, the customs of a young frontier. There is nostalgia for the old 19th Century days; there is also the energy of a horseback-riding youngster who has "seen almost all the dawns" of his life, who learns of the mysteries and courage and sorrows in the human heart. The only solace in finishing this wonderful novel is the anticipation of two more to come.

The Snow Ball

By A.R. Gurney Jr.
Arbor House, \$15.95

A.R. Gurney Jr., who wrote "The Dining Room" and other acclaimed plays, shows that he has an equally deft hand with fiction in "The Snow Ball." Gurney spins a gentle satire on WASP customs that has overtones of Updike and Auchincloss, but is lighter than either. The Old Guard in Buffalo, N.Y., plans to revive a traditional social event, the Snow Ball, in a landmark downtown hotel on the same evening that a concerned citizens group of radically mixed backgrounds is throwing an ethnic fundraiser. The WASPS are seen as an endangered species, the latest ethnic minority whose very weaknesses and snobisms are rather endearing. This is an amusing and wry chronicle of the universality of social rituals.

The West of the senses

ENGLISH CREEK

By Ivan Doig. Athenum. 359 pp. \$15.95.

By Mark Muro.
Globe Staff

His is not the High Lonesome of Louis L'Amour. No, while others have patched together sagas based on fake nostalgia and silly cowboy movies, Ivan Doig has been out in the wet, enormous landscape of the Northwest, there writing about what he saw around him, what had always been around him. That he has chosen the oldest theme in our literature, and perhaps its most abused, has not mattered. The West is what made him, and that's what he writes.

With a twist, however. Uninterested in the recovery of America — or Montana, or "the past" — as an idea, Doig tracks not reassurance in his Western roots, but the thing itself. He recalls, exactly, how shadows pooled in his childhood's Montana high country or how patches of fog snag in Puget Sound treetops. In this way, Doig gives not sentimental pageantry but specifics to explore the mysterious complex he perceives of self, scene and history. It was this avidity that inspired his autobiographical first book, the 1978 National Book Award nominee, "This House of Sky," and that shaped into curious, beautiful forms its successors, "Winter Brothers" (1980) and "The Sea Runners" (1982). "Yes. This album of summer again," he proposed in that fine first book, "as if I might finger through the emulsion patterns to the moments themselves." Such a responsive sense of touch and presence charged the memoir that one was prompted to see in Doig, as Huxley did in Lawrence, the work of "a mystical materialist."

Now, with "English Creek," comes a fourth book and second novel. Another study, as he writes, of "How home ground and kin together lay their touch along us as unalterably as the banks of a stream direct its water," this remembrance of a summer long past returns Doig to the high Montana mountains of his first book. Unfortunately, however, it does not return him to the earlier success. Certainly pleasant as a tale of a summer, it amounts, in the end, to one more story of a boy, a family and a great big landscape.

The book opens as June 1939 swims into the Two Medicine country — and into the memories of Jick McCaskill, a retired rancher. Jick recollects well that "green high-grass summer" when he was 14, and it is through the clear lens of his memory that we meet his family: Varick his father, a roustabout cow-punch turned ranger; Elizabeth his mother, a hard-working survivalist; Alec, Jick's 18-year-old brother with a knack at everything and a "head full of cowboy notions."

It's Alec who brings conflict. Set on a town girl and a horse-mounted life, Alec announces marriage plans one night and thereby kicks "the conversation in the head entirely." Since both his parents maintain, as his father puts it, "That old stuff of banging a living out of this country by sheer force of behavior doesn't work," Alec's determination to bypass college provokes great silence. This rift stressing the family, the book becomes the record of a summer where, as Jick says, "all four of our lives made their bend."

Early on, an overriding concern emerges. This is the past, for soon enough we realize that nearly every inhabitant of English Creek lives with "a handful of the past," searches, like Jick's father, for "some footing, some ground-work of the time and place." The matter catches most persistently at Jick, of course, who knows that to take his place among the adults he must get the hang of that "trickiest damned commodity," history. The credo comes literally. Rejecting the sentimental, ignorant pictures of The Saturday Evening Post, Jick thinks back on the Fourth of July and wishes someone in the crowd had "had the talent to paint the portrait of that picnic." And yet, to Jick's mind, only the right sort of group picture would have done: one "that would convey every one of those people at once and yet also their separateness. Their selves, I guess the



Ivan Doig.

PHOTO BY JIM BATES

word should be." "I don't mean," he goes on, "one of those phoney-balancey gill concoctions such as that one of Custer and all his embattled troopers there at the Little Bighorn, which hangs in three-fourths of the saloons I have ever been in and disgusts me every single time."

What Jick is after, then, involves scenes not only depicting the proper facts, but, as he imagines in the Fourth of July photo, facts and people imbued with an indefinable air of individual reality. As he makes clear as he extracts lore from his mother one night, he wants not just facts but the "feel," the meaning, of the facts.

And this, unfortunately, is precisely what one misses in "English Creek." In "This House of Sky," by contrast, Doig grappled in the most personal way with his memory. Moving in great arcs backward and forward from a mid-'70s present to his Montana childhood, he brought a keen urgency to recollected detail and in so doing constructed an almost magical "great house of sky" comprised of remembered detail processed by present day emotion and imagination. "Rare moments, these, mysteryless perhaps in themselves," he wrote of leading a horse around from behind a shed that day he turned 6 and his mother died, but then he went on: "It is where they lead, and with what fitful truth and deceit, that tantalizes." In this way, he sensed, the past beat within him as "a half-life" that "echoes a second pulse inside the ticking moments of my existence," and so flat events — a night with Dad at a bar, the cut of a rancher's jaw — hit the page still apulse.

In "English Creek," however, Jick recollects the book's action, but his act of remembrance is not the point, and one quickly forgets his presence in the book as anything but a first-person narrator relating facts. What he remembers becomes simple narration, another story of growing up Western. And the prose accents this. Muscular yet meticulous, Doig writes here with a hedged country precision that deals out words with, yes, admirable scrupulousness, but also a disappointing refusal to assign them deep personal significance. Somehow Doig seems truncated, blocked.

Yet, there is much beauty here, as there is in anything Doig writes. Colloquialism rattles every page, and if the book's no point, it moves in its own sweet time, like a horseback venture into new country. Perhaps no one writes better the feel of unspoiled land: "Up there, at that brink of the dawn hour, the world revealed all its edges. . . everything looked as if it were in heavy strokes with the final shade of night penciled in where ever there was a gulch or coulee."

Such writing may recede to local color in the present outing, but just the same, one hazards to suggest that, at his best, Ivan Doig is a writer deeply attractive to the American mind. Pragmatic, solitary and attentive, he seems our type, and given our tradition of brilliant jury-rigging, one might also expect his easy yokings — of art and history, nature and mind, memory and present — to appeal widely. One could desire a grander transcendence, a wilder passion, a softer beauty, but one knows, too, that the still barely civilized gulches of Ivan Doig's actual West breed a different romance.

and

'English Creek' nice journey about boyhood out West

Ivan Doig's "English Creek," a new novel about a Montana boy's summer experiences 46 years ago, rings so true it's hard to believe that this masterpiece of modern Western writing is set in the year the author was born.

It's equally hard to believe that a writer in his mid-40s could portray so vividly the concerns, attitudes and language of an innocent youngster one third his own age.

"I don't know any kids that age, and we have none of our own," Doig said, "but our friends who do have them tell me I'm right on the mark."

Doig, who lives in Seattle with his wife, the former Carol Muller of Ocean Grove, knows first-hand the Rocky Mountain foothills country that serves as the locale for "English Creek" (Atheneum, \$15.95).

Born in White Sulphur Springs, Mont., in 1939, he grew up farther north near the town of Dupuyer.

As a boy working during the summers while attending high school and later Northwestern University, where he earned his bachelor's and master's degrees, the author was brought up by his father near the eastern boundary of Lewis and Clark National Forest.

"I tagged along with Dad as he worked on or ran small ranches out there, mostly sheep ranches when sheep-raising was enjoying its heydays in Montana 30 or more years ago," he explained.

Doig laughed as he pointed out that "English Creek" is the first book he has written for a planned trilogy on the McCaskill family but it is not the first chronologically.

The author, who holds a Ph.D. from the University of Washington, now is working on the trilogy's real first book.

It covers the period from 1889, when Montana was admitted to statehood, to 1939, when "English Creek" takes place. The third book will treat the years 1940 to 1989.

In "English Creek," Doig speaks through Jack McCaskill, a boy a few months short of his 15th birthday.

Jack's colorfully portrayed mother, Beth, is an ex-schoolteacher. When she speaks firmly to Jack and his idolized 18-year-old brother, Alec, Doig indicates emphasis by capitalizing each word of the sentences.

Jack's father, Varick, is a range rider-turned-forest ranger who supervises a section of the fictional Two Medicine National Forest from his headquarters on English Creek, where the family lives.

It is around Alec that a continuing conflict centers. He is a bright student the senior McCaskills want to see go on to college in the fall, but he has other ideas.

When the conflict comes to a head, Alec leaves home with the intention of marrying a town girl and working as a cowboy. The break is complete. He refuses to return, even when his keen knowledge of the forest is needed in a crisis.

At the time the story is told, Jack is about 60 years old. He is recalling the special summer of his awakening when, like the author, he helped his fa-

ther by doing odd jobs at home and up on the federal lands where local ranchers graze their sheep between the spring and fall months.

One of Ranger McCaskill's tasks is to check sheepherders' grazing permits and count their flocks, a job in which Jack sometimes lends a hand.

What Jack doesn't like is being assigned to accompany Stanley Meixell, a broken-down, whiskey-swilling local character who needs help because of an injured hand. Jack fears him but, at the same time, finds himself fascinated by the man.

Stanley is a "campjack" who, with his string of horses and mules, packs supplies out to sheepherders camped in remote areas of the national forest.

Doig explains that Stanley was the forest's first ranger and the man who established the preserve's original boundaries some 30 years ago. He was a drinker then, and he remained one after he left the Forest Service for reasons no one will discuss.

Jack senses that there is some mysterious connection between Stanley and the McCaskills. He often finds himself asking, in various ways, "Why has Stanley got everybody in this damn family so spooked?"

Not until the book's climax during a huge forest fire does the boy finally learn the truth.

Like virtually everyone in "English Creek," Stanley is a figment of Doig's imagination. He admits he found no counterpart in his extensive contacts with Forest Service personnel and other Montana sources. He is, instead, a composite character.

"In telling Jack's story," Doig said, "I try to bring in the sense of the Montana country, some of the small incidents I turned up in my research, and some of Jack's feelings when he was out with old geezers on jobs he didn't especially want."

"I had such jobs when I worked on ranches during summer vacations. Sometimes being with those old guys was just great, but other times it was pretty grim. Yet I sometimes think now, as Jack eventually did, that experiences with such characters were educational."

In carrying out research for the new book on which he is working, Doig and his wife, a former Asbury Park Press reporter and education writer now teaching at a Seattle community college, journeyed last summer to Scotland.

"We were trying to find out what it was like to be a 19-year-old milltown boy there in the late 1880s," he said, "and how such a boy might emigrate to Montana as my grandfather did about that time."

Research looms large in Doig's life, as it must for any writer of historical novels.

"I've gone back to Montana every summer in recent years," he said. "I refresh my own memories and perceptions of that country and avail myself of Montana's extensive research sources."

"For example, I draw heavily on the state's archives to get down contemporary language and the 'feel' of the times I'm covering in my books."



Author Ivan Doig draws on own early days to tell of life in Montana.

For the same reason, I also read through several years' editions of weekly newspapers published in the '30s near my old home town."

In "Travels with Charlie," Pulitzer prizewinner John Steinbeck hailed the Federal Writers Program's state guides and related publications as invaluable information sources on the Depression years.

Products of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s and 40s, they were the first comprehensive guidebooks of their type ever published in and about the United States.

Doig agreed wholeheartedly with Steinbeck and used the FWP's background material extensively in recreating the western Montana scene as it was in 1939.

He added that he found the federal writers' interview material especially valuable, contributing to the regionally authentic language Jack and others use.

One of the most distinguishing features of "English Creek" is that Jack and his fellow characters employ words and idioms used a half-century ago by the country and smalltown people of western Montana.

While Doig seems to have a tape-recorder ear for Montana lingo, he admits that his rural terminology also results from archives research, interviews and correspondence with Montana oldtimers.

In one chapter, Jack helps a neighboring rancher bring in his hay.

"I've worked a little on hay crews," Doig said, "but I haven't done all the jobs on one. To get first-hand information on that, I ran classified ads in some southwestern Montana weeklies, inviting old hay crew men to write and tell me their experiences. I guess I heard from 12 or 15 of them, and that was a big help in describing Jack's days while haying on the English Creek ranch."

Readers will delight in many of the

localisms Doig drops into the pages of "English Creek" to lend authenticity.

A bothersome thing does not taste Jack, for example. Instead, "gravel" him.

An acquaintance is described "green as frog feathers," another innocent as a bluebird on a maple. It is said of a local tightwad, "he's gonna set up a stunginess for Scotchmen."

A hapless rancher is described liking his venison the same way he likes his eggs - poached. His head instead "looked as if demolition being done and the demolishers just now taking a smoke break."

While "English Creek" may cause some readers as largely autobiographical, Doig denies it. At the same time, however, he does not disavow things Jack says and feels.

"Jack has a number of my own things and a number of what I think would be my reactions if I were in situations similar to his," he said. "On the other hand, some opinions I give him I don't personally subscribe to, nor have I really thought much about them."

Doig's memoirs of his Montana childhood were published seven years ago in "This House of Sky."

