It should come as no surprise to any fan of Western literature that Ivan Doig has returned to the necessary soil of Montana to tell his latest story. But that he has combined his familiar landscape and characters with a new twist might cause a pleasant wonder.

In "Prairie Nocturne," the West's pre-eminent literary novelist rides the wide-open range between Montana and New York City during the Harlem Renaissance, gathering a cast of players for one last inspired grasp at love and celebrity.

As she tends to the vocal ranges of Helena's children, an old lover comes back into her life, but not for love. Wes Williamson, a charmingly ambitious cattle baron who fell from political grace when his earlier affair with Susan was discovered, seeks something far more unexpected: He asks her to train her black chauffeur, Monty Rathbun, to be a professional singer. Monty is the son of a Buffalo soldier, one of the black cavalrymen who came West after the Civil War to do one of the few jobs a newly free country could guarantee them. But when his father mysteriously disappears, he and his mother are alone, servants to a ranch household in Doig's fictional Two Medicine country in Montana. At her knee, he learns haunting spirits, but a voice that rings like a beautiful bell is his alone.

By 1924, Monty has grown up to be many things, from a rodeo clown to a chauffeur for the determined but paternal Wes Williamson. Partly because the wealthy Wes will pay any amount and partly because Monty truly possesses a rare but raw singing voice, Susan accepts the challenge. But when his father mysteriously disappears, he and his mother are alone, servants to a ranch household in Doig's fictional Two Medicine country in Montana. At her knee, he learns haunting spirits, but a voice that rings like a beautiful bell is his alone.

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Here’s a fact: Every year sees the publication of more books. And here’s an opinion: Every year they get both better and worse.

Here at the books department, we sort through a lot of, ah . . . dreck, manuscripts that needed far more attention than they got before being bound between two covers. But we discover ever more masterful volumes by authors at the height of their powers.

So the search goes on, and this year yielded a sterling set of discoveries. This best-of-2003 list, compiled from suggestions by our reviewers, is generous — 14 fiction titles, 13 nonfiction. (Book critic Michael Upchurch and crime-fiction reviewer Adam Woog present their “best of” picks inside today’s section).

Thanks to these authors, who presented us with a year’s worth of fine reading, and thanks to the reviewers who helped us find them.

Fiction

“Drop City” by T.C. Boyle (Far­rar, Straus and Giroux). Naked flower power (hippie commune) meets the raw muscle of Alaska’s back­woods. Finely drawn characters, a hefty satire­comic story and descrip­tions of the natural world that shimmer on the page. (Richard Wallace)  

“One­Way” by Didier van Cauwelaert (Other Press). This wily comic novel features an absurd plot critical of France’s treatment of illegal immigrants, through the eyes of two characters who borrow each other’s stories. The newly translated novel won the 1994 Prix Goncourt, France’s highest literary award. (Wingate Packard)  

“Prairie Nocturne” by Ivan Doig (Simon & Schuster). Set at the close of the Montana homesteading epoch, of her material is masterful; her style is compelling and the story she tells limns the interior and exterior landscape as few writers can. (Valerie Ryan)  

“The Probable Future” by Alice Hoffman (Doubleday). This book, about a clan of Massachusetts women with unusual powers, was hands­down the most enjoyable read of the year. It is one of those uncommon novels that instantly takes you into an imagined world. (Robert Allen Packard)  

“The Speed of Dark” by Elizabeth Moon (Ballantine). Science­fiction author Moon draws upon her own experience in raising an autistic teenager to create a powerful portrait of a gifted, autistic man in his 40s. So many literary novels stretch us to embrace negative consequences, whereas Moon’s novel gets us to see the possibilities. (David Flood)


**“The Great Fire” by Shirley Hazzard**

Parrish Patch, in his 40s. So many literary novels stretch us to embrace negative consequences, whereas Moon’s novel gets us to see the possibilities.

Como Brown’s “Almost Famous” is a keen and quirky observer of America who brings journalistic punch to the stories of survivors, and she presents an organized, thorough account.

**“Bayou of Souls” by Robert Stone**

The plot is no thriller, but I found the author’s gifted descriptions of dot-com boom-and-bust society, from the 19th-century to the computer age, endlessly authoritative, endlessly curious, drolly funny and notably unsqueamish.

**“Living to Tell the Tale,” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez**

When he was diagnosed with lymphatic cancer four years ago, Marquez amazingly declared the disease an “enormous stroke of luck,” claiming it forced him to finally write his memoirs (he’s healthy today). Full of richly researched anecdotes from the writer’s childhood in a small Colombian village, this book has all the weight and exquisite storytelling prowess of a master memoirist.

**“In Search of King Solomon’s Mines” by Taher Shah**

In his near-mythical subject, and his own trek to find it, with candor and wit. The fact that the search for King Solomon’s mines is a tradition in his family adds credibility to this otherwise whacked-out search. No one writes travel books with more honesty and greater warmth than Shah.

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**Local scene**

Current best sellers at University Book Store, 4326 University Way N.E., Seattle, 206-634-3400.

1. **“The Hornet’s Nest” by Jimmy Carter**
2. **“The Da Vinci Code” by Dan Brown**
3. **“Dian: And the Lying Lies Who Tell Them” by Al Franken**
4. **“Living to Tell the Tale” by Gabriel Garcia Marquez**
5. **“Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush’s America” by Molly Ivins**

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**University Book Store**

Beth and I went to a fundraiser last night.

Our host was a man who left Microsoft to start his own dot-com. He sells digital smells.

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**University of Washington**

December 18, 7pm

Jonathan Raban Waxing
Ivan Doig feels at home among Costco bargains

BY DIANE DE LA PAZ
The News Tribune

From Big Sky to big box: For Ivan Doig, it hasn’t been as strange a trip as you might think.

The Montana-born author’s books, ranging from “This House of Sky” to “Dancing at the Rascal Fair,” are highly regarded works of literature, taught in high school and college history courses. So what is a classy writer like Doig doing in a place like the Tacoma Costco? And isn’t this time – noon on a December Wednesday – awfully crowded for a man from the wide-open spaces?

It’s no sweat, said Doig, the son of sheepherders. He has no trouble with this
Doig
Continued from D1

new species of fleece-wearing flock. They are, in fact, his people. “I meet, in Costco, a lot of people who are like the people where I came from,” said Doig, 64.

The Pacific Northwest is rich with Montanans and sons and daughters of Montanans. Gray-haired couples strode up to Doig’s signing table; so did a blond woman who hugged his book to her chest, saying, “This is for my dad,” who was born in a tiny Montana community. The author greeted each one with a warm hello, then chatted about the towns and homesteading grandparents they had in common.

“These people are not going to come to a fancy-shmancy bookstore for an evening reading,” said Doig.

He has appeared before the intellectuals at Elliott Bay Book Co. in Seattle and at the Tacoma Art Museum, but he also relishes the chance to talk with the cheese-sampling, bulk-buying masses here. Ensnared amid tall stacks of his latest, “Prairie Nocturne,” he drew a small but devoted assembly of admirers. Some had made a special trip, braving the motorized stampede on 38th Street; others just happened by and realized that one of their favorite authors was seated at a table between the opulent $579.99 artificial Christmas trees and thundering big-screen TVs.

“I’m a nurse, and I just stopped in on my way to work to get some candy for Christmas treats — and I see Ivan Doig. Here. I’m just delighted I’m here at the right time,” said Laura Meacham of Gig Harbor.

For his part, Doig sees nothing odd about an author of his stature signing books among the bulk paper products, flannel sheets and granola bars. He did three Costcos this month; the others were in Everett and Shoreline, where the manager estimated 800 people per hour streamed in the door. In September at the Missoula, Mont., Costco, he signed more than 200 copies of “Prairie Nocturne.”

In Missoula, “I’ve seen people buy my book and put it in the cart with their steel fence posts and a case of beer,” he said.

Still, some fans were surprised to hear their man was coming to the Tacoma warehouse.

“It blew me away,” said Lee Trotter. “He’s a great writer.” Trotter drove from Spanaway to see Doig.

Chris Hamlin, a towering National Guard colonel, wouldn’t ordinarily come to Costco during the noon hour. The place is a madhouse, especially at this time of year. For this writer, Hamlin made an exception. His father is from Montana, and he and his family have read all of Doig’s books. “He is the dean,” Hamlin said, “of the Western genre.”

Others waiting in line said they too had read most or all of Doig’s nine previous books. They didn’t seem worried about liking “Prairie Nocturne,” a tale that travels from Montana to Edinburgh, Scotland, to New York during the Harlem Renaissance. Doig’s wife, Carol, was on hand to tantalize anyone, who asked about the book’s characters. There’s “a sexy music teacher, the rich rancher she had an affair with. Hamlin hails Pennie Ianniciello, the Issaquah-based Costco’s book buyer, for having diverse but discerning tastes.

“Nocturne” shares an 85-foot display table with titles from Jimmy Carter’s new work to “The Da Vinci Code” to chick lit to holiday cookbooks. Doig hails Pennie Ianniciello, the Issaquah-based Costco’s book buyer, for having diverse but discerning tastes.

“Costco has figured out that the Pacific Northwest is a pretty keen bunch of readers,” Doig said. At the Shoreline store, a man bought a copy of “Prairie Nocturne” along with one by Umberto Eco, the Italian philosopher.

“It’s not surprising, at least to this author, that we need our paper towels, we need our family-size peanut butter and, especially on these long, winter nights, we need our literature.

Diane de la Paz: 253-597-8876
Diane.delapaz@mail.tribnet.com

Films
Continued from D1

ma Film Club is required for admission to the remaining events.

For film buffs: The Tacoma Film Club was honored with an award for its dedication to keeping viewers informed and engaged.
Everything is Waiting for You
November 14, 2003
8:00 pm
Benaroya Hall
Tickets & Information
www.davidwhyte.com
360 221 1324
aristana@davidwhyte.com

This Week’s Reads

WHAT EVER
By Heather Woodbury (Faber and Faber, $15)

If you were bothered by Irvine Welsh’s adherence to Scottish colloquialisms and British junke dialect in Trainspotting, you may want to stop reading Gary Soto’s book, he next book, because Heather Woodbury makes Welsh look like a stickler for the Queen’s English.

It’s not just the language that trips you up in this “living novel,” which keeps many of the stage directions and scene settings from Woodbury’s original eight-page, 100-character performance piece. Jumping from city to city, chapter by chapter, Woodbury drops in on young ravers, lousy streetwalkers, some old Manhattan biddies, and various other folks in mid-’90s America. There are over a dozen primary characters and about a zillion more on the periphery. Each has distinct, idiosyncratic speech ticks, and Woodbury prefaxes the book by stressing that her goal was to present real dialogue, to record and adapt the real speech of real Americans.

Thus, when Bushie the hooker suggests to her fellow hooker Snapple, “Let’s go to the Ap-rab’s fuh chips,” it isn’t like you don’t know what she’s talking about, but 300-plus pages gets rather tedious. And when Clove—yes, there’s a character called Clove—spews endless lines of really bad poetry instead of just talking like a normal human, that’s when things get really tedious.

Language aside, What Ever’s constant shifting of plot lines can make it confusing to distinguish between characters. Woodbury’s old ladies sometimes come off like pill-popping teen partyers. Yet what others might call confusion, she might call connectedness. Woodbury manages to weave together these varied, geographically scattered, and strangely speaking characters into the same cloth, but the accomplishment is exhausting.

Reportedly, Woodbury is working on a more straightforward novelistic version of this hybrid work. Save your strength for that. LAURA CASSIDY

THE LONG HAUL
By Amanda Stern (Soft Skull Press, $12)

In this slim, 144-page book, first-time novelist Amanda Stern explores the love/hate dynamic inherent in both relationships and addiction. It’s not exactly a fresh topic, but she reworks it well with her sharp, staccato style and contemplative tone. Curiously, there are almost no proper names in Haul. Not even Stern’s narrator is named, and her boyfriend is simply called The Alcoholic. Over six years, back and forth between an upstate college and various parts of New York City, these two nameless twentysomethings blunder their way through codependency, aimlessness, and postcollegiate ennui. They love each other, but it’s an angry love. (Though the dialogue is sardonic, the balance of power—keeps shifting on a chapter-by-chapter basis.)

Threatening suicide, The Alcoholic angrily yells that his girlfriend’s the only one who can fix him, and he practically forces her to promise that she’ll stay with him forever. And while it was his mysterious, romantic melancholy—plus the fact that he’s a musician—that originally swept the narrator off her feet, it doesn’t take long before she’s fuming about his dirty hair and secretly despising him for sitting at a bar and writing bad lyrics on paper napkins. Most often, though, their anger is turned inward—a constant silence between them. (Though the couple remains clueless.)

At the close of the novel, The Alcoholic has become a 12-stepper, and Stern recites a long, steady string of his AA rhetoric as if it’s poetry. Amazingly, it works, even—or perhaps especially—when she slips in the old saw about depression being anger turned inward. It’s like an audible click, a lightbulb turned on. No matter that it’s one of those awful clichés; you, like The Alcoholic and his girlfriend, are relieved to have the closure. Even though stories about substance abuse, rock music, and depression in people in depressed relationships can be trite, a careful, gifted author like Stern can still make them ring alarmingly true. LC

Amanda Stern will appear at Elliott Bay Book Co. (101 S. Main St., 206-624-6600), 8 p.m. Fri., Nov. 7.

PRAIRIE NOCTURNE
By Ivan Doig ( Scribner, $25)

At the start of Ivan Doig’s seventh novel, Susan Duff, whose golden voice lit up his 1987 Dancing at the Rascal Fair, has grown up to be an ultraexciting music teacher in Helena, Mont., circa 1924. Scotch blood burns in her veins, giving her spirit the bite of fine whiskey. Ornery as an unbreakable bucking bronco and high-toned as Dresden china, Susan gives not one inch to grief when her beau, the puto-critically rich cattle baron’s scion and wounded World War I hero Wes Williamson, can’t find the heroism it would take to defy his religion, betray his strategically alling wife, and marry Susan. Their affair cost him the governorship in 1920, but his principles proved too high a price to pay.

So she’s skeptical when he comes limping back into her life in a breeching look. Yet she says yes, because he’s come to ask not for her hand but her talent: He wants to pay her big bucks to train the promising vocal cords of a sensitive, black-rodeo-cowboy-turned-chaufer who drives his doozy of a Duesenberg, Monty Rathbun. Grudgingly impressed by Monty’s gift, Susan aims to take him to Carnegie Hall via practice, practice, practice.

Nobody has more practice at capturing Montana history in prose than Doig (a Montana native and longtime Seattle resident), who writes that “geography has a way of kissing people in the mouth they never get over.” Indeed, to enter these pages is to get the lay of the land; to feel the disdain of a rancher for a fellow cowman who “doesn’t know which end eats,” the inchoate anger of a KKK member drunk at the bordello, and the anarchic atmosphere of Helena’s nonwhite Zanzibar Club.

Yet here’s what’s right and wrong about Nocturne: Though rich in detail, mystery, and plot, it has no surprises. Susan’s lessons with Monty inevitably attract flaming crosses and a cat nailed to her door—courtesy, of course, of local racists obsessed with miscegenation. Nobody does more research than a historian-turned-novelist Doig, but in that way, it weighs his characters down. They’re constrained by what really happened at the Zanzibar Club, what really happened in the great Montana dust storms and earthquakes and Klan infestation, and so forth. As a result, all the novel’s events seem too indebted to the past, while I kept wanting Doig’s characters to declare independence from history and fact, to light out for the territory of outrageous lies.

The fiction’s méticulous realism is also its glory, of course. Doig’s characters draw strength from feet planted on real, redolent dirt, like Antaeus. (The war scenes of Wes in action sound like my grandpa’s letters home from World War I: formal, serious, old-fashioned, morally rigorous.) Doig is a world-class novelist, and Nocturne is a master’s composition. He’s not going to pull his nose out of those archives, nor should he. If takes real winds blowing hard and cold from real world—mostly Montana—to billow Doig’s sails of imagination. I guess he boils down to this: Wherever that wind is coming from, it turns the pages all right. And what more can we ask of a writer? TIM APPELO

Ivan Doig will appear at UW Kane Hall (Room 220, 206-624-6600; free tickets in advance from University Book Store), 7 p.m. Wed., Nov. 12.
Volunteers needed
• Thanksgiving dinner, 1 to 4 p.m., Nov. 7, Big River restaurant. Volunteers are needed to help prep, serve and clean up for this annual community Thanksgiving dinner, which is open to anyone who is homeless, lonely, hungry or alone for the day. Information: Jan Bielman, Big River, 757-0694, or Carol Sweeney, 753-2624. Tickets: Community Outreach: 758-3000.

Activities
WEDNESDAY
• Draft horse wagon rides, 8 a.m., auditorium parking lot, Benton County Fairgrounds, 110 S.W. 53rd St. Sweet Well Farms will offer free wagon rides around the Fairgrounds. Information: Rebecca, 752-1510.
• Ivan Doig, 7:30 p.m., lounge, Memorial Union, Oregon State University. The author will read from his new novel, “Prairie Nocturne.” A book-signing will follow. Information: 737-1505.

WEDNESDAY-FRIDAY
• “Spooky Stuff in Nature,” 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Avery House Nature Center. This in-service day program for ages 6 to 11 will look at “scary” Halloween creatures such as bats and spiders and explain their purpose, as well as make Halloween crafts to take home. Bring a lunch and all-weather gear; snacks provided. Pre-and after-care available at $2 an hour. Cost: $27 per day. Registration: 758-6198.
• Ellen Morris Bishop, 7 p.m., C & E

Government
WEDNESDAY
• Benton County Commission on Children and Families Partners Council, 1:45 to 3:15 p.m., Corvallis-Benton County Public Library, 645 N.W. Monroe Ave.
• Benton County CCF, 3:30 to 5:30 p.m., library.
THURSDAY
• Law Enforcement Restructuring, 8 a.m., Police Conference Room, 180 N.W. Fifth St.
• Benton County Fair Board, noon, conference room, Fairgrounds, 110 S.W. 53rd St. Agenda: special meeting for policy discussion and adoption, Maintenance Plan Task Force.

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Auditorium, LaSells Stewart Center, 26th Street at Western Boulevard. The author will present a slide show and sign copies of her new book, “In Search of Ancient Oregon: A Geological and Natural History.” Information: 737-1505.

Information: 766-6521.
• Corvallis City Council/Planning Commission/Benton County Board of Commissioners/County Planning Commission, 7 p.m., Downtown Fire Station, 400 N.W. Harrison Blvd. Agenda: joint meeting on environmental, social, environmental and energy analysis training.

Organizations
THURSDAY
• Kiwanis Sunrisers, 7 a.m., Burton’s Sunnybrook Restaurant, 119 S.W. Third St. Information: 752-2563.
• Energy Flow Meditation Study Group, 7 to 9 p.m. For beginning to intermediate meditators. Call 929-9473 for location and information.
• Marys River Quilt Guild, 7 p.m., Benton County Historical Museum, 1101 Main St., Philomath. Open to the public. Social hour at 7 p.m., followed by a program at 7:30 p.m. Information: Cathi or Judy at 929-6230, or e-mail mrqg@peak.org.