The book won him the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, the Christopher Award, a Governor's Writers Day Award and a nomination for the National Book Award. "This House of Sky" also was adapted into a public television documentary.

Early this year, Doig was awarded a \$20,000 fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts. These are presented annually to "publishers of exceptional talent to enable them to set aside time for writing, research or travel."

— Larry Waddell
Asbury Park Press



**HOUSTON, TEXAS
CHRONICLE**

D. 324,301—S. 418,130
HOUSTON METROPOLITAN AREA

APR 21 1985

Events in Two Medicine country

ENGLISH CREEK.

By Ivan Doig.

Atheneum, \$15.95.

By CAROLYN VAUGHTER

MR. WEBSTER hasn't yet invented the word to describe Ivan Doig's writing style adequately. You need a word which sounds like a 14 year old boy talking — "angularity" is the closest we can come to it.

In the same word you need an individual's intense awareness and appreciation of nature. Somehow Doig does meld the two so that the narrative flows into smooth enjoyment.

The place is Montana, the time 1939. Jick McCaskill is the 14-year-old. His father is a forest ranger, his strong-minded mother comes of a ranching family and rules the McCaskills, husband and two sons, with a firm though loving hand.

She also takes a hand in the events happening in Two Medicine country but as Jick's father tells her after a speech she makes at the 4th of July picnic, "I think being married to you is worth all the risk."

Jick's brother, Alec, is 18, in love, wants to pass up college to get married, which has caused a schism in the family.

There are some cameo characters who appear only briefly but whom you will remember long after you've finished the book, such as "Good Help"

Hebner, who has a gaggle of kids, an exhausted wife and a "bad back."

And Jake Withrow, who only drinks seriously when he and his wife have their annual fight.

In this summer of '39, Alec having gone off to work as a cowboy for Wendell Williamson, Jick goes with his father on the annual sheep count.

On the trip, they run into Stanley Meixell, a hard-drinking former ranger who at the moment is suffering from a savage injury to his hand, compliments of the pack horse, Bubbles, who "looked capable not just of assault but maybe pillage and plunder and probably arson, too."

The senior McCaskill loans Jick to Meixell, who's back up in the Montana country to be "campjack for the Busby boys." Jick isn't over-enthusiastic about the loan but on the trip with Meixell, he learns much, including how to throw down the whiskey Meixell's swilling and how to suffer your first hangover. Sick as he is, though, Jick is more concerned his mother will somehow find out he's been drunk than he is about the way he feels.

You'll learn a great deal about a way of life as foreign to most of us as life on another planet, you'll absorb much of the impressive majesty of this area of the Rockies, and you'll experience the horror of high-country forest fire, all telescoped into the experience of a close-knit family.

This is a beautiful book.

Carolyn Vaughter is a writer living in Oklahoma City.

and literary viewpoints: Following the huge success of his 1979 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid," Hofstadter was approached by Scientific American magazine to write a column, with no restrictions on subject matter.

He agreed, and from January 1981 to July 1983, he wrote 25 lengthy articles under the heading "Metamagical Themas" — the name a suggestive anagram of Martin Gardner's "Mathematical Games,"

The result is a sprawling, uneven and wildly diverse book of more than 800 pages. There are 60 pages (probably more than you'll ever want to know) about the Rubik's cube, and another 60 about LISP, the basic language of artificial intelligence (AI). Other chapters tackle sexism, purity in language, comprehending large numbers, creativity, genetics, self-referential sentences, quantum mechanics and the music of Chopin. Hofstadter even includes a selection of his

meets the AI," says Hofstadter characteristic cheek. A renegade among computer scientists, he resists the notion that computers are able either to encroach upon or compete with human intelligence.

"The problem of intelligence," writes, "is to understand the fluid nature of mental categories, to understand invariant cores of precepts such as mother's face, to understand the strai-

Page opens to Antiquarian Book Fair

The Seattle Antiquarian Book Fair is coming up Friday through next Sunday, May 12, in the Flag Pavilion, Seattle Center. It's a great place to browse for everything from fine old special-interest books on boating and railroading to antique paper dolls and medieval Books of Hours.

Fair hours will be 6 to 10 p.m. Friday, noon to 8 p.m. Saturday and noon to 6 p.m. next Sunday. Admission is \$3, or \$6 for the entire weekend.

A Spectrum Summer Writers Conference will be held July 19-21 at the University of Washington, sponsored by the Department of English and University Extension. Beginning and experienced writers will participate in workshops led by six noted poets and authors of fiction.

On the faculty will be poets Thomas McGrath, Linda Gregg and Colleen McElroy and fiction writers Harriette Arnow, John Keeble and Marilynne Robinson.

Faculty members will read from their writings in afternoon and evening meetings. Mornings will be devoted to workshops. A lunchtime session will address "Recent Developments in Word Processing Software."

BOOK BEAT

The registration fee is \$95 until June 1, \$110 thereafter. Enrolled participants may submit manuscripts for consideration for use in the workshops.

For more information, call 543-2300, or write Spectrum Summer Writers Conference, University of Washington Extension GH-21, Seattle, WA 98195.

Dr. W. Thomas Porter, author of "Touche Ross Guide to Personal Financial Management" and co-author of "Wealth — How to Achieve it!", will kick off the Meet the Author series at 10:30 a.m. Thursday in the Seattle Public Library auditorium, 1000 Fourth Ave. Admission is free.

Future sessions in the series will feature Ed Hume, gardening expert, and Bill Holm, Northwest Coast Indian art expert. For a complete schedule, call 625-2665.

Craig Lesley, a Portland writer, walked off with the Mary Finnigan award for the best book by a Northwest author in 1984. The award-winning book is "Win-

ter Kill," a novel of contemporary Indian life in northeast Oregon. The award was given by the Pacific Northwest Booksellers at its annual awards banquet April 20.

Other authors honored by the booksellers included Ivan Doig of Seattle; William Farr and the late poet Richard Hugo, both of Missoula, Mont.; Douglas Unger of Bellingham; and William Kitteridge of Hamilton, Mont.

Doig was honored for "English Creek," the first novel in a trilogy about a boy growing up in eastern-Montana ranch country. The evening he was honored by the Northwest group, Doig was in Oklahoma City accepting the Western Heritage Award for fiction from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Apparently, cooking has been on the minds of a lot of people since the International Association of Cooking Schools met in Seattle at the end of March. "The Joy of Cooking," the basic cover-everything-in-simple-words cooking book that is a 50-year classic, showed up on our best-seller list this week. It's the No. 1 cookbook best seller of all time, with more than 10 million copies sold.

A couple of spark a train

"You Know W" by Jim Heyner North Point Press \$13.50.

by Richard W.

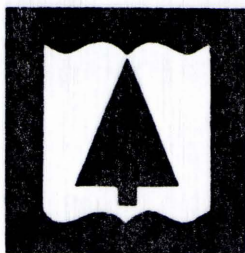
Jim Heyner, writer, bases two details, an action. The story tells their form from telling manner has been passed that it has been unnecessary. They are one and the character unnamed and "Big Bull".

some boys with their attitudes grown, some stuck in a hole. Learn by watching boys acquire knowledge of stories deal with prejudice against the catching, with of farm kids.

The cum the reader country life simpler relationship, F

*Governor's
Writers Day*

1985



May 11, 1985, 2-3 pm

Governor's Presentation of Awards 2:30 pm

Washington State Library
Olympia, Washington

Writers' Awards

Barbara Berger, Bainbridge Island
Grandfather Twilight
Philomel Books, New York

David Boeri, Seattle
*People of the Ice Whale: Eskimos,
White Men, and the Whale*
E.P. Dutton, New York

Sharon Bryan, Seattle
Salt Air
Wesleyan University Press, Connecticut

William Cumming, Seattle
*Sketchbook: A Memoir of the 1930's
and the Northwest School*
University of Washington Press, Seattle

Ivan Doig, Seattle
English Creek
Atheneum, New York

William L. Dwyer, Seattle
*The Goldmark Case: An American
Libel Trial*
University of Washington Press, Seattle

Grant Fjermedal, Seattle
Magic Bullets
Macmillan, New York

Tess Gallagher, Port Angeles
Willingly
Graywolf Press, Port Townsend

Delphine Haley, Seattle
*Seabirds of Eastern North Pacific and
Arctic Waters*
Pacific Search Press, Seattle

Skylar Hansen, Mercer Island
The Trumpeter Swan: A White Perfection
Northland Press, Flagstaff

Carolyn Kizer, Berkeley
*Mermaids in the Basement:
Poems for Women*
Copper Canyon Press, Port Townsend

Robert Michael Pyle, Grays River
*The Audubon Society Handbook for
Butterfly Watchers*
Charles Scribner's Sons, New York

George Schenk, Kirkland
The Complete Shade Gardener
Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston

Special Award

Special award to Richard Hugo for his lifetime contribution to the regional literature of the Pacific Northwest and to the world of English language poetry.

The Washington State Library Commission is pleased to present the 20th Annual Governor's Writers Day Open House honoring Washington authors for their important contributions to our cultural life.

Especially honored are the award winners selected by a distinguished jury. The 1985 jurors were Tim Appelo, former Book Review Editor, *The Weekly*, Seattle; Marjorie Kennedy, Librarian, Lakeside School, Seattle; Susan Pelzer, Book Review Editor, *Pacific Northwest*, Seattle; John S. Robinson, Attorney and Writer, Olympia; and Leroy Soper, Head, Trade Books, University Book Store, Seattle.

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION
THE AWARD-WINNING SERIES FROM PENGUIN
Coming of Age on the Continental Divide

English Creek

Ivan Doig

A tender, lyrical, and forceful evocation of adolescent awakening

In this affecting novel of Montana in the 1930s, Jick McCaskill vividly recalls his fourteenth summer, when his family was changed and shattered forever. Set in the isolated Two Medicine country, a region whose stark beauty is superbly portrayed, Jick's story begins when his idolized older brother decides to forgo college and become a cow boy. The resulting family conflict shadows all the events of the summer: the Fourth of July picnic, haying time, an expedition into the mountains with the seedy ex-ranger Stanley Meixell. In a stunningly rendered climax, a forest fire threatens the entire community. Doig's exceptional prose catches magnificently the flavor and speech of the West in a warm, finely crafted novel that transcends regionalism in its treatment of family love and conflict.

"A marvelous stretch of writing from the heart of the big sky country, at once an homage and a celebration of a way of life that is passing" —Wright Morris

"Doig's sure and lovely prose carries us miles, sustaining and fulfilling us with its power." —Denver Post

"Here is the real Montana, the real West, through the eyes of a real writer." —Wallace Stegner

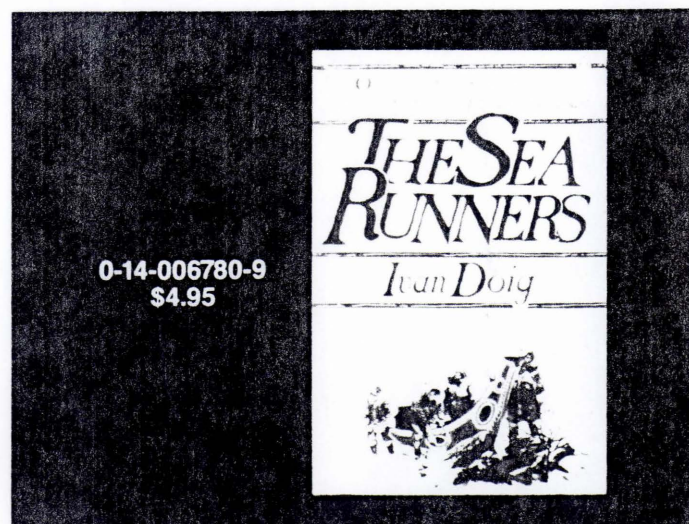
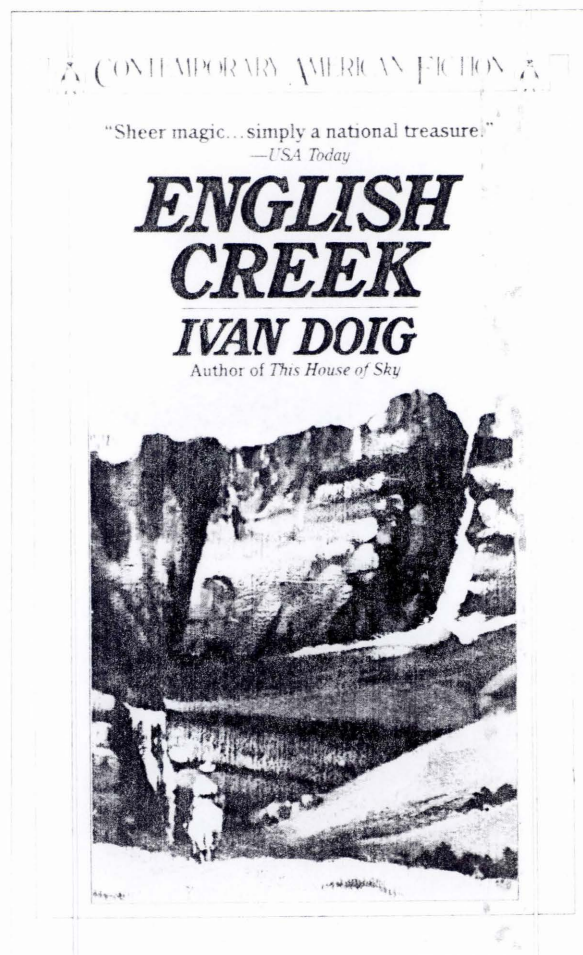
"*English Creek*, just like *Kidnapped*, can be read by both old and young with equal pleasure, fascination and excitement." —Washington Post Book World

Ivan Doig grew up in Montana and worked as a ranch hand and a newspaperman. His 1978 book, *This House of Sky*, was nominated for a National Book Award. He is the author of *The Sea Runners* (available from Penguin) and *Winter Brothers*. He is at work on the second novel of a trilogy about the McCaskill family.