October 29
7:30PM
Memorial Union Lounge

IVAN DOIG
Reading & Booksigning
PRAIRIE
NOCTURNE

osu|bookstore, inc
www.osubookstore.com
737-1505
Ivan Doig ‘meeting folks’ at library

BY JAN HOPKINS
Clipper Staff Writer

BOUNTIFUL — “Troughs of the past pooled with sudsy water as she slaved away at the old floor,” reads a line in author Ivan Doig’s latest book, “Prairie Nocturne.” Readers of the old-school writing style have been waiting for another feast. The wait is over and the feast is spread right here at home.

Doig will be speaking and signing copies of his new book, “A Prairie Nocturne,” Thursday, Oct. 23, 7 p.m., at the South Branch Library, 725 South Main, Bountiful.

Doig started life as “the red-headed only child, son of ranch hand Charlie Doig and ranch cook Berneta Doig, who in his junior year of high school made up his mind to be a writer of some kind.”

Since that time, he has authored 10 books and become one of the most respected writers of recent times.

He worked for several years as an editorial writer and assistant editor.

“I didn’t like the pace, starting over from scratch every day,” said Doig. “I wanted to work at longer rhythms of writing, so I freelanced in magazines and writing poetry.”

He admits he “lacked a poet’s final skill.” Yet many feel his novels and biographical works reflect the sensitivity of his poet’s heart.

Sponsors of his visit to Bountiful say that Doig’s passages are elegantly written, and when read aloud allow readers to share the magic of his word smithing. His characters are solid — real people with flecks of flaws and quiet courage lightly underscoring their everyday actions. They are unpredictable, unpigeon-holed and very human.

Because his works ring with poetry cemented in the history of his characters, readers often believe they are reading rhymes from bygone eras. Sometimes the rhymes are historically based. Most often, they are his own.

“I’m a closet poet,” said Doig. “I do not do ‘flat writing.’ My notion is indeed, to write visually, to try to put suggestions of pictures on the page, which will then form more fully in the reader’s mind.”

Doig’s lecture at the South Branch is free, but seating is limited to 250 people. Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. Patrons will be seated on a first-come-first-seated basis; call 295-8732 for details.
Doig's mix of West, black singer intriguing

By Ron Franscell
Special to The Denver Post

It should come as no surprise to any fan of Western literature that Ivan Doig has returned to the necessary soil of Montana to tell his latest story. But that he has combined his familiar landscape and characters with a new twist might cause a pleasant wonder.

"Prairie Nocturne," the West's pre-eminent literary novelist rides the wide-open range between Montana and New York City during the Harlem Renaissance, gathering a cast of players for one last inspired grasp at love and celebrity.

In a Faulknerian flourish that has threaded through five of his six previous novels, Doig again populates his seventh with some familiar faces and PRAIRIE settings. Doig fans may be astonished to find the indomitable Angus McCaskill making more than a cameo appearance in Doig's newest novel.

But another McCaskill aside, "Prairie Nocturne" is the story of three other entangled fates, starting with Susan Duff - first seen as the stubborn schoolgirl with an angelic singing voice in Doig's "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" - who is now a lonely, middle-aged voice teacher. As she tends to the vocal ranges of Helena's children, an old lover comes back into her life, but not for love. Wes Williamson, a charmingly ambitious cattle baron who fell from political grace when his earlier affair with Susan was discovered, seeks something far more unexpected: He asks her to train his black chauffeur, Monty Rathbun, to be a professional singer.

Monty is the son of a Buffalo soldier, one of the black cavalrymen who came West after the Civil War to do one of the few jobs a newly free country could guarantee them. But when his father mysteriously disappears, he and his mother are alone, servants to a ranch household in Doig's fictional Two Medicine country in Montana. At her knee, he learns haunting spirituals, but a voice that rings like a beautiful bell is his alone.

By 1924, Monty has grown up to be many things, from a rodeo clown to a chauffeur for the determined but paternal Wes Williamson. Partly because the wealthy Wes will pay any amount and partly because Monty truly possesses a rare but raw singing voice, Susan accepts the challenge.

"Bright and early tomorrow, the

SEE PRAIRIE ON 33E

Inside
Characters sparkle in Doig tales

PRAIRIE FROM PAGE 1EE

matter would become Montgomery Rathbun, showing up here expecting to trade a chauffeur's polishing rag for the velvet stage curtains of Carnegie Hall.

For better or worse, Scotch Heaven (her ancestral Montana cabin) would have the human voice back in it tomorrow."

But in literature, no good deed goes unpunished. The Ku Klux Klan, rooting itself in the rural West after World War I, threatens to destroy all the white teacher's work with her black student. And to render the black-and-white complications grayer, Wes' unexplained motives haunt everyone, including himself.

And lest any reader think Doig's beloved landscape has been relegated to a cameo appearance shorter than any McCaskill's, fear not. No western writer - and Doig is the prime living model for that species - can escape the ageless countryside's effect on either character or author:

"The mountains practically at the back of his neck, Wes perused this pocketed-away homestead at the top of the valley, catch-basin of the snow in winter, gentle swale the color of cured hay at the moment. The silence over everything was as if a spell had been cast, and in a way it had, although it had taken nearly three dozen years to register. The North Fork Valley was all as empty as his father ever could have wished it. Which is to say, occupied only by Double W cattle with their heads down in good grass."

For all its unlikely charm, Monty Rathbun's story is rooted in reality. It is loosely based on the real life of black tenor Taylor Gordon, who grew up in Doig's home town of White Sulphur Springs, Mont. Gordon journeyed to New York City to become one of the lesser lights of the Harlem Renaissance, the name given to the period from the end of World War I and through the middle of the Depression when a group of talented African-American artists created a spellbinding body of literature, drama, visual art - and music.

In some ways, Monty's story is Ivan Doig's, too. The son of Montana ranch hands grew up to become one of the West's most beloved writers.

Doig's poetic prose is growing richer and more subtle with each book. In "Prairie Nocturne," as the narrative entwines the pasts and presents of its three principal characters, his essential themes re-emerge: family, landscape, childhood memory, loyalty and the inescapability of our past.

Doig's characters, new and old, are unforgettable, and not just because he keeps bringing them back to life in subsequent books. He embroiders them with history, myth and sensuality. Combined with the timeless beauty of his own ancestral ground, they are fast becoming as much a part of the American mind-scape as the Snopes family of Yoknapatawpha.

(Doig will sign copies of "Prairie Nocturne" at 7:30 p.m. Monday at the Tattered Cover Book Stores, 2955 E. First Ave., Cherry Creek.)

Newspaperman and novelist Ron Franscell is author of "Angel Fire" and "The Deadline."
Lit Warden's Book Cover Presents

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23**

**PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING**

Diana Gabaldon, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Diana Gabaldon, the New York Times bestselling author of the Outlander novels, will read from and sign her book Lord John and the Private Matter ($13.95, Delacorte), her first book featuring the young brother of Lord John Grey, the central character of the Outlander novels. "Gabaldon takes readers for a walk in the wild side...Lord John is a complex, intriguing character, the very image of family loyalty and friendship." (New York Times). Tickets for the event will be available at $10 on event ticket per person.

**PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING**

Edward P. Jones, 7:30 pm, LoDo

Edward P. Jones, widely regarded as a leader in American literature and winner of the MacArthur Fellowship Grand Prize for Fiction, will discuss and sign his new novel, The Known World ($24.95) which takes place during the American Civil War and focuses on the life of a slave named John Clay. The novel is Jones's first new work in the City was short listed for the National Book Award. Jones will read and sign The Known World ($24.95) a collaborative effort that ranges seamlessly between the past and present and back to the present. "Woving together the lives of freed and enslaved blacks, whites, and Indians--this book gives a deeper understanding of the enduring world created by the institution of slavery."

**FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24**

**PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING**

Diana Gabaldon, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Diana Gabaldon, the New York Times bestselling author of the Outlander novels ($24.95), will discuss and sign her new novel, the third in the Outlander series, Voyager ($24.95). Gabaldon takes readers for a walk in the wild side..."Lord John is a complex, intriguing character, the very image of family loyalty and friendship." (New York Times). Tickets for the event will be available at $5 on event ticket per person.

**PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING**

Patrick Smith, 7:00 pm, Cherry Creek

Patrick Smith, the former senior editor of the New Yorker and his latest book, How the Youngest Generation Got a Square Deal ($24.00). Institutional investors have skip-tripped the hereafter, only to find that death is not a destination, but a starting point. Our failed collective faith in the afterlife is single-handedly discovered by a reformation. Tickets for the event will be available at $5 on event ticket per person.

**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1**

**PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING**

Michelle Konig, 7:30 pm, LoDo

Michelle Konig, a freelance writer, editor, and author will discuss and sign Book Smarts: Creative Ways to Live with Less ($4.95 Gibbs-Smith). In Blueprint Smarts, Konig takes us on a journey through the tried and true: from wardrobe staples to furniture blocks, and from office supplies to storage solutions. From the practical to the personal, Konig demonstrates how to save money and live a more meaningful life.

**PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING**

Sharon Kay Penman, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Sharon Kay Penman, the internationally acclaim novel, The stolen child, for a $24.95.) The fifth installment in the Outlander series, Voyager ($24.95), is the story of two brothers who must come together to rescue their missing sister. This is not a simple task, as the brothers find themselves in the middle of a war between the British and the French. Tickets for the event will be available at $5 on event ticket per person.

**PREVENTATION & BOOKSIGNING**

Adrian McKinty, 7:30 pm, LoDo

Adrian McKinty, the author of the highly acclaimed thrillers, Burnt Offerings, The Magician, and The Good Will, is the winner of the Grady Lougheed Short Story Prize and the author of The Magician, who in the Next World was short-listed for the National Book Award. Jones will read and sign The Known World ($24.95). Gabaldon combines a compelling narrative with an intricate plot, creating a novel that is both a work of art and a novel featuring Lt. Eve Dallas. The砾ztin is abundant for the reader's use to decide which story is right for them. Tickets for the event will be available at $5 on event ticket per person.

**CULINARY HAPPENINGS**

**HALLOWEEN TREAT**

For those looking to go out for a fun night on October 31, The Denver Post has put together a list of great places to go for Halloween treats. Whether you're looking for a place to go trick-or-treating, or a haunted mansion, the Denver Post has you covered. To find out more information, visit their website at www.denverpost.com.

**FOURTH STORY RESTAURANT & BAR**

Reservations and information 303-322-1824

www.fourthstory.com

**NATIONAL BEST SELLERS**

These listings from The New York Times are based on sales figures from 350 bookstores and from wholesalers with 50,000 retail outlets for the week ended October 1.

**FICTION**

1. The Five People You Meet in Heaven, by Mitch Albom ($19.95). Albom's previous novel, Angels in America, was a best-seller and this one is expected to follow suit. Albom has a way of writing that is both touching and humorous.

2. Second: The Sequel, by Neal Stephenson ($27.95). This is a sequel to the author's previous novel, Snow Crash, and is already a best-seller.

3. East of Eden, by John Steinbeck ($24.95). This classic novel has been a best-seller for decades and is still popular today.

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**NONFICTION**

1. The Known World, by John Williams ($23.95). This novel is about the life of a slave named John Clay, who must navigate the challenges of the American Civil War.

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Doig defies stereotypes in Western tale

Music teacher develops tie with black ex-rodeo clown in author’s splendid novel

By Jennie A. Camp
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

With his new novel, *Prairie Nocturne*, the highly acclaimed and prolific Western writer Ivan Doig has succeeded splendidly in creating a story that defies the archetypal stereotypes of a formula Western.

The typically slow-talking, fast-shooting John Wayne type and his beautiful but utterly dependent belle are replaced by a spiritual-singing, one-time rodeo clown black cowboy and his sharp-tongued but equally talented white music teacher whose looks are wholly superfluous to his stubborn determination and fearless passion.

The novel’s protagonist is music instructor Susan Duff, a character drawn from *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, the middle book of Doig’s Montana trilogy. While she was a mere schoolgirl in *Rascal Fair*, Susan is now a middle-aged voice instructor who teaches the upper-class children of Helena, Mont.

Susan lives alone and has a love life that once centered on a long-term affair with Wesley Williamson, a married cattle baron whose gubernatorial aspirations were squelched by rumors of his relationship with Susan.

Wes, a smooth-talking but mostly congenial man, appears on Susan’s doorstep after a four-year absence to ask that she take on his black chauffeur, Monty Rathburn, as a private voice student. Susan agrees, and in the ensuing chapters we watch Susan and Monty first slowly and carefully build a teacher-student relationship that soon develops into something far more meaningful — and potentially dangerous in the racially divided United States of the 1920s.

The majority of the novel takes place in 1924 Montana, although we occasionally step back in time to catch glimpses of characters in formative moments, as well as east to the dusky energy of the Harlem Renaissance.

Next to Susan’s often curiously stern countenance and unflinching belief in art and humanity, Monty is an equally fascinating character. His active past-dodging bulls as a thick-skinned rodeo clown in 1914, contrasts with what he initially views as the tediousness of Susan’s voice exercises. Inhale as if smelling a rose, she tells him repeatedly; exhale as if blowing into a bugle.

Monty’s training, which begins painfully slowly, however, proves hugely successful as he learns to breathe past a rodeo-deflated lung and ultimately finds himself singing at Carnegie Hall in the novel’s final pages.

Monty’s voice is a talent Susan has never heard the like of, and she is determined to see him succeed in the professional world. But the journey is far from smooth, as Susan, Monty and even Wes find themselves repeatedly battling the violent hatred of the Ku Klux Klan.

Alongside Doig’s compelling characters is a sense of place that grounds us in the startling beauty of the West and carries us well past Bonanzing sensibilities to a 20th-century understanding of a diverse and continually changing contem-
Nocturne: Novel builds gradually

Continued from 31D

Temporary West. Soon after Susan moves from Helena to the prairie home where she will teach Monty, we get a glimpse — in Doig's ever-poetic prose — of the serene but demanding landscape:

"Susan that night thought long and hard about the populace of solitude. About the dots of humankind, connected and not, strung through the weathered valleys and across the girth of prairie like constellations reflected on the ground. The Adairs, the Anguses — and those between them even when no longer there — of the flower trip: the women hungry for any other women to talk to, even dressed-up ones from Helena; the men half-mused and half-alarmed that they would be hearing these suffrage arguments from their wives and daughters forever after."

Prairie Nocturne builds gradually, both in action and narrative direction. Unfortunately, the hesitant, understandably aloof beginnings of Susan and Monty's relationship leaves the first third of the novel lacking in a certain intensity of emotion. Doig makes up for this as he weaves issues of race and bigotry with the creative artistry in the novel's remaining two-thirds, but I wonder whether nuggets of the latter might have helped enliven the novel's early chapters.

Doig, who grew up in the 1940s and 1950s in a family of Montana ranch hands, is best known for his novels Mountain Time, Bucking the Sun and his trilogy English Creek, Dancing at the Rascal Fair and Ride with Me, Mariah Montana. Despite its minor flaws, Prairie Nocturne undoubtedly ranks as one of his most ambitious projects yet with its complexity of social and cultural issues nestled in the deceptive serenity of the American West.

Jennie A. Camp's reviews and short stories have appeared in "Prairie Schooner," "Colorado Review" and other publications. She lives in Platteville.
DANCE

To local fans of flamenco, Jeanette Trujillo is known simply as La Muñeca — the doll. For years, she’s brought the fire of flamenco to schools and concert halls. Recently, Trujillo has teamed with guitarist Miguel Espinoza, doubling the pleasure for her audiences. At 7 p.m. today at the Lake-wood Cultural Center, the two will appear in an ambitious program titled “The Spirit of Spain,” along with Gina Martinez & Company.

The Cultural Center is at 470 Allison Parkway, near Alameda Avenue and Wadsworth Boulevard. Information: 303-987-7845

Marc Shuldin

BOOKS

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Marc Shuldin

FOOD

Dine at Sascha Nicolaus, Germany, for a choice of three sauces: nagamono, uniting soft so- ba noodles with teriyaki shrimp and soba- mono, a clay pot packed with a pepper-spiked broth stew of fish, meat, sea and land vegetables and tofu. This simply extraordinary eating experience is open for lunch and dinner (Thursday through Saturday only) at 1365 Osage St. Grade: A Reservations (six or more): 303-595-3666

John Lehndory

POPULAR MUSIC

The Primus concert at the Fillmore Auditorium on Tuesday may be sold out, but fear not: You’ll be able to download every show from the tour at www.primuslive.com as leader Les Claypool follows in the footsteps of Pearl Jam, The Who, The Dead and other bands offering their shows for sale. It’ll take about a month before the shows are available for download, Primus warns, and a price hasn’t been set yet. Stay tuned.

Mark Brown

ALSO ...

FLM

• American Splendor • Autumn
• Spring • demonlover • Dickie Roberts: Former Child Star • Dirty Pretty Things • Intolerable Cruelty
• Kill Bill: Volume 1 • Lost in Translation • The Magdalene Sisters • Matchstick Men • Out of Time • Princess Blade • The Rundown • School of Rock • Step Into Liquid • Thirteen

CLASSICAL MUSIC

• Colorado Symphony 7:30 p.m. today, 2:30 p.m. Sunday. Boettcher Concert Hall, 14th and Curtis streets. 303-893-1300
• Anonymous 4 7:30 p.m. today. Augustana Lutheran Church, 5000 E. Alameda Ave. 303-388-4962
• Moscow Virtuosi, Vladimir Spivakov 8 p.m. Wednesday. Telkeys Loredo Heights Theatre, 3001 S. Federal Blvd. 303-306-9594

POPULAR MUSIC

• Roger McGuinn, Buddy Mondlock 8 p.m. today. Swallow Hill Music Hall, 71 E. Yale Ave. 303-777-1803
• Primus 8 p.m. Tuesday. Fillmore Auditorium, 1510 Clarkson St. 303-837-0360

THEATER

• Macbeth Mizel Center for Arts and Culture, 350 S. Dahlia St. 303-837-9555; www.mizelcenter.org
• The Balcony LIDA Project Theatre, 2180 Stout St. 303-282-0466, www.lida.org

DANCE

• The Spirit of Spain Flamenco music and dance. 7 p.m. today. Lakewood Cultural Center, 470 S. Allison Parkway, Lakewood. 303-987-7845

Staff

• Mike Pearson, Features Editor • Joe Rassenfoss, Entertainment Editor • Sonia Doctorian, Photo Editor • Brian James, Design

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Muffled realities and vocal dreams in Ivan Doig’s ‘Prairie Nocturne’

By Christy Karras
The Salt Lake Tribune

Ivan Doig’s latest book is about a man who tries to find his way out of rural Montana, against the odds, and using only his talent.

The subject hits close to home for the author — after all, that is exactly what he did with his writing.

Since first tackling book-length projects with his Montana memoir This House of Sky, Doig has become one of the West’s most celebrated chroniclers, both in fiction and nonfiction. Prairie Nocturne, his seventh novel, has debuted to generally good reviews, including a coveted spot on USA Today’s short list of books to read this fall.

The novel continues the tale of Susan Duff, the silver-tongued songstress from Dancing at the Rascal Fair. As the book begins, she is 46—lath, single and teaching voice lessons. Along comes a former lover, Wes, with a special favor to ask: he wants Susan to mold his black chauffeur’s extraordinary singing talent and help him launch a professional career.

“I always wanted to write about a guy rising on the basis of talent,” Doig said in an interview from his home near Seattle.