Fiction • Trade trim • 339 pp.

0-14-008442-8 • \$6.95

• 12-copy counterpack



Book Wor

Self-Portrait Of a Landscape Artist

ANSEL ADAMS: An Autobiography

By Ansel Adams
with Mary Street Alinder
New York Graphic Society. 400 pp. \$50

By Ivan Doig

AS A PILGRIM to Yosemite, I remember being scarcely out of the parking lot when I stopped in my tracks and stood gawking at one of our primary natural monuments. It loomed in redoubtable weathered repose amid its half-circle of students and cameras, it wore a Stetson hat like it knew how, and there was no other eminence upon the American earth that this could be but Ansel Adams.

A singular grizzled grace is our image of the late and hallowed photographer-environmentalist, and Adams takes his customary workmanlike care to preserve that in these pages. Posthumously—he passed to history at age 82 in April 1984—the Adams profile still looms formidably here, from the silver-spoon San Francisco child who plagued the household by asking “Does God go to the toilet?” to the famous photographic craftsman who answered when asked if he felt a heightened consciousness at the instant of shutter click, “I practice Zone, not Zen.” But he also tellingly remarks, “Relatively few really know me, but millions know the folk hero they think is me.” It would take a confessional barn-burner of a memoir to change our view of Ansel Adams the stalwart yet sensitive Sierraman, and this isn’t that.

What *Ansel Adams: An Autobiography* does nicely manage to be—it’s a tribute to the book’s quiet but beautiful balance of design

Ivan Doig is the author of “English Creek,” first in a trilogy of novels about the American West, and the memoir “This House of Sky.”



FROM "ANSEL ADAMS: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY"

“Moon and Half Dome, Yosemite National Park” (1960) by Ansel Adams

that this work—is a simultaneous family album-cum-memoir and retrospective of the Adams photographic canon. Not unexpectedly, the inimitable exactness Adams gave us from his camera wasn’t duplicable from his word processor. He recounts various social occasions and ceremonies which do not retell as

niftily as they must have uncorked at the time and he provides numerous ritual bows to family, friends, colleagues, patrons. Be prepared for some ancillary Ansel throughout the pages. A deep focus sometimes has been deliberately chosen against. He mentions that grandfather “built a —Continued on pag



PHOTOGRAPH FROM "ANSEL ADAMS: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY"

"On the Heights, Yosemite National Park, 1927," by Ansel Adams

Ansel Adams

Continued from page 1

prosperous lumber business." In fuller and more interesting perspective, William J. Adams was a baron among early cut-and-run timbermen who took down the magnificent virgin forests of Puget Sound, once vowing when a competitor outdealt him: "We will get even as sure as there is a God in Israel." Also, there probably was more to Ansel Adams' thoughts than is in here about the rise of pictorial magazines such as *Life*, which proffered to artistic photographers a mass audience previously undreamed-of but then frequently truncated or scrapped the photo essays they did on assignment. And his (and everybody else's) role during the Sierra Club's internecine combat in its David Brower era needs an incisive neutral observer. If we, and Ansel Adams, are lucky in his eventual biographer, a more complicated and compelling soul may emerge from under the shadow of that Stetson.

MEANWHILE, anecdotes have to sustain us, and they do. With wonderful amiability Adams lets Alfred Stieglitz and Georgia O'Keeffe steal the scene whenever they show up. Tales are told of dozens of fine photographers and other artists—and a hilarious one about the mobile moguldom of Darryl F. Zanuck.

re in his last public words Adams is permanently angry at only a chosen few—fellow photographers William Mortensen (exponent of allegorical portraiture that Adams deemed "fuzzy-wuzzy") and Edward Steichen ("As a friend said, 'He has the ability to make women cry and he revels in it.'") and President Ronald Reagan, former employer of James Watt. The Prez may have won a PR moment in 1983 by actually sitting down with Adams, the symbolic environmentalist, for 55 minutes, but Adams now gets to aim an earful at posterity: "I was negatively impressed with Reagan's failure to discuss or challenge my opinions at every turn . . . The flow of bilge from the Reagan administration is a blot upon our history of literacy."

For all his environmental spokesmanship that capped a career of outdoor life, Adams well knew what would give him his own mark in our history. The photographs, the hauntingly luminous photographs. Here in their half-century panorama, Adams' pictures have never spoken better for themselves, and thus for him. Of this book's 277 illustrations some 120 are Adams' nature compositions, and along



Ansel Adams

with lesser-seen ones his classics shine anew here—"Monolith, The Face of Half Dome"; "Mount Williamson . . . from Manzanar"; "Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico"; and that astounding eye-symphony, "Winter Sunrise, the Sierra Nevada, from Lone Pine," with the Sierra peaks whitely sunlit and teased by cloud tendrils, the dark undulation of leftover night shadowing below them, and below *that* a spectral line of trees and the lone tiny grazing horse which somehow lends resounding magnitude to all else.

"My vision established its own groove," writes Adams, "as I know I have been derivative of myself for fifty years." He indeed seems to have decided early, and I think rightly, that photodrom's interpreter of the Sierra Nevada's magnificence was plenty to try to be in one lifetime. A recent critic tut-tutted Adams' trademark exactness in portraying nature—"a poet more of light than of personalities." What, are we so far gone down the narcissistic path that the face of Half Dome counts for less than human physiognomy? *But Audubon, baby, if you ever hope to get the cover of "People" you're gonna have to lay off the birds and whip out some portraits of, well, you know.* Ansel Adams caused us to perceive what we should have known was there, but didn't know how to see. Early in these pages he recalls an instant from boyhood, on a summer afternoon when he was setting the table for supper:

"The persistent fog had lifted and the warm sun streamed into the dining room through the west-facing windows. . . . The light was unforgettable."

Exactly. ■

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION THE AWARD-WINNING SERIES FROM PENGUIN

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English Creek

Ivan Doig

A tender, lyrical, and forceful evocation of adolescent awakening

In this affecting novel of Montana in the 1930s, Jick McCaskill vividly recalls his fourteenth summer, when his family was changed and shattered forever. Set in the isolated Two Medicine country, a region whose stark beauty is superbly portrayed, Jick's story begins when his idolized older brother decides to forgo college and become a cowboy. The resulting family conflict shadows all the events of the summer: the Fourth of July picnic, haying time, an expedition into the mountains with the seedy ex-ranger Stanley Meixell. In a stunningly rendered climax, a forest fire threatens the entire community. Doig's exceptional prose catches magnificently the flavor and speech of the West in a warm, finely crafted novel that transcends regionalism in its treatment of family love and conflict.

"A marvelous stretch of writing from the heart of the big sky country, at once an homage and a celebration of a way of life that is passing"

—Wright Morris

"Doig's sure and lovely prose carries us miles, sustaining and fulfilling us with its power."

—Denver Post

"Here is the real Montana, the real West, through the eyes of a real writer."

—Wallace Stegner

"*English Creek*, just like *Kidnapped*, can be read by both old and young with equal pleasure, fascination and excitement."

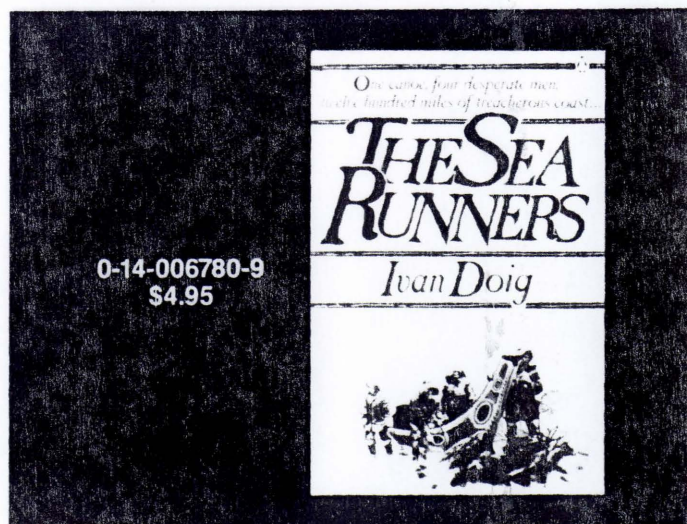
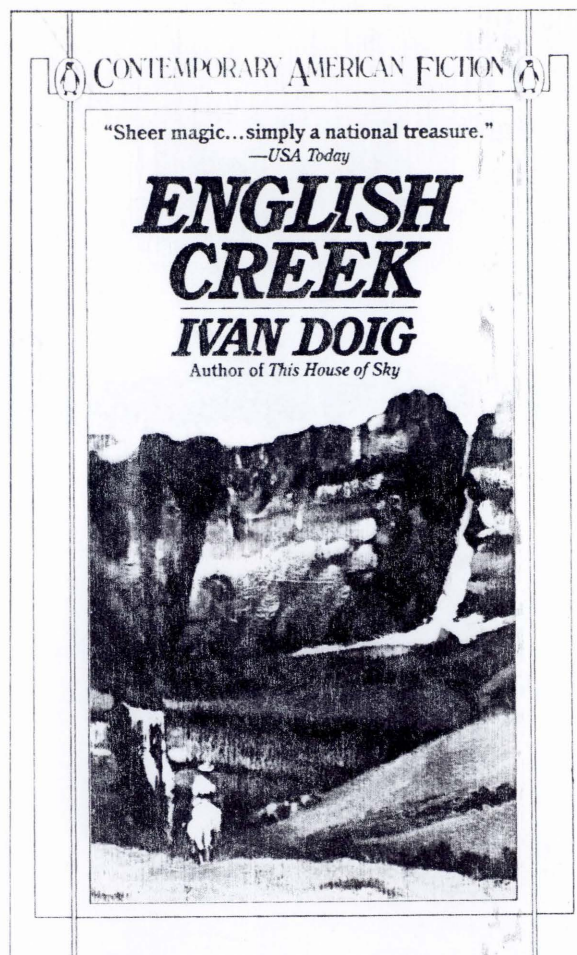
—Washington Post Book World

Ivan Doig grew up in Montana and worked as a ranch hand and a newspaperman. His 1978 book, *This House of Sky*, was nominated for a National Book Award. He is the author of *The Sea Runners* (available from Penguin) and *Winter Brothers*. He is at work on the second novel of a trilogy about the McCaskill family.

Fiction • Trade trim • 339 pp.

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• 12-copy counterpack



**"English Creek" by Ivan
Doig (Atheneum, \$15.95)**

Montana, the summer of 1939. The Depression is lifting and war is in sight. At 14, Jick McCaskill starts out to have a standard summer but his older brother's insistence on foregoing college in favor of marriage and life as a ranch hand is only the first of many events to make this particular summer different.

The beautiful Two Medicine Country is the McCaskills' domain. Largely from horseback, Jick describes the mountain's grandeur and the smells and sounds of a lush national forest in a manner approaching poetry.

The story is compelling because of the richness of its characterization. Jick's dad, once a range rider and now a forest ranger; his sharp-witted mother, who comes from indigenous stock, and a host of other family and nonfamily characters contribute to the special impact this period has on Jick.

Summer sweeps along. The boy "on the edge of growing up," is paired by accident with a crusty ex-ranger, Stanley Meixell, who allows him a taste of his first morning-after, thanks to the "...doctor, Dr. Al K. Hall, that is..."

The summer's experience moves through the much anticipated 4th of July rodeo, the annual job of stacking hay for his uncle, and a raging forest fire where once again Jick meets up with Stanley, and learns a carefully guarded family secret.

Doig lyrically blends events, places and a young man's ponderings. The novel is leisurely paced but holds the reader's attention to the satisfying conclusion.

Lynn Miner
(Ms. Miner is a free lance writer.)

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FEB 11 1987

Circuit rider's story view of history

RIDERS OF THE LONG ROAD
by Stephen Bransford. Doubleday &
Co. \$15.95.

By Robert Conrad

"Riders of the Long Road" is an eye-opener to a little-known part of American history.

Most of us know little about circuit-riding preachers in early America. They rode shoulder to shoulder with explorers, soldiers and early settlers. They spread their gospel wherever a new frontier was pushing ahead. They lived mostly outdoors, were preyed on by Indians, tolerated ridicule and fought exhaustion, disease and highwaymen.

On horseback they covered from 4,000 to 6,000 miles a year for an annual salary of \$65. So rigorous was the pace that one-fourth of them were dead within five years.

Nearly half of them died before they reached the age of 30. Their story is one of immeasurable sacrifice for the sake of spiritual welfare.

Author Stephen Bransford, the son of a lumberjack preacher, grew up in remote Oregon communities, so he has a feeling for his writing task. His fiction tale concerns a circuit riding lay preacher serving the pioneers around Cumberland Gap, Va., and part of Kentucky.

It's a moody, moving book with strong allegorical undertones. In pioneer America, Johnny Appleseed

planted apples, but that "old-time religion" was planted by circuit riders such as we find in "Riders of the Long Road."

ENGLISH CREEK by Ivan Doig.
Atheneum. \$15.95.

"English Creek" is about a 14-year-old boy named Jick growing up in Montana's Big Sky country in 1939. His dad is a forest ranger and Jick takes on responsible tasks to help him, such as making an annual sheep count, fighting forest fires, stacking hay and digging an out-

house pit. These can be rewarding country chores to read about.

Ivan Doig is one of those rare writers who transport you into their pages. You are there, in the action, with the sights and smells and the feelings.

In "English Creek" there are no good guys or bad guys, no sex or violence to speak of. It is family drama, everyday life Montana style, people doing their jobs, but, like a Norman Rockwell painting, warm to watch.

Doig's keen perceptions and stream of consciousness narration of the little things and thoughts that make up our lives is great at holding the reader's interest. He has captured the flavor of speech and life in Montana the way Mark Twain did with his beloved "Hannibal."

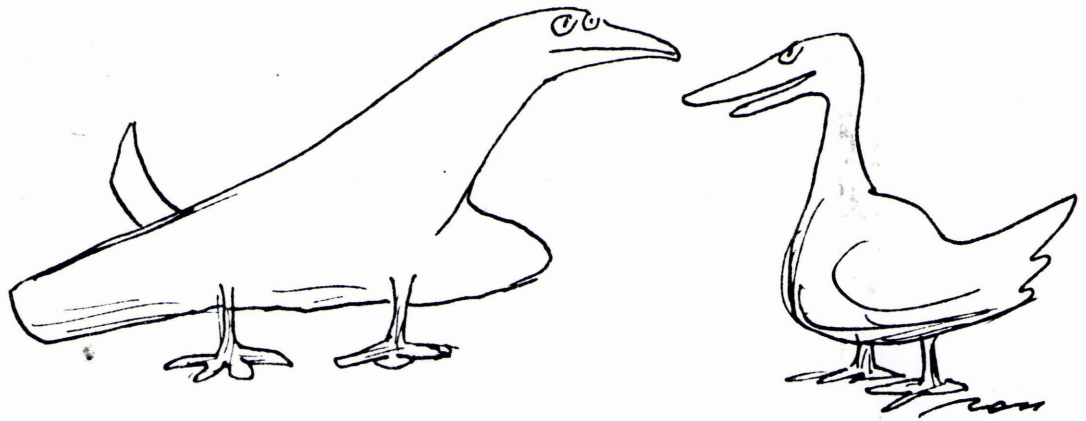
(Robert Conrad is a free-lance reviewer who lives in Shaler.)

BOOK REVIEW

at the energy of the nineteenth-century American women who chronicled their cross-country (or cross-wilderness) journeys in wagon trains to the Far West—their days might begin with fighting off Indians, rounding up animals, and getting breakfast (if there was any food), but they still had the strength to pick up their diaries.

When I was a youngster, my ambition was to be just like all the other little girls I knew, and I was in my teens before I realized that my goal was impossible. One day, unguardedly but quite seriously, I objected to a friend's proposal for an excursion, "But Thursday is blunt." My friend demurred. "No, it isn't. Thursday is spongy." We amazed each other. Neither had imagined the other, since each of us could perceive the world only her own way—the one shaped, the other textured—and each thought that how she saw *was*. Our own individuality often prevents us from suspecting others' individuality. It seems to me that the unimaginableness of others is worsened by the official and practical classifications to which we are all subjected nowadays and which often pretend to define us. Twentieth-century women who are dancers in New York City might conceivably constitute a small common market for direct-mail solicitation, but such a commercial sorting does not tell us, as their diaries do, that Martha Graham and Toni Bentley are very different—and that neither resembles another member of Mr. Mallon's corps de ballet, Nijinsky. Perhaps Mr. Mallon's most conclusive demonstration of our mutual opaqueness is a pair of travel diaries kept by two old friends, C. L. Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) and Henry Parry Liddon, who crossed Europe and visited Russia together. Their itineraries agree, but otherwise the journals reflect two different experiences and two different valuations of experience; Liddon, for example, was impressed enough to tell his diary that Dodgson was moved to tears by the beauty of Cologne Cathedral, but Dodgson didn't tell his diary that he wept.

By bringing together so many diverse people at their most candid—



"Did anyone ever tell you that you look like the Concorde?"

often they are more candid than they know—Mr. Mallon offers us a glimpse of human possibility we could get no other way. The value of diaries—and especially of this book about diaries—is that each unique statement reminds us that every one of us is filled with an unguessable quiddity. One might say that diaries teach us that the most orthodox believer is a heretic, the most socially adept person an eccentric, because of his inescapable, insuppressible, original self. Mr. Mallon's book impels us to look at our peers with anticipation. Each of us is a surprise for everyone else.

—NAOMI BLIVEN

BRIEFLY NOTED

FICTION

HOW FAR SHE WENT, by Mary Hood (University of Georgia; \$13.95). "Melodies low and private as lullaby": these are what the country girl of "A Country Girl" sings, and are a fair description of Mary Hood's writing at its best. The nine stories' settings, all Southern and smaller-than-small-town, tend to be low and private places, enveloped in "the Nu-Grape scent of kudzu"—places where women keep one ear cocked for the roar of a young man's motorcycle or the drone of an old man's car, and where crows call "Mom! Mom!" and jays cry "Thief!" "His brick-red wake stood tall as a two-story house," Mary Hood writes of a hasty outsider, and the contemptuous words, satisfying to pronounce, linger in the air like the clay his car has stirred up. Other precise phrases—old socks

"chafed into lace at heel and toe," Life Savers "tasting of the scented depths" of a gloomy mother's purse—suggest a tenderness, or at least a soreness, in low and private places, and go far to explain why this book has won the Flannery O'Connor Award for short fiction.

ENGLISH CREEK, by Ivan Doig (Atheneum; \$15.95). John Angus (Jick) McCaskill looks back to the summer of 1939, when he was going on fifteen in the little ranching community of English Creek, in the mountain country of northern Montana. His father is the forest ranger (and a dedicated one) for that region; his mother is sharp of tongue and stout of heart; his eighteen-year-old brother Alec has (to his parents' consternation) decided against college in favor of a local girl and a cowboy job. Jick's summer includes a lamb-counting jaunt with his father, a Fourth of July rodeo and square dance, a month of haying, and a big forest fire, and he recalls these events and his musings on them in the leisurely drawl and jocular idiom of that time and place ("as tidy as spats on a rooster"). Mr. Doig is himself a native Montanan. The English Creek country he writes about is only partly fictional, and most of his fictional events—especially his old-timers' tales—have a basis in the history of that region. Local history is, in fact, a characteristic of most contemporary Western fiction. There are few surprises here—of character or scene or observation. There is, however, a pervasive warmth, a gentleness, an affection for those long-distant Depression years and the toughness, the innocence, and the sense of community that they shaped.

Most Memorable Books

Continued from page 3

the misadventures of a particularly engaging character trying to make some money growing in California. It is not just the situations here, but also the use of language, the vocabulary—at once rich and hip in a Boyle brings to bear. There is a delight in the story, and yet, also, plenty of belly-ache over how he did it. ■

RUMBACH:

Each is the author of "The Ladies" and "The Men."

g I read in 1985 seems especially of course, who knows for certain what I remember in 2000 of this year's that our grandchildren will celebrate that year? There was something for me, however, and enjoyed greatly were Evelyn novels some of which I first read in 1939. My husband-to-be pointed them out to me at Cornell University Library. In 1939 did the American reading public and by reissuing the seven satiric, funny, early Waugh books: *A Handful of Dust*, *More Flags* (1942); *Black Mischief* (1930); *Decline and Fall* (1928); and *The Loved One* (1948). These were

all issued in handsomely designed, uniform volumes, bound in black cloth with gold stamping, the type generous-sized and most readable, perhaps because the original plates were used, and so, for me, a pleasure to read.

My favorite among them is still *A Handful of Dust*, the supreme satire on English gentry, marriage and infidelity, boredom and country-squire satisfactions. It ends with one of the most ironic scenes in English fiction: the hero, a bored English aristocrat, Tony Last, lost in the Brazilian jungle, is fated to be, for the rest of his life, a captive of Mr. Todd, an illiterate half-breed to whom he must read, over and over again the novels of Charles Dickens. It is not for nothing that Edmund Wilson called Waugh "the only first-rate comic genius that has appeared in England since Bernard Shaw." I deem any reader lucky who comes upon these volumes for the first time. ■

ROGER G. KENNEDY:

(Roger G. Kennedy is director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.)

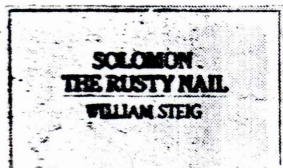
FUNCTIONAL ILLITERACY marches on. Sedentary viewers degenerate into televegetables. Paper-bound literary junk food found at airports turns even travel into torpor. But there is still writing to be found which does, indeed, induce an altered state, altered from passive reading into active reading. —Continued on page 5

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Ivan Doig

BY FREDERIC OLSON



Marguerite Duras

BY HELENE HAMBERGE

Continued from page 4

Take, for instance, Ivan Doig's *Winter Brothers* (1980). Doig, the quirky bard of Puget Sound, will not permit you to be a mere consumer of prose. He beguiles you into joining a conversation between himself and James Gilcrest Swan, and then . . . Swan may have taken his last drink at the age of 82, in 1900, but he is so present for Doig, who holds discourse with his Diaries, that they attend your every daytime reading, and crowd into your bed at night. They don't merely come to you: they force you to go with them, for Doig invokes specific places better than anyone living except maybe Wendell Berry, almost as well as Turgenev. And he sets an active example: he wants us up and reading, up and thinking, up and writing. Do you know an unpublished memoirist who is spoiling for a conversation? ■

JIM LEHRER:

(Jim Lehrer is the co-anchor of public television's "MacNeil-Lehrer Report.")

MARGUERITE DURAS' *The Lover* is physically a mere pittance of a novel. But its 117 small, spare pages tell a giant story of a young French girl's affair with an older Chinese

JUDITH

(Judith column, is feet Child)

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SEATTLE TIMES 4-20-86

Author gives a vivid account of life, love on a tiny island

"The Island of the White Cow"

by Deborah Tall
Antheneum, \$14.95

by Ivan Doig

Would he, the white-haired, blue-eyed visiting Irish poet, come talk to her dormitory group about Yeats?

No, but would she, young and lissome, come have a drink with him?

So began the romance/affair/relationship (make your own generational choice of term, but what so richly ensued with Deborah Tall and the poet she calls Owen seems to merit all three) that took the pair away to five years on an Irish island with an indigenous population of 230.

"The sense of isolation is marvelously acute," Tall exults, "the deep silence unnatural to my ear, the rest of the world suddenly something to contemplate from a distance, or ignore. I am drunk on it, a natural for islomania."

In "The Island of the White Cow," her first book of prose — by now she, too, is a poet and poetry teacher — Tall deftly persuades her reader to become an islomaniac, too. Which is no small trick, if you have ever stared out over

In 'The Island of the White Cow'
... Tall deftly persuades her
reader to become an
islomaniac, too.

the Atlantic's frothy edges to those rock splatterings, those stony leftovers of Ireland and Scotland, and wondered how anyone but gulls and lighthouse keepers live there.

Those few who do, Tall discovered, may look as if they came from central casting — Tommy, the gabby drinker; Theresa, the flightly but good-hearted neighbor — but their roles in life emerge as singular as we like to think our own are. "Their lives have for the most part been bitterly poor and monotonous, but they're still willing to be surprised."

Four lives in particular become vivid in Tall's telling of her island residency, within sight of Achill in the West of Ireland, from 1972 to 1977:

■ Catherine, the innkeeper and nurse, "the only woman on the island I can come close to

talking honestly to."

■ Jack, captain of the boat that plies the seven miles of water to the mainland, and luckily the least mercurial person on the island.

■ Sean, the tragic bachelor farmer who readily befriends Deborah and Owen.

■ And Owen himself, whom Deborah affectionately sees through: at his best in the great public role of refereeing the Gaelic football match between their Island of the White Cow and the neighboring Island of the Boar, but fretful as a sinning altar boy when he fears the neighbors will catch Deborah and him skinny-dipping.

This captivating memoir received snuffy treatment in The New York Times Book Review from a British reviewer who called it "disappointing," largely because of its language and because she thought the author hadn't been hard enough on ex-lover Owen. I concur that Deborah Tall allows herself — deliberately, I think, to convey the dewy young seeker she was at the time — to be seen as more earnest and less retributive about falling for an Irish charmer than if she were, say, a sniffish Londoner.

But as to this book's language, try a swatch for yourself, such as Tall's scene of attempting

to fathom the island's post office and postmistress:

"'Is this a parcel or a packet, would ye say?' (A distinction I've yet to comprehend.) 'Because if ye'd call it a small packet. . . . 'It's a packet, I'd say.' 'Oh, then . . . well I suppose that'd be 38p.' '38p? Good lord!' 'It's right here, see —' She proffers a mottled scrap of government type. 'It's not that I was questionin' ye, Mrs. O'Malley, but the prices of things!' 'Sure they're goin' up faster than ye could count. Desperate.' Mrs. O'Malley searches through several folders containing the various denominations of stamps that might add up to thirty-eight. When she's finally assembled them, she spits onto the back of her hand and rubs the stamps across the spittle, then pastes them onto the 'packet' haphazardly, angles all askew. Then she tosses the packet to the floor to be dealt with later."

If that's disappointing language, we're in need of more of it, as Mrs. O'Malley would say, desperate.

■ Ivan Doig, at work on a fictional trilogy about a Scottish family's emigration to Montana, is a writer who lives in Seattle.

welcomed by all *Lepidoptera* enthusiasts. The format for the 250 Species Accounts includes etymology, range (with excellent maps), habitat, life history, and food sources (nectar and host plants)—a particularly valuable information source for the “butterfly gardener” who wishes to attract certain species. As bibliophile and naturalist, I found it filled a major gap in my library and increased my ability to find hard information on butterflies.

Jack DeForest, a free-lance writer, has a productive “butterfly plot” on his Fairfax County, Virginia, homestead.