The history of the period, interwoven through the book, is as important an element as plot; the 1920s in Montana saw the decline of the optimistic homestead period as large mining and ranching companies bought up tracts of land from small-time farmers and ranchers who gave up and headed for the cities.

The decade also saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, feeding off discontent over a changing society nationwide, including pockets in the West. “It’s revived after World War I with whole new resentments. It’s not just black and white resentment — it’s anti-Catholic, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish and, to an extent, anti-urban,” Doig said. “The U.S. was losing its rural roots.”

The title of the book refers not just to the musicians in the book but also to the sad song that was the fading Old West. “The twilight of the homestead movement — things did not work out, people didn’t give in to the melancholy fact that they could not make it out there on their own…” The title is also meant to say there’s no reason we can’t have some Chopin in our lives, in the way we think about our lives in the West. High art is possible here, so I wanted to include that in the book.”

Doig is a conscientious stylist who works carefully with language, “trying to explore the possibilities of language: How can something be said more memorably, how can you describe a landscape or a person or an event so it will stay with the reader more strongly?” he said. “I’m very adamant that I’m trying to write with the whole orchestra, not just the bugle.”

Doig’s qualifications for writing about the West could hardly be better. He was raised in Montana ranching country but left and got a Ph.D. in American History ("it gave me three years to sit and read books about the American West — that’s quite an asset to bring to writing something about the West") and worked as a print and radio journalist before turning to creative writing as a career. "I worked under some terrific old radio writers turned professors at Northwestern University… They came out of the Renaissance,” Doig said, but the success was short-lived. “He ended up herding sheep back in the same sagebrush he started from.”

But the book really began with Susan Duff, who as a young girl became one of the most memorable characters from Dancing at the Rascal Fair. Doig had already given her a distinct personality—talented, bossy, too smart for her own good. "In each of my books, I have, I think, pretty consciously left open alleyways where characters can be resurrected or where events from the books can be revisited,” Doig said.

Most of Doig’s fiction is set in the first few decades of the 20th century; it’s not likely he’ll tackle a contemporary novel. "Writing as fast as I can about the current moment, it’s still going to be a couple years old before you get hard covers around it.” Besides, he says, to read his books people “don’t have to know about that period in history — but I think it’s good for them to find out.”

In SLC, Bountiful

• Ivan Doig will read from and sign Prairie Nocturne at The King’s English bookstore, 1511 S. 1500 East, in Salt Lake City, Wednesday at 7 p.m. He will also speak at the Salt Branch of the Davis County Library, 725 S. Main in Bountiful, on Thursday at 7 p.m.; patrons will be admitted starting at 6:30.

• Call The King’s English at 484-9100 or the library at 295-8732 for information.

Interviewed in 1988 for a non-published history article, “became a vivid minor character in the Harlem Renaissance,” Doig said, but the success was short-lived. “He ended up herding sheep back in the same sagebrush he started from.”

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Doig’s ‘Prairie Nocturne’ is ornate, but lacks insight

The West Under Cover

By Martin Naparsteck

Prairie Nocturne by Ivan Doig is a rococo novel. It is so ornate, so crowded with decoration, that noticing there is a plot holding it all together requires an act of will by the reader.

The plot that does exist is, perhaps, best hidden, because it is a model of melodrama. Most of the action is set in Helena, Mont, in 1924, an era, if not a locale, of great excess, a time when exuberance was so loud, the din of poverty and racial hatred and social injustice could scarcely be heard.

Susan Duff, a voice teacher who once had an affair with a man who would have otherwise become governor (that’s in an earlier Doig novel, Dancing at the Rascal Fair), is 40, unmarried, and resigned to a life of solitude, which she understands is not the same as loneliness.

She is visited, after not seeing him for years, by the man who almost became governor, Wesley Williamson, who is rich, a war hero and, we are told, charismatic. He wants his long-ago girlfriend to train the voice of his chauffeur, Montgomery Rathburn, known as Monty, who is black and has a powerful but undisciplined singing voice.

The story also includes trips into the beautiful countryside around Helena and to Harlem, in New York, where a cultural renaissance is in progress; flashbacks to Williamson’s war heroics; and the lurking presence of the Ku Klux Klan.

The essence of melodrama is that everything comes in extremes. Characters don’t like or dislike each other; they only love and hate. And there is never any moral ambiguity. Put the KKK tag on a man and there’s no ambiguity. Put the KKK tag on a woman, and there’s no doubt she’s evil and whoever opposes him is good. Put the KKK tag on a man and there’s no doubt he’s evil and whoever opposes him is good.

The KKK tag is a plot device. The reader doesn’t have to work hard to figure out who to root for.

So, is Susan going to teach Monty to be a great singer? Will the old romance between Susan and Wes be rekindled? Will the KKK try to interfere with Monty’s drive for success? Most of all, will Monty be a success? Well, this is melodrama, and you don’t have to read the book to find out.

But the shape of the building and what goes on inside it is not what interests fans of rococo. The plot that does exist is, perhaps, best hidden, because it is a model of melodrama. Most of the action is set in Helena, Mont, in 1924, an era, if not a locale, of great excess, a time when exuberance was so loud, the din of poverty and racial hatred and social injustice could scarcely be heard.

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But the shape of the building and what goes on inside it is not what interests fans of rococo.
Items must be submitted to the Standard-Examiner by noon on the Wednesday prior to publication. For information, call 625-4279.

Readings and signings

Seattle author Ivan Doig will be speaking and signing copies of his new book “Prairie Nocturne” (Scribner, $26), in which the noted Western novelist explores the discord that racism sows in the Montana wilderness during the Roaring ’20s, 7-8:30 p.m. Wednesday at The King’s English, 1511 S. 1500 East, Salt Lake City; and 7 p.m. Thursday at the Davis County South Branch Library, 725 S. Main St., Bountiful. Both events are free. Seating for Doig’s appearance at the Davis County South Branch Library is limited to 250. Copies of Doig’s books will be available for purchase at both events. For more information, call The King’s English at 484-9100 or the Davis County South Branch Library at 295-8732.
Doig’s long-ago interview pays off

By Susan Whitney
Deseret Morning News

Thirty-five years ago, a young journalist named Ivan Doig spent an afternoon interviewing two elderly residents of White Sulphur Springs, Mont. White Sulphur Springs was also Doig’s hometown, so he’d known Taylor Gordon and Gordon’s sister, Rose, all his life.

He didn’t know them well, of course. He was so much younger. But, “I was an observant kid,” Doig recalls. “I didn’t have anything else to do.”

He could see, even as a child, the basic pattern of the Gordons’ lives. They were solitary, said Doig. “The only people of color in the entire county. They were the most courtly people in town. Always, ‘How do you do?’ They had impeccable manners.”

Doig was working on his Ph.D. in history back in 1968. He sought out Taylor Gordon, knowing Gordon had a history.

Gordon’s gift was singing. He’d sung his way off the prairie onto the stage at Carnegie Hall. He’d lived in Harlem, been a minor figure in the Harlem Renaissance. He’d gone through his money like confetti, Doig said. “Then, his career turned.” Gordon ended up back in White Sulphur Springs, herding sheep.

This week, from his home in Seattle, Doig talked by telephone about Gordon and that long-ago interview. The man stayed in Doig’s brain and his filing cabinet, Doig said. Then, Gordon emerged, this year, fictionalized, as one of the main characters in Doig’s new novel, “Prairie Nocturne.”

Doig has written 10 books and is most famous for “English Creek,” “This House of Sky” and “Dancing at the Rascal Fair.”

When he interviewed the Gordons, he was just 29, and he wasn’t famous at all. Doig’s research included time at Yale reading a collection of letters between Gordon and an early benefactor. Doig then wrote an article about Gordon, a scholarly article (“I was up to my eyebrows in footnotes”) and submitted it to the state’s history society magazine.

The editor hated it and had a junior editor rewrite it. Doig argued with them both. In retrospect, Doig says, he was perhaps “walking an inventive edge.” At any rate, the article was never published.

So, did it feel good to get back into the piece, to do more research about Harlem and the place of African-Americans in Montana in the 1920s? Yes, Doig agreed.

Writing is fun twice, he said: “When I’m rewriting and when it’s done.” He said, the first draft is nothing but a slog. As for research, yes it does hook you. But it’s frustrating. “You know you are never going to get to use 95 percent of what you learned.”

In “Prairie Nocturne,” two characters from “Dancing at the Rascal Fair” resurface. At the end of the story, the future of all the characters is undecided. Several reporters have asked Doig if there will be more about them. He doesn’t know, he said. He doesn’t rule it out.

Meanwhile, he’s working on a piece for the Washington Post about fiction, about the way characters can stick with an author, growing older as he grows older, eventually finding their way onto the pages where “they begin to dance their own dance.”

E-MAIL: dennis@desnews.com
'Prairie Nocturne' hits right notes

By Susan Whitney
Deseret Morning News

PRAIRIE NOCTURNE, by Ivan Doig; Scribner; 365 pages.
$25.

In Ivan Doig's latest novel, "Prairie Nocturne," the language and the settings envelop the reader, but the characters are reserved, in the way people of another time were reserved.

The story begins in 1924, years after the story in "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," with two of that novel's minor characters — Susan Duff and Wes Williamson. Susan is single, a voice teacher in Helena, Mont. Wes, having inherited his father's cattle and property, is one of the richest men in the state. He is married, but he and Susan were lovers for a time, until their affair ruined his chances of being governor.

Now, after not seeing her for four years, Wes comes to Susan for a favor. A man who works for him, Monty Rathbun, a cowhand who is the descendent of slaves, has a beautiful voice. Wes asks Susan to teach him voice lessons. She agrees. Eventually, members of the Klu Klux Klan become irritated with Monty and Susan.