La Place de la Concorde Suisse

By John McPhee



New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux
1984, \$12.95, 150 pages
Reviewed by Peter Wild

“Mooo, Mooo” call out the customers in a restaurant high above the Rhone River. They’re providing a little authentic background noise for three soldiers radioing back to headquarters. On its annual exercises, the patrol is supposed to be struggling up the Swiss Alps among the cows and goats, reporting on the advance of the “enemy.” Before them the fondue blazes. The leader turns his walkie-talkie upside down and stirs the cheese with the antenna.

Dutifully, tag-a-long John McPhee records the scene. The whimsical McPhee keeps popping out of the most unexpected places: birchbark canoes, oranges, basketball courts. And now it’s the Swiss Army. It consists almost entirely of civilians who keep assault rifles in their homes, prepared to rush out and devastate any invader of their idyllic mountain state. Despite their weakness for wine and fondue, McPhee lays odds on the neutral Swiss. “If Pearl Harbor had somehow been in Switzerland, a great deal of Japanese aluminum would be scattered all over the Alps,” he tips.

For the quaint farmhouse that tourists click their shutters at may well house a cluster of surface-to-air missiles. The snowcapped

craft and artillery deep within their bowels. And who knows what that Heidi over there, picturesque among the goats, is secreting among the folds of her peasant dress? Military buffs will be charmed.

Switzerland’s mountain crags represent at once its agricultural livelihood and its defense. And over the centuries the Swiss have arrived at the subtle balance with nature, one that allows them to use their limited resources without abusing them. “The Swiss have not embarrassed their terrain,” McPhee notes. This is the unstated message of his story.

As McPhee huffs up an Alpine road with the joking men of the patrol, they all stop dead in their tracks. Before them is an astounding sight: litter!—a paper cup and a plastic bag. A soldier scratches his head. “Are we still in Switzerland?” he asks.

McPhee’s latest is more than an eccentric departure from the already unpredictable trajectory of his writing. Someday, a Ph.D. candidate will do a dissertation on McPhee and discover that, for all the apparent quirkiness of their subjects, his volumes are of one cloth. The title of his first work, *A Sense of Where You Are*, gives the hint. Whether McPhee is musing on New Jersey’s Pine Barrens or hobnobbing with homesteaders in Alaska, he is concerned with how well people have adjusted to their environment. The real story behind his excursions with the Swiss Army is of a people exquisitely adjusted to natural circumstances.

English Creek

By Ivan Doig



New York, Atheneum,
1984, 340 pages, \$15.95,
Reviewed by Tom Turner

If the Talking Books crowd ever decides to record a version of *English Creek*, they simply must hire Garrison Keillor to do the narration.

Keillor, of course, is the host of “A Prairie Home Companion” on National Public Radio and, incidentally, a writer of no mean skill himself. But what I’m thinking of is Keillor’s slow, rich, light, and witty story-telling that takes up the interstices between songs on the radio show. His delivery is a perfect complement to Ivan Doig’s slow, rich, warm tale of

Great Depression.

Doig’s narrator is a fourteen-year-old boy, younger son of the ranger in charge of the Two Medicine National Forest, and the boy undoubtedly contains no small measure of Doig himself, who grew up in northern Montana where the fictional English Creek drains the eastern slope of the Rockies. The whole of *English Creek* takes place over one summer, as Jick—the tale-teller—watches his family rattle with problems of an older brother defying his parents’ wish that he start college in the fall, follows his dad on a sheep-counting trip up into the high country, and attends the annual Fourth of July picnic. But in this delicious book it’s the telling, rather than the tale, that counts.

Doig has an absolutely masterful way with language and dialog, and he has no compunction at all about inventing euphonious words when the language doesn’t already contain one that suits his purpose. You won’t find it in the dictionary, but “he was spraddled on top of a boulder” is as clear as the Montana sky. Likewise, a “shambly” walk may not earn praise from an English teacher, but try to think of something better.

And his feel for the country is lovely to behold. “Of all of the number of matters about the Two country that I never have nor will be able to savvy—one life is not nearly enough to do so—a main one is why in a landscape with hills and buttes and benchlands everywhere a person is so seldom sheltered from the everlasting damn wind. I mean, having the wind of the Two forever trying to blow harmonica tunes through your rib cage just naturally wears on the nerves.”

Horses, too, have starring roles, as one might expect in a Montana book, and Doig obviously knows his way around them: “I lectured Bubbles on the necessity of standing still so that I could retie his packs into place. I might as well have saved my breath. Even on level ground, contriving a forty-foot lash rope into a diamond hitch means going endlessly back and forth around the pack horse to do the loops and lashes and knots, and on a mountainside with Bubbles fidgeting and twitching every which way, the job was like trying to weave eels.”

There’s very little in the way of sermonizing in *English Creek*, but what there is is appropriate and telling. One theme that recurs a few times, handled gently but firmly by the author, is the tragedy of small ranchers being swallowed up by one big octopus of a ranch and the impoverishment of the land and the people who live there. Doig zings this message home through a magnificent and unexpected speech from Jick’s acid-tongued mama delivered at the picnic on the Fourth, where the miscreants in question had to sit still and take it politely. It comes and goes in a trice, but it sticks with you, like the memory of a particularly hot pepper.

For some reason I keep coming back to food analogies in trying to describe *English Creek*, perhaps because so little actually happens, the way things happen in thrillers. This is a slower feast, to be savoured morsel by morsel, line by line. And, best of all, it’s the first in a projected trilogy. I can’t wait.

not long after that shift in juridical status, however, that responsibility for the Rocky Mountain Mission and a stepchild, the California Mission, was assigned to the Italian Province of Turin. In 1909, no longer dependent on Europe for manpower or resources, the former missions, now united, with a Provincial Superior directly responsible to Father General, became a single Province of California; in a sense the stepchild had become the parent. Finally, in February 1932, "Oregon," comprising the geographical territory of Old Oregon and western Alaska, became an independent province. Hence the subtitle of this work and its occasion: a year of jubilee celebrating a half century of independent status.

On March 27, 1840, Peter John DeSmet left St. Louis to keep his promise made to the Flatheads to

join them at the Green River rendezvous. He traveled with the Flathead delegation, entering the region of present-day Montana. The following year he returned with five other Jesuits, and the first of the Jesuit mission stations in the Pacific Northwest, St. Mary's, was established in the Bitterroot Valley. Jesuit presence would spread from that early center. Today there are some four hundred Jesuits in the territory that was Old Oregon and Alaska. But a small percentage of that number, and those mostly in Alaska, are working directly with native peoples. Part of Father Schoenberg's story is an account of an early and continuous deflection from that basic purpose for Jesuit pathways into the Northwest.

The earlier part of this saga has been told before, but it is retold here with definite verve. The continu-

English Creek and Western Historical Fiction

by William Bevis
University of Montana, Missoula

Ivan Doig's *English Creek* is one of a number of recent and excellent "historical fictions" set in Montana, from Maclean's *A River Runs Through It* to the national bestseller on Custer by Evan S. Connell, *Son of the Morning Star*, to Jim Welch's novel-in-progress on the Blackfeet in 1870. The "documentary novel" of the sixties (such as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*) seems to be sliding back into time, into earlier and earlier "fictions" that stake some claim to historical truth. But what is "historical fiction"?

All good fiction, good authors have believed, could "really" have happened—Ivanhoe's honor, Frankenstein's ambition—the question is what is real. The answer, to us, seems to be event: as historians, Americans are materialists. No matter how important the "history of ideas," or of values, or of consciousness, we begin always with what happened that could be perceived by the senses at a certain time and place. Laws pass, the railroad comes, the drought comes, people pass: our history is a vast conflation of "Births," "Marriages," and "Deaths" complete with names and dates. When we say "historical fiction" in Montana in 1985, we mean that the events in the novel could well have happened in that time and place and, therefore, the book is as good as real.

Now the relationship of imaginative writing to such an "eventful" reality is always going to be paradoxical; the serious writer has often turned to fiction precisely because he has not found the truth in the records and needs to invent a story which could have happened or which gets at the reality behind the events:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. . . . If man will strike, strike through the mask!

That is Ahab in Melville's *Moby Dick*, one of our more preposterous fictions, but symbolically true, perhaps, to the "story" of American self-reliance leading to disaster. When the Greek historian Herodotus wrote his "istoria," he thought of "story" as narrative, not as a list of births and deaths, not as event, and he probably did not consider the credibility and accuracy of his sources more important than the "light" shed by the story on what it was like to live at a certain time and place.

In his first book, *This House of Sky*, Ivan Doig proved himself a master of historical narrative in roughly the tradition of Herodotus and the documentary novelists. The events in that book are true, and the true events are balanced against a style impressively imaginative. The result is that both poles, event and consciousness, fact and passion, what happened and what it felt like to have it happen, were touched and touched well.

In his most recent book, *English Creek*, Doig has returned to central Montana as his setting and has attempted historical fiction on a scale much more ambitious than that of his previous novel set in Alaska, *Sea-Runners*. Out of the three possibilities of historical fiction—narrative story (Herodotus), symbolic story (Melville), and "it could have happened" documentary, Doig is closest in *English Creek* to the third. *English Creek* places minimal emphasis on advancing a narrative, and very little story behind the story is intended (in contrast to Maclean's *A River Runs Through It*, which develops a formal theology of fishing, in order to save Paul). In *English Creek*, instead, there is a wealth of surface detail true to scene, and thus Doig writes in some ways the purest of historical fiction, fiction verging on data before it has been digested to narrative or history.

I find the effect of such a book, crammed with the names, events, and speech of a time and place, intriguing. "Such a book": I have trouble naming another like it. The story of Jick's coming of age in pre-World War II Valier ("English Creek") is deliberately told with so much realistic detail, and so

ing story of Jesuit presence in the Northwest is much less known in particulars and is chronicled here by someone intimate with the sources. For years Father Schoenberg has garnered and guarded these materials in his role as Oregon Province archivist.

This is a big book and the sheer range and bulk of incident, anecdote, and personality provide some difficulties for the general reader who attempts to follow along the pathways. Unfortunate is Father Schoenberg's choice to follow a schema of strict chronology rather than some kind of topical or geographical organization. A set of scaled and detailed maps might have helped the reader get his footing at times. (The two maps in the volume are mere caricatures and useless.)

More serious difficulties beset the way of the

little story or symbolism, that the book becomes an immense chat, a folk history, a wandering monologue over the back fence on the life and times of English Creek. This chattiness reflects the mind of the narrator, Jick:

Sometimes I think if I endure in life long enough to get senile nobody will be able to tell the difference, given how my mind has always drifted anyway.

The resulting pile-up of detail, the sheer weight of the gossip finally creates its own impressive realism, its own illusion of reality. That reality may be slightly nostalgic, but then the narrator is remembering when he was fifteen, and we tend to remember our own innocence as the world's.

In the last ten years, post-modern artists (especially visual artists and dancers) have experimented with overloading the senses, throwing at the audience more than it can absorb while not offering a standard story or message that the audience can hang on to. They bury us with detail and deny us any easy conventions. Although Ivan Doig would be the last to claim any avant-garde status for himself or his work, I think he may be experimenting in *English Creek* with such a form, at the edge between novel or narrative or fiction on the one hand—those organized understandings—and a chaos of data on the other. So Doig has deliberately chosen a form that uses minimal story by modern standards, although it contains several good yarns; that uses minimal symbolism or suggestion, although the way World War II interrupts the book subordinates all local conflict to a fate more pervasive; a form that reflects not only some probable material events of Valier in the thirties but seems to reflect also the pace, the chatty, leisurely, neighborly pace of those events.

The unity in such a work is provided by its style. The book's wandering pace is its style. We are inside Jick's sensitive, observant, confused head, ourselves trying to write the story he can't understand, out of the wealth of human fragments he gives us.

serious historian. This is a book in such a hurry that it does not take time out to ask itself many questions. If there is a thread of historical patterning beside the thread of chronology in the volume, it is the less than satisfying concept of Christian progress. Not that the dreams and the triumphs are the only story here. Indeed, there is much space given to disheartening trials and failures. But, finally, the present, the end point of the story, is but the product of a kind of felicitous interplay of Divine Providence and human personalities.

This is not meant to belittle the contribution Father Schoenberg has made. *Pathways to the Northwest* is obviously a work of dedicated research, of energy, and of love. There is a vein uncovered here and ore that I hope others will mine.

The "data" of event, from places and jobs to dress and speech, is certainly accurate in *English Creek*. Doig works very carefully, and the integrity of the book and of the narrator is a large part of its appeal. There is something being loved here, by both Jick and Doig, although one can't easily say what it is. The pick-up firefighters, for instance, are from "the bars and flophouses of Clore Street in Helena and Trent Avenue in Spokane and First Avenue South in Great Falls." That information is the result of six or eight letters from Doig to various sources determining just where the Forest Service got its men. More impressively, Butte and Missoula were omitted because Doig could not pinpoint for certain the particular streets where hiring was done. He refused to generalize and name the probable hiring places of those towns. In such an instance, what is loved may be only scholarship, important insofar as it contributes to a reader's trust; but Doig's fidelity to common speech and local dialect holds a mirror to the most spontaneous expression of his people (real and imagined) and, as in *This House of Sky*, moves us closer to their dry wit, their sly counters of wind and winter and fate. For me, then, the book has three threads beyond the obvious "story" of Jick: one is its barrage of detail, its events of time, place, and speech; another is its slow, chatty, wandering pace; and the third is its immense love of language, from the dialect of its characters to the often elegant prose of its author.