Doig's plot is complex but satisfying. It goes back and forth in time and place. At several points, Monty recalls his childhood and the father he barely remembers. Wes recalls his war injuries. Susan recalls the beginnings of their love.

There is a denseness to Doig's writing. It is thick with poetry and the sentences are long. As a reader, you are submerged. Each chapter ends with a kicker, drawing you on, back down into the next section of the story.

Another plus: Doig's descriptions seem real. You are in Harlem; you hear the sounds. You are on the plains of Montana, in an abandoned fort; you smell the dust and the dry wood.

Still, for all its beauty, there is a catch to this book. You have to be able to believe that two Western white people in the early 1920s could be beyond racism. You also have to believe that, even though they've been lovers, they've always held a part of themselves back.

In the end, Doig pulls it off, but just barely, and then only because his settings and language and history are so good. You accept that these characters are not going to spill their guts to you and you are not going to understand them, not completely.

Susan and Wes' fathers hated each other. Here's how Doig describes Susan and Wes meeting for the first time since they were youngsters in Montana:

"But that was neither here nor there, the concern of the moment was to come up with enough manners to obscure those two grudges, older than themselves, that met at fencelines back in the Two Medicine country. Fortunately the occasion was running over with politeness, so she and he could simply extend a hand to each other and apply enough as needed. For public consumption one or the other of them murmured something to the effect that their families long had been acquainted — each would later tease the other for being so slick at

e-mail: susan@ldesnews.com
Scribner Invites You to Meet

IVAN DOIG

at a book signing of

Prairie Nocturne

Monday, September 29
Noon

at the Missoula

3220 Northern Pacific Avenue

FOR COSTCO MEMBERS ONLY
Scene of the Crime
Adam Woog looks at the latest mysteries, including Sara Paretsky's "Blacklist." K 11

Here's a reading/signing at a small suburban independent store that paid off nicely.

Local scene

Harcovers
1. "Prairie Nocturne"
   Ivan Doig
2. "The Da Vinci Code"
   Dan Brown
3. "Madam Secretary: A Memoir"
   Madeleine Albright
4. "Waxwings"
   Jonathan Raban
5. "Our Lady of the Forest"
   David Guterson

Paperbacks
1. "The Secret Life of Bees"
   Sue Monk Kidd
2. "The Piano Tuner"
   Daniel Mason
3. "Life of Pi"
   Yann Martel
4. "Under the Tuscan Sun"
   Frances Mayes
Spirits high at smaller Northwest Bookfest

BY TYRONE BEASON
Seattle Times staff reporter

Northwest Bookfest wrapped up its ninth year yesterday with an embarrassment of literary riches, including appearances by well-known local authors Ivan Doig, David Guterson, Octavia Butler and the boisterous Sherman Alexie.

The two-day event drew about 9,000, about a third the attendance of previous Bookfests. Still, that number beat the organizers' estimates; turnout had been expected to be lower because this was the first year an admission fee was charged.

The smaller-than-usual crowd did not seem to dampen spirits inside the aircraft hangar at Sand Point Magnuson Park, which has been home to Bookfest for two years. Several panel discussions and author readings were lively and standing-room only.

Science-fiction fans crowded into a discussion featuring authors Butler, Steven Barnes, Spider Robinson, Syne Mitchell and Susan Matthews, who cheerfully dissected their genre. And after reading from his new novel "Prairie Nocturne" (Scribner, $26), Doig fielded a question about his philosophy for using sex scenes in his work.

"I steer between smut and chastity," he said, bringing roars of laughter from the audience.

Visitors to Bookfest would have had a tough time switching gears among panel discussions, which varied widely in topic and tone.

In another session, National Book Award winner Charles Johnson explained how Buddhist principles and meditation can serve the novelist.

For starters, he said, writing requires total focus and the letting go of one's ego.

"There's very few things that put pressure on the ego to the extent that writing does," Johnson said. "Buddhism, as a refuge, has allowed me to get closer to that goal."

He encouraged emerging writers in the audience to truly listen to the characters that populate their imaginations — and to follow the characters' lead when writing.

In his session, Guterson picked up on a similar theme, telling his audience that the characters he creates seem to have lives of their own.

Some may find it interesting, he said, that his latest novel, "Our Lady of the Forest" (Knopf, $25), shows off his humorous side.

Even he had begun to notice the seriousness of his past work.

"This book was liberating in that way," Guterson said. "It felt comfortable to me."

The book, set in pre-millennium America in 1999, deals with questions of spirituality.

"We're all on a spiritual search," said Guterson, a self-described agnostic.

"Questions brought to the surface, I think, are really important.

Alexie provided a dose of comic relief yesterday when he read some of his short stories and poems. Not one to avoid political jabs, he offered at the outset to let his large audience vote on what he'd read to them.

"In my world, voting counts," he said, as the crowd erupted in applause and laughter. The audience left to believe his "world" was left of center.

For the most part, Bookfest went off without hitches.

The aircraft hangar's leaky sealing dampened sections of the exhibition space Saturday, but yesterday's alternately sunny and cloudy weather posed no major problems.

Bookfest organizers, however, may regret bringing a live pony to the festivities this weekend as part of a book promotion. The little horse couldn't hold its water, and left its own special mark on the event.


**Buckfest**

In its ninth year, Bookfest finally has to start charging admission. So what will your $10 get you besides paper cuts?

BY BRIAN MILLER AND MARK D. FEFER

You can go to an author reading at Elliott Bay or the U Book Store for free every night of the week. Jonathan Raban, David Guterson, and others are practically standing on the street corners to hawk their new novels. Sherman Alexie does children’s birthday parties. (“More balloon animals, Mr. Funny Clown Man!”) Having revamped itself and shed some (paid) staff last December, the extremely nonprofit Northwest Bookfest now finds itself in the awkward position of charging for what most of us expect to receive—like the Internet, file sharing, like hot-wired cable—gratis. So are you willing to pay to browse table displays from the American Society of Indexers, the East West Bookshop, and Kvetch Press? What are the draws? Here’s a selective overview and some picks for the weekend event, which runs Saturday, Oct. 18–Sunday, Oct. 19, at Hangar 27 at Magnuson Park (206-622-5317 and www.nwbookfest.org).

**Saturday**

With his Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land, Boeing-engineer-turned-wildlife-photographer Subhankar Banerjee became a cebrélle this summer, when his photos were relegated to the basement of the Smithsonian and his descriptions of them censored because of Republican attempts to open ANWR to oil drilling. Banerjee will discuss the controversy with P I art critic Regina Hackett, who wrote an interesting article herself recently about Seattle’s own inability to get exercised about art (10:15 a.m., Carver Stage).

Gail Collins, the first female editor of The New York Times editorial page, has somehow also found time to write America’s Women: Four Hundred Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines, which looks at women’s ambivalence about home life. She and two other authors will be interviewed by our Tim Appelo (11 a.m., Stafford Stage).

Then it’s a logjam of top local writers: If you haven’t heard enough from Jonathan Raban, he’ll talk more about his boond-and-bust novel Warwings (1:30 p.m., Hugo Stage) with David Shields (Remote). Simultaneously, cantankerous longtime SW staffer Fred Moody (Seattle and the Demons of Ambition) will square off on Seattle history and characters (1:30 p.m., Stafford Stage) with J. Kingston Porter (Ecencentric Seattle) and Gary Atkins (Gay Seattle). Meanwhile and most promisingly, there’s some kind of a hip-lit smackdown among three novelists: Matt McIntosh, whom we recently praised as “downright heroic” for his depiction of sad Federal Way nerds in Wells, Matt Ruff (Set This House in Order), whom our Tim Appelo called “the hottest, coolest new Seattle writer”, and D.B. Weiss of L.A., whose Lucky Wander Boy is all about video-game culture (2 p.m., Hall Stage).

Later, famed naturalist David Quammen, whose Monster of God is reviewed on p. 134, will discuss the impending extinction of Earth’s great predators (3 p.m., Hugo Stage). In another bizarre Bookfest logjam, Quammen conflicts with a panel on environmental activism led by Seattle Times investigative honcho Duff Wilson (3:30 p.m., Stafford Stage).

**Sunday**

Ivan Doig has a new novel, Prairie Nocturn, which we’ll review Nov. 5 before his Nov. 12 reading at UW Kane Hall. He’ll appear with John Findlay (11 a.m., Hugo Stage).

Fantagraphics fans will unquestionably want to show up for a panel featuring Peter Bagge, Gary Groth, Ted Joaflas, and Jim Woodring (11:30 a.m., Carver Stage). Tim Appelo tells us that Ethan Watters’ light-sociology study Urban Tribes is “witty, serious, insightful, and scattershot” in its analysis of why the Friends—watching generation seems intent on ducking marriage in favor of an alterna-family of friends and roommates (11:45 a.m., McCarthy Stage).

David Guterson is such a big shot he doesn’t have to share the stage with anyone, even a moderator. Our Appelo nicked Our Lady of the Forest, saying it “blends some of the appeal of Stephen King’s uncanny tales set in white-trash rural blue-collarville and John Updike’s fables of small-town spiritual yearning among the inexplicably sensitive and the effing lazy” (12:30 p.m., Hugo Stage).

For a discussion on ‘The Meaning of Everest,” Outside contributing editor Bruce Bartlett (an SW alum who did both our jobs so much better that it’s positively painful) interviews climbing legend Dr. Tom Hornbein, a member of the 1963 team that made the first ascent of Everest’s West Ridge; the occasion is the 50th anniversary of that mountain’s original ascent by the comparatively easy South Col (1 p.m., Stafford Stage).

Get up-to-date with some of the most progressive Northwest writers at the Clear Press showcase, which features a dozen authors published by Matthew Stadler’s new Astoria, Ore.-based publishing outfit (2:15 p.m., McCarthey Stage). With mounting U.S. casualties in Iraq, the timely “Writing War” panel presents Anthony Swofford (Jarhead) and Dr. Khassan Baiev, whose The Oath is a first-person account of living in occupied Chechnya, among others (2:15 p.m., Stafford Stage).