I assume that the readers of this review are familiar with Doig's work and setting, and I imagine that most plan to read *English Creek*. Certainly Doig is a first-rate writer, and we all await with pleasure the perspective on Montana culture that will emerge from the finished trilogy, spanning the century from 1889 to 1989. As an eloquent, ambitious overview of Montana's history, Doig's trilogy will join Guthrie's epic sextet; and as an experiment in literature, this "historical fiction" is radically thorough, bold, and interesting.

English Creek by Ivan Doig was published in 1984 by Atheneum Press, New York.

Interviews with Northwest Writers: Ivan Doig

Ivan Doig was born and brought up in rural Montana. His father was a sheep rancher, and throughout Doig's childhood and adolescence, he lived and worked on ranches. After graduating from Northwestern University in journalism in 1962, he went on to publish more than 200 magazine articles and, to date, two books of nonfiction, *This House of Sky* (1978) and *Winter Brothers* (1980), as well as two novels, *The Sea Runners* (1982) and *English Creek* (1984). This interview, the first in a *Seattle Review* series, was conducted by student editor Nick O'Connell on December 17, 1984, at Doig's home in north Seattle.

Interviewer: How did you get started writing?

Doig: I suppose I was going to be a writer of some kind from about my junior year in high school. My notion was to go away to college to break out of what seemed to me not a very promising ranch future in Montana. So I went to Northwestern, specifically to the school of journalism. I thought at the time I was going to be a newsman. That idea held through college and through the first couple of jobs. I began to shift when Carol [Doig] and I were living in the Midwest, where we were both working on magazines. I wanted to have more time to think about things. That's when I thought I would like to become a journalism teacher. So we came out here with the notion that I would get a Ph.D. in history and would know more background to bring to journalism teaching.

Graduate school taught me that I didn't want to be on a university faculty. I was continuing to free-lance magazine pieces even during graduate school and I began, to my surprise, writing poetry—which I'd never done before.

Interviewer: Have you ever published it?

Doig: Eight or nine published poems—mostly during the graduate school years or just afterwards. But I don't have any great facility in it, that I can see. Once I began *This House of Sky*, I began working on what Norman Maclean has called the poetry under the prose—a somewhat poetic kind of language. That fulfilled whatever urge I had toward poetry.

Interviewer: So you could do in fiction writing what you were doing in poetry?

Doig: Yes, as I savvy it. I've read and learned a great deal from Richard Hugo's book, *The Triggering Town*. Looking at the individual vowels and consonants, the interiors of words, for instance. I imagine my use of rhythms in some of my prose has a kind of poetic urge behind it, too.

Interviewer: Did you know Richard Hugo?

Doig: Yes, Carol and I knew Dick and his wife, Ripley, to a point where we were friends but not close friends. We were around them six or eight times. We never lived in the same community. He was someone of considerable stature by the time I got to know him. I was just glad he was around, writing as he was about Montana, living that sometimes outrageous life he did. I knew him during his great spate of creativity when, Christ, every time we saw Hugo he had a new book of poetry coming out. I got to know him well enough to kid him about that a little bit, and he'd say, "Aw, I wrote these years ago. They just *happened* to come out *now*." You'd look up next and he'd have a mystery novel out.

Interviewer: Was it both his lifestyle and poetry that impressed you?

Doig: I think it was his commitment to language—his burning himself and his life up for the sake of his language. This was a guy doing the job to his fullest. I like writers who pour themselves into their work.

Interviewer: Was it Hugo's subject matter that caused you to have an affinity with him?

Doig: It was more his verve. You got that not only in his poetry, but being around him and hearing stories about him. There were more stories about him than any other writer out here. There was a dimension to Hugo; there was a lot of him (laughs) in every way. I don't know that we could have stood each other as roommates for more than twenty-four hours. But he was someone very bracing and he was very generous to me in his estimation of my work, in his comments.

Interviewer: As a full-time writer, what keeps you going? What about writing is continually demanding?

Doig: It may be because I look on it as a craft that it's perpetually interesting to me. I've done it as various phases of craft. At the newspaper phase I wrote editorials, did a bit of reporting, book reviews, editing. I mentioned the poetry, and freelance magazine pieces are entirely a craft in and unto themselves. Then, trying to

stretch the craft toward the areas where it mysteriously starts to be something more than craft—art, literature or whatever you want to call it. Above all, I'm interested in the language. Language is the alpha and omega. I'm working now on this trilogy [*English Creek* is the first book of the trilogy] where I'm trying to use the Montana slang and get at the flow of life, the deep aspects of life as well.

Interviewer: And to get at the deeper aspects of this life, you have to use the idiom of Montana?

Doig: That's what I'm interested in doing, currently. Having a first person narrator, as each of these three books will, provides me a distancing device—the way Marlow is in some of Conrad's material. A person is there speaking in ways which I want him to, but he is not me, and therefore he can say more, in some ways, than I can. Because I'm inventing him he's going to have new aspects which I don't particularly have myself. There's a richness to be got at by having a Montanan narrator speak Montanese.

Interviewer: Did journalism help your later writing?

Doig: Yes, it did help. Much of the course work I had at Northwestern was in what was called radio/television editing. I was taught by excellent journalistic craftsmen. Among other things, they taught me to write for the ear—because that's mostly what radio news is about. They taught me to write bright leads because you have to attract the listener. No one is being paid to listen to you or to read your stuff.

I see mine as similar to the way writers used to get their training. Hemingway and O'Hara worked on newspapers. Until the rise of writing courses at colleges and universities, that's the way you did it. Both journalism school and the almost ten years I put in as a magazine free lance were part of that training. Not always the most pleasant training, particularly in free-lancing, because of the financial impossibility involved. But it does teach you to do certain things with words.

Interviewer: Does there come a point where journalism will hurt your writing?

Doig: If you don't keep pushing the form of whatever you're in, you simply curl up and die away. I don't think it's the genre or form itself that is necessarily constricting, if you try to reinvent it.

Interviewer: Why did you move to Seattle?

Doig: We came out here largely pushed by the flatness, the lack of distinction of the Midwest. Both Carol and I were hungry for mountains and water.

Interviewer: What makes the Northwest distinctive?

Doig: In a lot of ways, the geography is its attraction. But I think out here—in the Mountain West as well as the Coastal West—you're around people choosing to live here for the sake of geographic place, rather than profession or family or social class. There's a force field attractiveness to that.

Interviewer: What are people's reactions to your books, say, *This House of Sky*, for instance?

Doig: There's much enthusiasm for *This House of Sky*, which is taught in courses in Montana starting with high school English, and then the Montana and western literature courses at colleges and universities. It ranges from that to phone calls and letters I've had from ranch foremen, forest rangers, saying, "Godammit, I don't read that many books, but that was sure a good one."

Interviewer: That must be very gratifying.

Doig: Yes, it is. Again, when you work at this as a craft, to have it recognized by the people who know the country, who know what you're writing about—that is gratifying.

I try to run as much of my writing as I can in manuscript past the eyes of people of this sort. The payoff on that is, when it finally gets into print it's been tinkered with, corrected if necessary, to the point where people are not sending letters all the time saying, "God, you got that assbackwards."

Interviewer: What's the value of that strict authenticity?

Doig: Well, intrinsic (laughs). It takes on a rightness in itself. I can't defend it financially. A lot of writers would not bother to defend it in terms of the time and energy it takes. But by God, you ought to do it right, it seems to me. If it does take more time and energy, nobody ever said this was going to be an easy business to be in. Some of this goes back to people I grew up around. There simply was a right way to build a haystack or fix a fence, in these people's minds—my dad among them.

Interviewer: What is distinctive about the writing that comes out of the Northwest?

Doig: In terms of living out here, some of the writers I'm aware of as fellow professionals and craftspeople are Ursula LeGuin, Frank Herbert, Tom Robbins, Ernest Gann and certainly Ken Kesey. Of those, what I have in common with Robbins and Herbert is our journalism background, which is not much recognized because now our writing and the topics we work on go in three very diverse directions. But all three of us paid our dues. All three of us are fairly productive writers, fairly regular writers. And Ursula LeGuin probably produces more than any of us. So, there are a number of

us out here who have the right work habits. We hole up and do our work.

Interviewer: Do you feel your writing grows out of a certain tradition?

Doig: Not literarily. Socially and culturally, I'm aware of being part of a lineage, a family tree of western writers, because I have read and know of Wallace Stegner and Mari Sandoz and Hamlin Garland. They are people whose growing up was somewhat along the lines of mine—on ranches, farms, homesteads. People who came out of rural places to be writers. A.B. Guthrie is also in that family tree. He was around as an example when I was a kid that a Montanan could, indeed, grow up to write famous books.

The western tree continues in my own generation—Jim Welch, Bill Kittredge, and Mary Clearman Blew, up in Havre, Montana. Norman Maclean is kind of an honorary member of our generation, even though he's thirty-five years older, because he began publishing about the same time we did.

I'm aware of being a part of these people, because some of them are friends and people I admire for how they've made their way in life. But professionally, I don't compare my work to other regional writers. Or anybody, for that matter.

Interviewer: Where does your writing fit within the scheme of western writing?

Doig: What seems to me most distinctive about what I'm trying to do is an interest in working people in the American West. Currently, in this trilogy, my interest is in using working language of the area, trying to find a style within it for these three Montana novels.

Interviewer: Because this hasn't been done before?

Doig: Well, I don't know and I don't much care if it's been done by other people. Again, I feel it's worth doing in its own right. You don't use up a literary topic by writing about it once. Who's going to write better about the sea than Joseph Conrad? And yet there are other sea stories to write. There have been endless coming-of-age stories—none of which bothered me one bit in writing 340 pages about a fourteen-year old, Jick, in *English Creek*. His coming of age was unique to me.

But I don't think you have to forever be searching for the topics that haven't been done. If the story is coming out through you, then it hasn't been done. I don't think there need to be new literary fashions and topics constantly. When they are done, that's fine, but they shouldn't be done just for their own sake. If you're going

to do them, do them right, as Garcia Marquez has or Vargas Llosa or Russell Hoban in *Riddley Walker*.

Interviewer: When you first started publishing books, why did you choose to write a memoir about your growing up, rather than a novel?

Doig: I'm quite literal minded, and a memoir seemed to be the best way to tell the story, and so I didn't see why it shouldn't be done that way.

Interviewer: Do you think your writing is moving away from personal experience and history? Are you moving toward writing solely fiction?

Doig: Well, the project of the '80s is this fiction trilogy. That's as far as I can say. When I'm done with that—the third book is to appear in 1989—I don't know whether I'll be tired of writing fiction for a while or whether I'll have new stories, new angles and roads I'll want to take. Fiction in these past two books has been a liberating and exhilarating phase for me. You're no longer bound to the fact of the people you're writing about. You're free to make up the book's population. I still feel bound by the authenticity within which they live, but the people themselves are a liberation.

Interviewer: Are there things that you can accomplish in fiction that you can't in non-fiction?

Doig: There *are* things that I wouldn't know how to get at in non-fiction. The circumstances would have to present themselves in non-fiction for me to equal it, and that's not too likely to happen. In writing fiction about the Depression generation in *English Creek*, or now the homestead generation as I'm starting the next book—there are scenes I feel I can get at that I couldn't otherwise, simply because the people are no longer alive, or I can't see the actualities. So I create the actualities. I've been working on the opening scene of my two young Scotchmen on a dock on the River Clyde, getting ready to come to America. I can't see them, back there a hundred years ago. I've seen the dock, I've seen the River Clyde, I've seen the town these guys come from—I've seen a lot but I have not and cannot see these two actual guys. So the way to see them, therefore, is fiction.

Interviewer: So fiction fills in what you can't discover otherwise?

Doig: Yeah, and as it fills in it takes its own forms. It pushes the bounds of actuality. It's a hot, molten mass. It moves the form of the writing around to new patterns. You find your fictional people getting into predicaments, having troubles, having good times, which maybe people do and maybe they don't in actuality.

Interviewer: But the fiction must still be authentic, that it could have happened?

Doig: Yes, so far, my writing "could have happened." I don't believe you have to be goosing the reader with outlandish surprises all the time, the notion that fiction has to be hyped up—*Ho! Here comes an axe murderer! Huh! Here's a Russian submarine! Jesus! Here's the killer comet from outer space!* Life is vivid enough in itself. Look what happens to people as they go through their years. Everybody's got a story, everybody's got drama, good times and bad. There's a lot of intrinsic drama, and I think it cheapens fiction by having artificial sweetener in plot in it all the time.

Interviewer: Why did you base *The Sea Runners* on an actual event, rather than making it up out of thin air?

Doig: It didn't occur to me. I had lived out here at that time twelve to fourteen years, I've been along the coast as a hiker and had thought at various times of trying to write something about it, but it never dawned on me that anybody could have, would have, made that particular voyage by canoe.

I turned to fiction in *The Sea Runners* because I didn't see any way to do it as non-fiction. So it looked like the best way to do that particular story was to take the historical kernel—the fact that it happened—and base fiction on it. My imagination works off facts, by and large.

Interviewer: Is that your newspaper training?

Doig: Well, could be. Could be 700 years of Scotchmen in my background. It's simply there and it's what propels me through life, and I try to work with it. Once I do have a fact, I'm perfectly game to do something imaginative from it if I'm working on fiction. But apparently I need that seed of fact.

Interviewer: In *Winter Brothers*, you quoted extensively from the diaries of James Swan. Does your own writing build on writers like Swan?

Doig: In that they are the eyes and ears into a time we can't reach ourselves, yes, they're utterly invaluable. Swan would prove in his diaries to be so good, so deft a writer that I would find a kinship and admiration and a reminder to myself, "Okay, he is doing something I would like to do in his situation." Sometimes it might come just out of the words, whatever their topic might be. But I—maybe it's the direction my writing has taken in fiction—I tend to look on people like Faulkner as the real liberators.