Finally, Sherman Alexie (Ten Little Indians): charming, funny, talented, excellent ball-handling skills . . . what more do we need to tell you? (3:30 p.m., Hugo Stage).
DATE: 10/22/03

TO: Carolyn Reidy—14th floor
    Susan Moldow
    Nan Graham
    Pat Eisemann
    Roz Lippel
    Laura Petermann
    Paul O’Halloran—11th floor
    BJ Gabriel—9th floor
    Shelly Davis—9th floor
    Deb Darrock—9th floor
    Lisa Levinson—9th floor
    Michael Selleck—14th floor
    Brant Rumble

FROM: Alison Kling

RE: *Prairie Nocturne* by Ivan Doig

*Prairie Nocturne* reviewed in the 10/17 issue of the *Rocky Mountain News*.

*Ivan’s reading at the Boulder Bookstore was also listed in the 10/18 issue as a “Critic’s Choice.”

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Ivan,

Here’s the *Rocky Mt. News* review. Also, *fyi*, the review that appeared in *The Milwaukee Journal* has now appeared in *The Denver Post*.

---

Brant

It should come as no surprise to any fan of Western literature that Ivan Doig has returned to the necessary soil of Montana to tell his latest story. But that he has combined his familiar landscape and characters with a new twist might cause a pleasant wonder.

In "Prairie Nocturne," the West's pre-eminent literary novelist rides the wide-open range between Montana and New York City during the Harlem Renaissance, gathering a cast of players for one last inspired grasp at love and celebrity.

In a Faulknerian flourish that has threaded through five of his six previous novels, Doig populates his seventh with some familiar faces in old settings. What Doig fan would be astonished to find the indomitable Angus McCaskill making more than a cameo appearance in Doig's newest novel?

But yet another (or simply recurring) McCaskill aside, "Prairie Nocturne" is the story of three other entangled fates, starting with Susan Duff -- first seen as the stubborn schoolgirl with an angelic singing voice in Doig's "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" -- who is now a lonely, middle-aged voice teacher.

Partly because the wealthy Wes will pay any amount and partly because Monty truly possesses a rare but raw singing voice, Susan accepts the challenge.

But in literature, no good deed goes unpunished. The Ku Klux Klan, rooting itself in the rural West after World War I, threatens to destroy all the white teacher's work with her black student. And to render the black-and-white complications grayer, Wes' unexplained motives haunt everyone, including himself.

And lest any reader think Doig's beloved landscape has been relegated to a cameo appearance, fear not. No Western writer -- and Doig is the prime living model for that species -- can escape the ageless countryside's effect on either character or author.
Doig's poetic prose is growing richer and more subtle with each book, like a stone in a river. In "Prairie Nocturne," as the narrative entwines the pasts and presents of its three principal characters, his essential themes re-emerge: family, landscape, childhood memory, loyalty and the inescapability of our past.

Doig's characters, new and old, are unforgettable, and not just because he keeps bringing them back to life in subsequent books. He embroiders them with history, myth and sensuality. Combined with the timeless beauty of his own ancestral ground, they are becoming as much a part of the American mindscape as William Faulkner's Snopes family of Yoknapatawpha.

Novelist Ron Franscell is author of "Angel Fire" and "The Deadline."

LOAD-DATE: October 19, 2003
October 19, 2003, Sunday

SECTION: ARTS; Pg. E12

LENGTH: 545 words

HEADLINE: Doig's long-ago interview pays off

BYLINE: By Susan Whitney Deseret Morning News

BODY:

Thirty-five years ago, a young journalist named Ivan Doig spent an afternoon interviewing two elderly residents of White Sulphur Springs, Mont. White Sulphur Springs was also Doig's hometown, so he'd known Taylor Gordon and Gordon's sister, Rose, all his life.

He didn't know them well, of course. He was so much younger. But, "I was an observant kid," Doig recalls. "I didn't have anything else to do."

He could see, even as a child, the basic pattern of the Gordons' lives. They were solitary, said Doig. "The only people of color in the entire county. They were the most courtly people in town. Always, 'How do you do?' They had impeccable manners."

Doig was working on his Ph.D. in history back in 1968. He sought out Taylor Gordon, knowing Gordon had a history.

Gordon's gift was singing. He'd sung his way off the prairie onto the stage at Carnegie Hall. He'd lived in Harlem, been a minor figure in the Harlem Renaissance. He'd gone through his money like confetti, Doig said. "Then, his career turned." Gordon ended up back in White Sulphur Springs, herding sheep.

This week, from his home in Seattle, Doig talked by telephone about Gordon and that long-ago interview. The man stayed in Doig's brain and his filing cabinet, Doig said. Then, Gordon emerged, this year, fictionalized, as one of the main characters in Doig's new novel, "Prairie Nocturne."

Doig has written 10 books and is most famous for "English Creek," "This House of Sky" and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair."

When he interviewed the Gordons, he was just 29, and he wasn't famous at all. Doig's research included time at Yale reading a collection of letters between Gordon and an early benefactor. Doig then wrote an article about Gordon, a scholarly article ("I was up to my eyebrows in footnotes") and submitted it to the state's history society magazine.

The editor hated it and had a junior editor rewrite it. Doig argued with them both. In retrospect, Doig says, he was perhaps "walking an inventive edge." At any rate, the article was never published.

So, did it feel good to get back into the piece, to do more research about Harlem and the place of

http://www.nexis.com/research/snews/submitViewTagged
African-Americans in Montana in the 1920s? Yes, Doig agreed.

Writing is fun twice, he said: "When I'm rewriting and when it's done." He said the first draft is nothing but a slog. As for research, yes it does hook you. But it's frustrating. "You know you are never going to get to use 95 percent of what you learned."

In "Prairie Nocturne," two characters from "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" resurface. At the end of the story, the future of all the characters is undecided. Several reporters have asked Doig if there will be more about them. He doesn't know, he said. He doesn't rule it out.

Meanwhile, he's working on a piece for the Washington Post about fiction, about the way characters can stick with an author, growing older as he grows older, eventually finding their way onto the pages where "they begin to dance their own dance."

If you go...

What: Ivan Doig

Where: Wednesday, 7 p.m.

When: King's English, 1511 S. 1500 East

How much: free

Phone: 484-9100

Also: Thursday, 7 p.m., Davis County Library, South Branch, 725 S. Main, Bountiful (295-8732; space is limited to 250)

E-mail: dennis@desnews.com

LOAD-DATE: October 19, 2003

http://www.nexis.com/research/snews/submitViewTagged
In Ivan Doig’s latest novel, "Prairie Nocturne," the language and the settings envelop the reader, but the characters are reserved, in the way people of another time were reserved.

The story begins in 1924, years after the story in "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," with two of that novel’s minor characters -- Susan Duff and Wes Williamson. Susan is single, a voice teacher in Helena, Mont. Wes, having inherited his father’s cattle and property, is one of the richest men in the state. He is married, but he and Susan were lovers for a time, until their affair ruined his chances of being governor.

Now, after not seeing her for four years, Wes comes to Susan for a favor. A man who works for him, Monty Rathbun, a cowhand who is the descendent of slaves, has a beautiful voice. Wes asks Susan to teach him voice lessons. She agrees. Eventually, members of the Klu Klux Klan become irritated with Monty and Susan.

Doig’s plot is complex but satisfying. It goes back and forth in time and place. At several points, Monty recalls his childhood and the father he barely remembers. Wes recalls his war injuries. Susan recalls the beginnings of their love.

There is a denseness to Doig's writing. It is thick with poetry and the sentences are long. As a reader, you are submerged. Each chapter ends with a kicker, drawing you on, back down into the next section of the story.

Another plus: Doig's descriptions seem real. You are in Harlem; you hear the sounds. You are on the plains of Montana, in an abandoned fort; you smell the dust and the dry wood.

Still, for all its beauty, there is a catch to this book. You have to be able to believe that two Western white people in the early 1920s could be beyond racism. You also have to believe that, even though they’ve been lovers, they’ve always held a part of themselves back.

In the end, Doig pulls it off, but just barely, and then only because his settings and language and history are so good. You accept that these characters are not going to spill their guts to you and you are not going to understand them, not completely.
Susan and Wes' fathers hated each other. Here's how Doig describes Susan and Wes meeting for the first time since they were youngsters in Montana:

"But that was neither here nor there, the concern of the moment was to come up with enough manners to obscure those two grudges, older than themselves, that met at fencelines back in the Two Medicine country. Fortunately the occasion was running over with politeness, so she and he could simply extend a hand to each other and apply enough as needed. For public consumption one or the other of them murmured something to the effect that their families long had been acquainted -- each would later tease the other for being so slick at watering it down that way -- and that was the extent of it."

E-mail: susan@desnews.com

LOAD-DATE: October 19, 2003
Ivan Doig’s latest book is about a man who tries to find his way out of rural Montana, against the odds, and using only his talent.

The subject hits close to home for the author -- after all, that is exactly what he did with his writing.

Since first tackling book-length projects with his Montana memoir This House of Sky, Doig has become one of the West’s most celebrated chroniclers, both in fiction and nonfiction. *Prairie Nocturne*, his seventh novel, has debuted to generally good reviews, including a coveted spot on USA Today’s short list of books to read this fall.

"I always wanted to write about a guy rising on the basis of talent," Doig said in an interview from his home near Seattle.

The history of the period, interwoven through the book, is as important an element as plot; the 1920s in Montana saw the decline of the optimistic homestead period as large mining and ranching companies bought up tracts of land from small-time farmers and ranchers who gave up and headed for the cities.