Interviewer: Liberators in what sense?

Doig: Through their particular obsessions in language, obsessions in their work, they have shown us what is possible and make our own obsessions a bit easier. Faulkner has shown us that you can live in backwater Mississippi and be great. Maybe your neighbors didn't even know it and maybe if they did know it they were against it. That didn't matter. You could still be great.

To see greatness in writing come out of a guy like Faulkner, that's exciting to somebody trying to work with words. You don't have to be striving to be great—I don't mean anything that extreme—but just to see how proficient a guy like that could be in his circumstances. That's a wonderful example for a writer.

Interviewer: In writing *This House of Sky*, did you need several years to get an emotional distance from the story?

Doig: It took me quite a while to accumulate the emotional ingredients of *This House of Sky*, to get the material brought out of memory and taken back to Montana and expanded or verified by talking to other people and seeing the places where things actually took place. The work on the prose, of trying to make each sentence carry its weight, took two-and-a-half years at the typewriter.

Interviewer: Did the book flow out of you or was it painful to write?

Doig: It did not flow, but none of my writing flows (laughs). It comes out a word at a time and a sentence at a time. Because of the way I work, carving away at this craft of mine, that's simply the way things happen. I don't feel I was emotionally blocked, no. It was simply a matter of needing the time to work on the language, and find the stuff and think about it. The old-fangled philosophy of taking some time to think produced a lot of that book.

Interviewer: What about the Montana landscape inspires you to write so movingly about it?

Doig: You can't be around that landscape without it being on your mind. The weather governed our lives on the ranch, often determined whether the entire year was a success or not. Our lives turned on the weather, in combination with the landscape. This carries over into my writing.

Interviewer: So in a way you're still working the landscape like your dad was?

Doig: An even smaller patch of it than he was. I work on these small sheets of paper, still trying to make a living out of the landscape.

Interviewer: One of the reviewers of *English Creek* criticized the book as slow-moving while another reviewer contradicted this and

said the pace was entirely appropriate for the period and the characters. Did you design the pace so that it would reflect the way life was during that time?

Doig: It never dawned on me that the actualities of life and how working people lived and went about their labors could be considered plodding; that you had to have green-eyed invaders from outer space before anything was happening. I thought, and still think a lot of things do happen in *English Creek*.

Along with its seasonal life had to go, I believed, description of the country—sense of the country, sense of the past, as people tell stories and listen to stories. This does not bother me at all as a reader and so it doesn't as a writer. But, Christ, you can edit Faulkner and Conrad and Shakespeare and everybody else down to a third their length and pretty much preserve what ostensibly happens. What you'd lose is the richness in life, and the richness in life is what I'm trying to get at. If a reader or reviewer is bothered by that, he's got the greatest fast-forward ever invented—the human eye. Just flip ahead in the pages.

So, yes, the pace was meant to be natural. I'm trying to write each book on its own terms. The pace of *The Sea Runners*, which is much swifter, is meant to match the tension in that book. In *English Creek*, you're meant to take in the seasonal change as it comes month by month through the summer, and meant to be catapulted into what's coming next in history.

Interviewer: Do you have any other books planned after you finish the trilogy?

Doig: I always have other books in mind, but it remains to be seen which of them will hold up as intentions over the next five years, and which will look most appealing then. I have ideas all the time of things I'd like to do. We say around this house, "Life is choices. Decide what seems most worth doing and work on that."

Englishman, Major St John Jackson, to see what shall be done. Like Counihan ahead, he started to sing:

*"We'll wander over mountains and we'll gallop over plains
—For we scorn to live in slavery, bound down by iron chains."*

Soon there are five of them: Sawtell, Counihan, Jackson, a British padre named Sergius Donaldson and Kevin O'Donohue, a young Australian. They have little in common except: "We are all soldiers and we have a common enemy." They have no specific orders, so Sawtell chooses a mission for them: "To sabotage the Zinc Corporation Mine at Broken Hill. It's a prime military target." Thus they set out, on horseback, across the outback on what is for Donaldson, and

NOT MERELY is it a journey toward a military target; gradually it becomes a journey through Australia itself, which Sawtell fancies to be "the best place in the world" but Donaldson can see only as a wasteland: "Are there any cities? I haven't seen them. Are there any cathedrals? I haven't seen them. I sometimes think God has forsaken this place, it's like no other country I've ever known." As a civilian, an engineer working for the Country Roads Board, Sawtell had seen himself as "helping to build Australia." Now, as a soldier, he is not merely help-

big American car and thought of the years after the war, of picnics, of Marcia and playing tennis on country grass courts." The sense that permeates the novel is of deep, irrecoverable loss; the passages in which peacetime is recalled positively ache with longing and regret, with a desperate desire to rip away the terrible present and somehow to be happy again. But for Sawtell and his warriors that is not to happen. They accomplish their mission and move on, deeper and deeper into the unknown Australia, farther and farther away from any hope of rest. It may seem a sad, cruel way to end this splendid novel, but Hooker is an honest writer and he knows he has no other choice. ■

Coming of Age on the Continental Divide

ENGLISH CREEK

By Ivan Doig

Atheneum. 301 pp. \$16.95

By Reid Beddow

IN MONTANA, Ivan Doig tells us, the mountains are the calendar. When the snow line shrinks along the peaks, deer return to the high ground and youngsters work on their saddles lengthening the stirrups to account for the past winter's growth. So it was the fateful summer of 1939, the time of Doig's second novel, *English Creek*, the splendid story of a boy's coming of age in the American West.

June that year came in wet, and was remembered long after for its green high-grass by *English Creek's* narrator, 14-year-old Jick McCaskill. As the novel opens, Jick is much puzzled by the behavior of his older brother, 18-year-old Alec, who has fallen in love with a town girl. Their father, a U.S. forest ranger, oversees part of Two Medicine National Forest, a fictitious wilderness bordering Glacier National Park on the south. Their mother, a former school teacher, carefully watches over her menfolk and the household expenses. This is a family "scraping along better than many" after years of hard times and drought.

The McCaskills live where the great plains reach the east face of the Rockies, in what they call the Two Medicine coun-

try, and we quickly learn what a Montanan means by "country": the terrain all the horizons around, a landscape bounded by the breathtaking grandeur and hundred-mile vistas of the Continental Divide.

When Alec proclaims his intent to marry the curvaceous Leona, instead of attending college, his parents object. Alec rebels and leaves home to be a cowpoke on the Double W Ranch. Unexpectedly, Jick makes a pack trip into the moun-

"'English Creek', just like 'Kidnapped,' can be read by both old and young with equal pleasure, fascination and excitement."

tains with the seedy Stanley Meixell, an alcoholic ex-ranger with a mysterious background. The novel closes at summer's end, on Labor Day weekend, as war breaks out in Europe. There is an epilogue and Jick, now threescore years, reveals how that summer changed and shattered his family forever, despite boundless love. In that time, Jick learned, and would continue to learn, the terrible lesson of growing older: "The past is a taker, not a giver."

What sustains this unexceptional plot is some very exceptional writing. Indeed this is not a conventional western novel at all. The high points are muted: there is a Fourth of July picnic, a square dance, a rodeo. They are all treated satirically. The forest fire at the novel's climax is described through the eyes of the firefighters' cooks—a really brilliant narrative tactic. In between we learn quite a lot about raising sheep, making hay, digging a new pit for an outhouse, naming horses, and much else:

"My earliest memory of this brother of mine was the time, I must have been four and him eight, when he took me into the pasture where the ranger station's saddle horses were grazing and said, 'Here's how you mooch them, Jick.' He eased over to the nearest horse, waited until it put its head down to eat grass, then straddled its neck. When the horse raised its head Alec was lifted, and slid down the neck into place on its back and simultaneously gripped the mane to hang on and steer by. 'Now you mooch that mare,' Alec called to me and I went beside the big chomping animal and flung my right leg over as he had, and was elevated into being a bareback rider the same as my brother."

ADMIRERS OF Doig's beautiful memoir of Montana, *This House of Sky*, and his adventurous first novel, *The Sea Runners*, will have high expectations for *English Creek*. They will not be disappointed. Doig seems to be one of those enviable

Reid Beddow is an assistant editor of *Book World*.

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British colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain? These and other questions of historical detection are answered in fascinating detail by this beautifully written reconstruction of the high noon of imperialism.

Love in Bloomsbury: Memories, by Frances Partridge (Little, Brown, \$7.95). Bloomsbury is always with us. Frances Partridge was part of the celebrated literary set in the 1920s, and Lytton Strachey, Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, and all the rest float through her breezy memoir. But this book gives us more than just the familiar lives, letters, and loves: it is a charming and smoothly written account of the maturing of a thoughtful woman.

Hugging the Shore: Essays and Criticism, by John Updike (Vintage, \$9.95). If there were a decathlon for American writers, John Updike would almost certainly take the gold (Gore Vidal the silver, Norman Mailer the bronze). Novels, short stories, light verse—in each he has performed memorably, often unforgetta-

bly. This hefty collection of book reviews, essays and talks shows Updike at his finest: he soars through the world of literature with the greatest of ease, discerning the merits of writers as varied as Knut Hamsun, Saul Bellow and Robert Pinget in sentences of compelling beauty, making of his supple prose the outward sign of a remarkable intelligence and sympathy. Any young person who wishes to practice literary journalism would do well to give over his days and nights to Updike.

Puzzles and Paradoxes: Fascinating Excursions in Recreational Mathematics, by T.H. O'Beirne (Dover, \$4.95). T.H. O'Beirne not only provides more fodder for the brain-tease addicts but fascinating background on some of the old chestnuts among logic puzzles. For example, a problem of how to discover a defective (i.e. light) coin among a stack of 12 using only a beam balance without weights, and making only three weighings, is said to have consumed so much time among Allied scientists during World War II, that someone suggested inflicting comparable damage on the enemy by dropping a copy of the problem behind their lines.

English Creek

Continued from page 3

writers whose every book is better than the previous one. The new novel is full of good writing and the sweat and tears and laughter of hardworking plain people—people whose lives are shaped by a land which as it grows more scenic becomes more hostile to human habitation, the incomparable Big Sky country of western Montana.

The McCaskills' world is the vanished one of prewar rural West, evidently a place where the brooks are always full of trout and the lodgepole pines are as straight as the local morality. But rural and western do not mean simple, and in fact *English Creek* makes fun of the rustic trappings we associate with western life: when young Alec shows up in a rodeo outfit which includes a red bandana around his neck, his father mercilessly asks, "What, is your Adam's apple cold?" It is the heroic old-timers whom Doig honors, the first ranchers and the surviving cowboys who can ride a horse but not drive a car, true cowboys like Toussaint Rennie, out of place even in 1939 but who can dimly remember the roundup of 1882 when the cowmen fanned their crews "north to the Canadian line and brought in a hundred thousand head" and a great buffalo hunt when the prairie "looked burnt, so dark with buffalo, the herd pinned into place by the plains tribes."

Commonly compared with Paul Horgan and Wallace Stegner, other writers of the American West with distinctive styles, Doig seems something else. He is more virile than Horgan and less romantic than Stegner. A truer comparison might be with Robert Louis Stevenson because of Doig's magical welding of history with fiction, of adventure with everyday life, of legend with lore. *English Creek*, just like *Kidnapped*, can be read by both old and young with equal pleasure, fascination and excitement. It just might become—one must be cautious—something of a western classic.

It surely will become a classic for those readers who know what Doig means when he writes, "I cannot even safely say what the weather was, one of those brockled late afternoons under the Rockies when tag ends of storm cling in the mountains and the sun is reaching through wherever it can between the cloud piles."

The Brain

Continued from page 8

researchers are now women, only NIH's Candice Pert rates so much as a small portrait among the 17 modern scientists pictured. Of the 232 individuals in the index only 13 are women, and the bibliography is exclusively male. It's at least a five-fold under-representation of the women already in the field, and probably worse. The lone portrait, all the quotes, and all other indirect references to the work of women scientists occupy less than 1.5 of the 361 pages. Furthermore 70 percent of the American and Canadian researchers mentioned in *The Brain* are located in the Boston-to-Washington corridor, a three-fold over-representation as only 24 percent of the brain researchers work there.

The complaint here is not uneven treatment (which is unavoidable in a limited selection), nor the quality of the science selected (which is excellent). It's that no attempt seems to have been made to compensate for understandable initial selection bias. Asking your friends is indeed the natural place to start—it's just not where you should finish.

The author, producers, WNET, the Annenberg/CPB Project, PBS, and Bantam Books all had the opportunity to spot the obvious biases and failed to do so. One expects better, of all concerned, when both book and television series aspire to educational excellence and a national audience.

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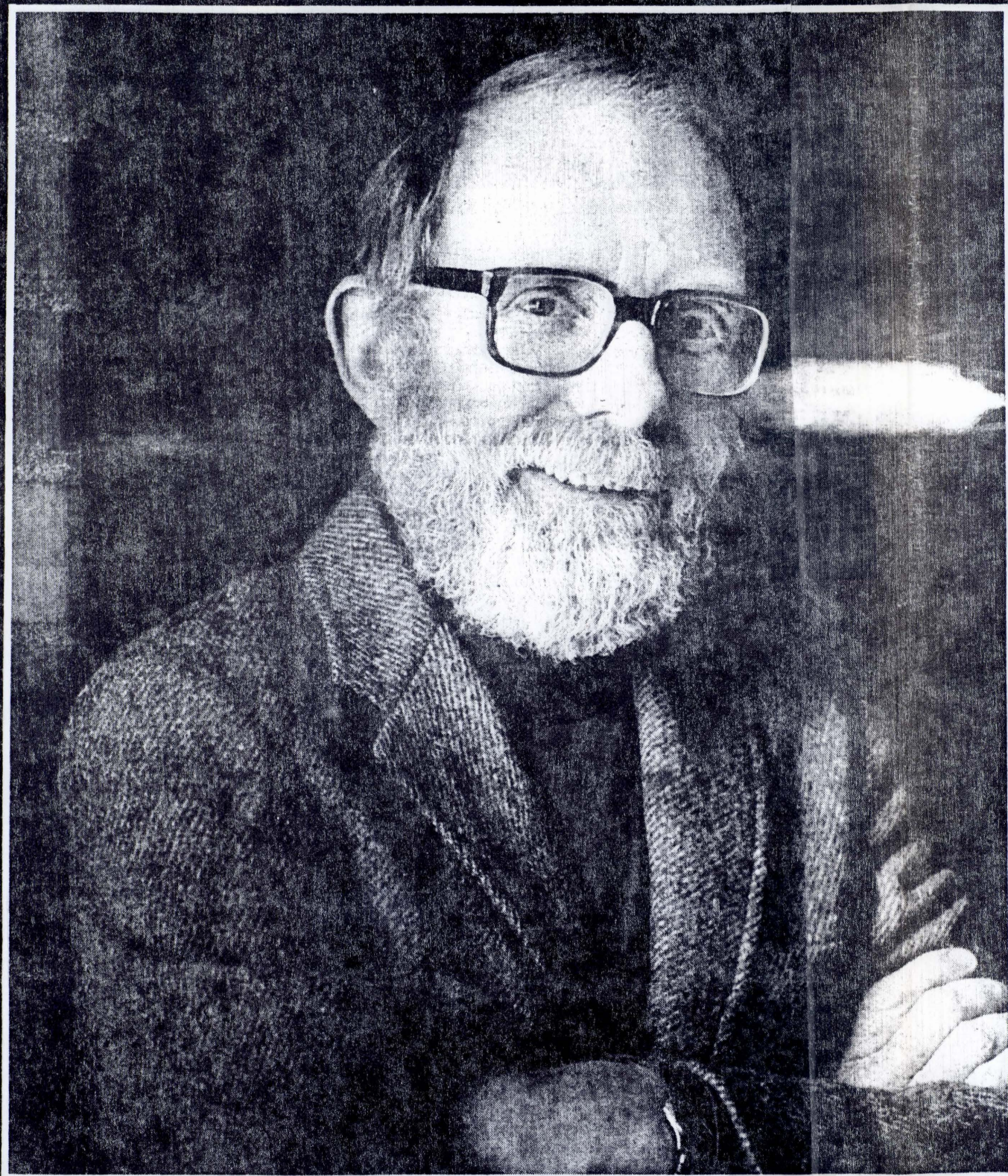
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Inside: 'Places in the Heart,' GRCC's Season Seaside Brunch

WEEKLY
SEPT. 28 - OCT. 4, 1984

RAVE

WEEKLY ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE



Ivan Doig captures the Northwest like no other author. See page 3

Doig's books celebrate people who matter, like sheepmen and foresters

By JIM KERSHNER
Rave Editor

If you haven't read anything by Ivan Doig, you haven't read the best contemporary literature about the Northwest. Doig, of Seattle, has written three successful books, all taking place in the northwestern quadrant of the U.S. Now, he is about to release a fourth. As he told a crowd Tuesday at the Kent Friends of the Library meeting, "I am at the nervous stage for an author. I am about to have a book."

The book is called *English Creek*, and it's about a boy growing up in Montana during the Great Depression. It should be in bookstores within a few weeks.

Doig read some excerpts from *English Creek*, and judging from the crowd's enthusiastic reaction, the new book will be loved by those who loved Doig's most popular book, *This House of Sky*. *English Creek* is funny, affectionate, and canny into the ways of 14-year-old boys. As in all of Doig's writing, he uses words so effectively that you can smell the lodgepole pine; see the clouds decorating the edges of the Big Sky; and hear the creak of leather on a pack saddle. He's an author who can skin a sheep and turn it into prose poetry.

He's also an author who chooses to celebrate people who normally couldn't even get their names in the paper except when they die.

"I'm sick and tired of books being written about disgraced politicians, washed-up athletes, and movie stars," said Doig. "If you've done something interesting, like herding sheep, you can't be in a book."

Doig's strength — some would say his genius — is his dead-perfect ability to render the conversational style of the northern Rockies. Westerners use conversation as kind of whimsical play, making little Twain-like jokes out of the most mundane statements. In *English Creek*, a forest ranger doesn't merely offer someone some peaches. He says: "Do you want some peaches? There are still a few in here we haven't stabbed dead yet."

A man in the audience on Tuesday said, "I've tried to write my own recollections of my growing up, and they came out dull and pedestrian. Yours come alive. Can you tell how you do it?"

Doig said that he has taped hours of conversations with his relatives, with sheepherders, with forest rangers, with cowboys. He studies the way they talk. He also keeps note cards with words, phrases, and ideas. But mostly, as a man who grew up in the towns and sheep ranches near Dupuyer and White Sulphur Springs, the dialogue is simply a part of him.

'Do you want some peaches?
There are still a few in here we
haven't stabbed dead yet.'

A character from 'English Creek'

"A lot of it comes straight from my father, I'm sure," said Doig. "Once I was writing a piece in which a character says, 'How much longer?' and I wanted to say 'We're about done.' I looked down at my typewriter, and I had written, 'We've pretty close to got it.'"

Here are some other words and phrases from a short excerpt of *English Creek*:

- "The bread was dry enough to strike a match on."
- "The conversation was mysteriously kinked."
- "His face had a lot of routes of squint wrinkles."
- "I've always thought the two commonest afflictions of Montana — probably everywhere, but I haven't been everywhere — are drink and orneriness."
- "It danced off Canada Dan like a berry off a buffalo."
- "He laughed a little now, in what I considered an egg-sucking way."
- (After skinning some sheep, and then sitting down to a mutton dinner) "The report came into my mind that I had just been elbow deep in dead sheep, and now I was expected to eat some of that. I tried to keep that thought traveling."

English Creek is part of a trilogy that Doig plans, which will span all 100 years of Montana's statehood. *English Creek* is actually the chronological middle of the story, taking place during the Great Depression. It will be in bookstores within a few weeks.

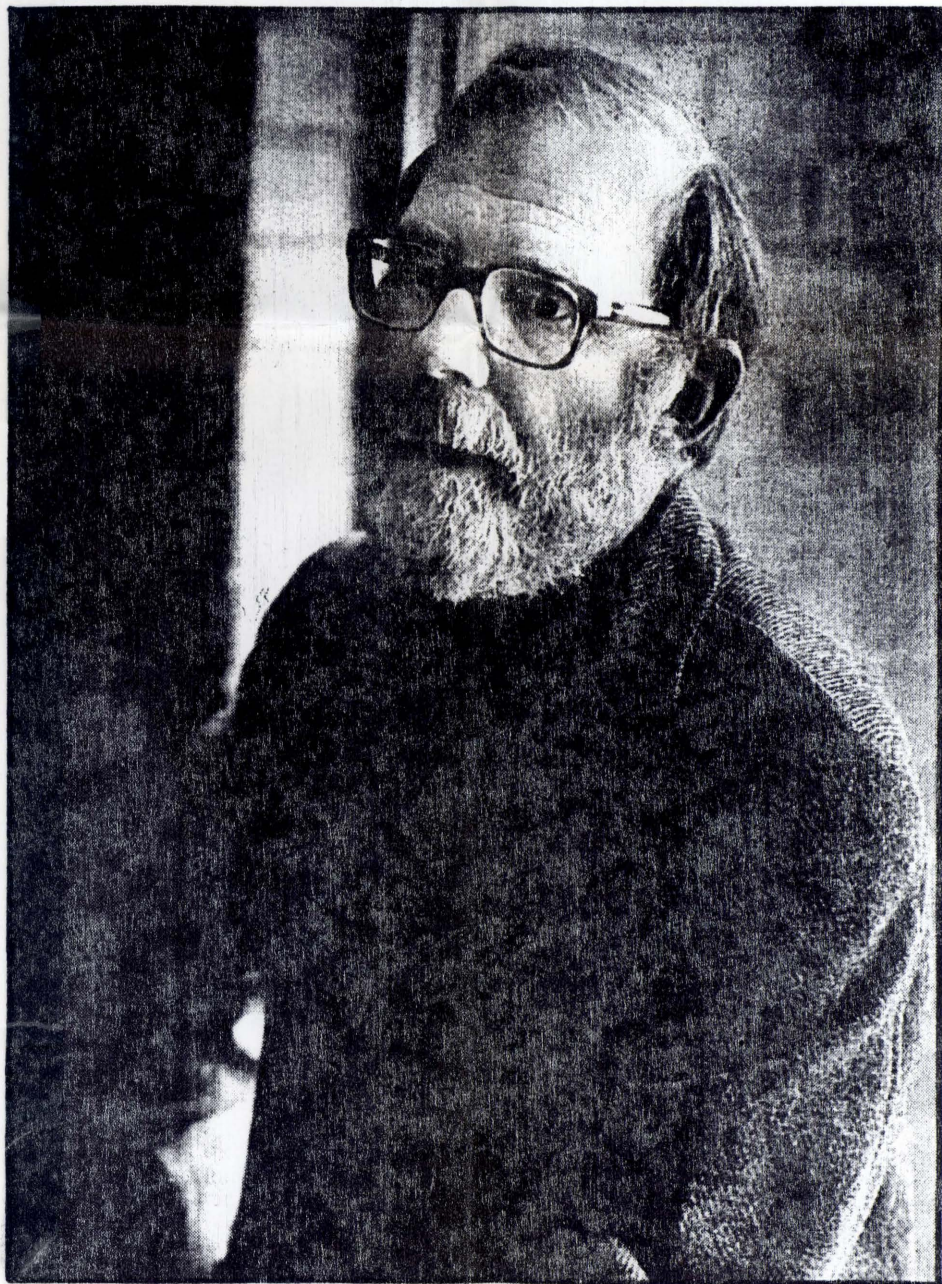
Doig is now working on the next volume, which will trace Scottish immigrants from the County Angus to a new homestead in

Montana in the 1880s. The final book will take place in the 1980's.

Doig also discussed each of his previous books:

□ *This House of Sky*, an evocative memoir of his childhood in Montana.

Doig said this book was spawned almost by accident. He was in his hometown in Montana, waiting to interview a black gospel singer ("the most famous person to come from that small town"). The singer, now an elderly sheepherder, couldn't talk to him that day. There Doig was, with a new tape recorder, so he taped lengthy interviews with his father and grandmother. Those



Ivan Doig, at a Kent Library appearance

Photo by Jim Bates

"I'm sick and tired of books being written about disgraced politicians, washed-up athletes, and movie stars. If you've done something interesting, like herding sheep, you can't be in a book."

Ivan Doig

interviews became the raw material for the book. (The book about the black singer never got written).

□ *Winter Brothers*, a true story about an Olympic Peninsula pioneer trader. Doig said this book was inspired by the

trader's diaries, which Doig ran across at the University of Washington while he was a graduate student.

□ *The Sea Runners*, a gripping adventure story which takes place along the Northwest coastline from Sitka to Astoria.

Doig said he deliberately wrote this in the style of a nineteenth century historian, such as H.H. Bancroft.

The style may be archaic, but the words are poetry, and Doig makes the story compelling. It's about two Scandinavians in the Russian colony of Archangel, Alaska (now Sitka) in the early 1800's. They decide to escape indentured servitude by the only method available to them — by rowing an Indian canoe all the way to Astoria, Oregon.

They endure killing cold, blinding fog, unfriendly Indians, and mile upon mile of fir-covered coastline. It's a trip a reader will not soon forget.

GRCC hosts some blues, some baseball, and some Buckley

Buckley, bluegrass, baseball and blues. The lineup for Green River Community College's Artists and Speaker Series was announced this week, and it includes:

William F. Buckley, Jr., Oct. 25, 7:30 p.m., Lindbloom Student Center:

Buckley is the best-known spokesman for the nation's conservatives. He is also the host of television's *Firing Line*, founder of National Review, newspaper columnist, and author of best-selling spy novels.

Tom Lasorda, Nov. 29, 7:30 p.m., Lindbloom Student Center:

Lasorda is the manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, famous for his baseball savvy, his love of Italian food, and his entertaining speeches on baseball matters. His team won the World Championship in 1965, and he was named manager of the year in 1983.

Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Feb. 7, 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., Auburn Performing Arts Center:

This band began as a folk-rock band in the 1960's, and they are now a top country music act. They are best known for the songs

House At Pooh Corner, and *Mr. Bojangles*. They also recorded the landmark album *Will The Circle Be Unbroken*, featuring country music legends Merle Travis, Earl Scruggs and Doc Watson.

Ferrante and Teicher, Feb. 27, 8 p.m., Auburn Performing Arts Center:

This piano duo performs a variety of musical styles. They met at the Juilliard School of Music, and have recorded 109 albums and sold 22 million records.

Ernestine Anderson, at the Green River

Vocal Jazz Festival, April 13, 9:30 p.m.:

Ernestine Anderson made her first jazz recording in 1955, and she has played with Lionel Hampton and many other top jazz bands. She now lives in Seattle.

Season and individual tickets may be purchased from the GRCC student program office. Season tickets are \$35, and they should be reserved by Oct. 8. Information on tickets is available by calling 833-9111, ext. 337. Tickets are also available through Ticketmaster, 628-0888.