The decade also saw the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, feeding off discontent over a changing society nationwide, including pockets in the West. "It’s revived after World War I with whole new resentments. It’s not just black and white resentment -- it’s anti-Catholic, anti-immigration, anti-Jewish and, to an extent, anti-urban," Doig said. "The U.S. was losing its rural roots."

The title of the book refers not just to the musicians in the book but also to the sad song that was the fading Old West. "The twilight of the homestead movement -- things did not work out, people did give in to the melancholy fact that they could not make it out there on their own . . . The title is also meant to say there’s no reason we can’t have some Chopin in our lives, in the way we think about our lives in the West. High art is possible here, so I wanted to include that in the book."

Doig is a conscientious stylist who works carefully with language, "trying to explore the possibilities of language: How can something be said more memorably, how can you describe a landscape or a person or an event so it will stay with the reader more strongly?" he said. "I’m very adamant that I’m trying to write with the whole orchestra, not just the bugle."
Doig's qualifications for writing about the West could hardly be better. He was raised in Montana ranching country but left and got a Ph.D. in American History ("it gave me three years to sit and read books about the American West -- that's quite an asset to bring to writing something about the West") and worked as a print and radio journalist before turning to creative writing as a career. "I worked under some terrific old radio writers turned professors at Northwestern University ... They came out of the exceptionally creative spoken journalism of World War II," Doig said, including journalists like Edward R. Murrow who created pictures with their words, even as they worked under deadline pressure.

The character of Monty, who takes a giant chance in attempting to become a professional singer after a career as a cowboy and chauffeur, is loosely based on the sole black man living in Doig's hometown. The man, whom Doig interviewed in 1968 for a never-published history article, "became a vivid minor character in the Harlem Renaissance," Doig said, but the success was short-lived. "He ended up herding sheep back in the same sagebrush he started from."

But the book really began with Susan Duff, who as a young girl became one of the most memorable characters from Dancing at the Rascal Fair. Doig had already given her a distinct personality -- talented, bossy, too smart for her own good. "In each of my books, I have, I think, pretty consciously left open alleyways where characters can be resurrected or where events from the books can be revisited," Doig said.

Most of Doig's fiction is set in the first few decades of the 20th century; it's not likely he'll tackle a contemporary novel. "Writing as fast as you can about the current moment, it's still going to be a couple years old before you get hard covers around it." Besides, he says, to read his books people "don't have to know about that period in history -- but I think it's good for them to find out."

**In SLC, Bountiful**

Ivan Doig will read from and sign *Prairie Nocturne* at The King's English bookstore, 1511 S. 1500 East, in Salt Lake City, Wednesday at 7 p.m. He will also speak at the South Branch of the Davis County Library, 725 S. Main in Bountiful, on Thursday at 7 p.m.; patrons will be admitted starting at 6:30.

Call The King's English at 484-9100 or the library at 295-8732 for information.

**GRAPHIC:** Since first tackling book-length projects with his Montana memoir *This House of Sky*, Ivan Doig has become one of the West's most celebrated chroniclers, both in fiction and nonfiction.

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Rocky Mountain News

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Doig defies stereotypes in Western tale

Music teacher develops tie with black ex-rodeo clown in author's splendid novel

By Jennie A. Camp, Special To The News
October 17, 2003

With his new novel, Prairie Nocturne, the highly acclaimed and prolific Western writer Ivan Doig has succeeded splendidly in creating a story that defies the archetypal stereotypes of a formula Western.

The typically slow-talking, fast-shooting John Wayne type and his beautiful but utterly dependent belle are replaced by a spiritual-singing, one-time rodeo clown black cowboy and his sharp-tongued but equally talented white music teacher whose looks are wholly superfluous to her stubborn determination and fearless passion.

The novel's protagonist is music instructor Susan Duff, a character drawn from Dancing at the Rascal Fair, the middle book of Doig's Montana trilogy. While she was a mere schoolgirl in Rascal Fair, Susan is now a middle-aged voice instructor who teaches the upper-class children of Helena, Mont.

Susan lives alone and has a love life that once centered on a long-term affair with Wesley Williamson, a married cattle baron whose gubernatorial aspirations were squelched by rumors of his relationship with Susan.

Wes, a smooth-talking but mostly congenial man, appears on Susan's doorstep after a four-year absence to ask that she take on his black chauffeur, Monty Rathbun, as a private voice student. Susan agrees, and in the ensuing chapters we watch Susan and Monty rather slowly and carefully build a teacher-student relationship that soon develops into something far more meaningful - and potentially dangerous in the racially divided United States of the 1920s.

The majority of the novel takes place in 1924 Montana; although we occasionally step back in time to catch glimpses of characters in formative moments, as well as east to the dusky energy of the Harlem Renaissance.

Next to Susan's often curiously stern countenance and unflinching belief in art and humanity, Monty is an equally fascinating character. His active past, dodging bullets as a thick-skinned rodeo clown in 1914, contrasts with what he initially views as the tediousness of Susan's voice exercises. Inhale as if smelling a rose, she tells him repeatedly; exhale as if blowing into a bugle.

Monty's training, which begins painfully slowly, however, proves hugely successful as he learns to breathe past a rodeo-deflated lung and ultimately finds himself singing at Carnegie Hall in the novel's final pages.

Monty's voice is a talent Susan has never heard the likes of, and she is determined to see him succeed in the professional world. But the journey is far from smooth, as Susan, Monty and even Wes find themselves repeatedly battling the violent hatred of the Ku Klux Klan.

http://www.rockymountainnews.com/drmn/cda/article_print/1,1983,DRMN_63_2350347... 10/22/2003
Alongside Doig's compelling characters is a sense of place that grounds us in the startling beauty of the West and carries us well past Bonanza-sensibilities to a 20th-century understanding of a diverse and continually changing contemporary West. Soon after Susan moves from Helena to the prairie home where she will teach Monty, we get a glimpse - in Doig's ever-poetic prose - of the serene but demanding landscape:

"Susan that night thought long and hard about the populace of solitude. About the dots of humankind, connected and not, strung through the weathered valleys and across the girth of prairie like constellations reflected on the ground. The Adairs, the Anguses - and those between them even when no longer there - of the Adair trip; the women hungry for any other women to talk to, even dressed-up ones from Helena; the men half-bemused and half-alarmed that they would be hearing these suffrage arguments from their wives and daughters forever after."

_Prairie Nocturne_ builds gradually, both in action and narrative direction. Unfortunately, the hesitant, understandably aloof beginnings of Susan and Monty's relationship leaves the first third of the novel lacking in a certain intensity of emotion. Doig makes up for this as he weaves issues of race and bigotry with the creative artistry in the novel's remaining two-thirds, but I wonder whether nuggets of the latter might have helped enliven the novel's early chapters.

Doig, who grew up in the 1940s and 1950s in a family of Montana ranch hands, is best known for his novels _Mountain Time, Bucking the Sun_ and his trilogy _English Creek, Dancing at the Rascal Fair and Ride with Me, Mariah Montana_.

Despite its minor flaws, _Prairie Nocturne_ undoubtedly ranks as one of his most ambitious projects yet with its complexity of social and cultural issues nestled in the deceptive serenity of the American West.

_Jennie A. Camp's reviews and short stories have appeared in "Prairie Schooner," "Colorado Review" and other publications. She lives in Platteville._

Copyright 2003, Rocky Mountain News. All Rights Reserved.
In "Prairie Nocturne," Seattle novelist Ivan Doig revisits his Montana roots. It is a landscape he made famous in his memoir, "This House of Sky," as well as in his fictional Montana trilogy, "English Creek," "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana." For Doig's readers, it is a welcome return; for those new to his work, a generous introduction to the author's broad reach and vibrant imagination.

It is 1924, and the brief prairie homesteading era Doig richly celebrated in earlier novels has come to a close. World War I, the flu epidemic of 1918, a series of dry summers and drier markets have emptied the homesteads of Scotch Heaven on the eastern slope of the Rockies.

Large-scale cattle and mining interests are carving up the state. And the last Scotch Heaven homestead family keeps lonely watch over weathered ranches, and stubborn guard against the overreaching Williamson cattle empire based in the next valley.

In an odd turn of events, life briefly returns to Scotch Heaven. One of the Williamson brothers, Harvard-polished war hero Wes, decides to sponsor his black ranch hand and chauffeur, Monty, to train for a singing career.

Monty was raised on his mother's soulful spirituals, songs that came west with blacks sent to cut ties for the railroads. His deep, sonorous renditions need only some polishing before he can take them to the stage.

But Wes' motives are less than clear. The cattle baron is burdened with his own thwarted ambition. He forfeited a run for governor over an illicit affair with Susan Duff. Susan, daughter of Scotch Heaven's original homesteader, once sang on the stages of Europe. Now, her horizons narrowed, she teaches voice lessons in Helena. She is hired by Wes to train Monty for the stage.

Susan has her own reasons for investing herself in Monty's success.

Having had a brief time in the spotlight, she has turned her talents to music composition and various progressive causes, including the campaign for women's
suffrage. She hears in Monty's untrained voice an inspired beauty that should be shared with the world. Now it is Monty's turn.

To avoid the censure sure to arise from a white woman instructing a black man, lessons are held at the old Duff homestead at Scotch Heaven.

Unfortunately for Susan and Monty, Helena's newly formed chapter of the Ku Klux Klan finds the secluded old homestead anyway. Doig evokes the little-known history of the Klan's early presence in the West to steepen Monty's already-stacked odds against success.

Doig is masterful at weaving storytelling with history, tweaking the latter just enough to fit the tale. The deeply entangled lives of his characters must negotiate not only the upheavals of the twentieth century's early decades, but the deeper waters of their own family's ruthless histories.

The relationships between Wes, Susan and Monty are complex, complicated by race, class, their own prickly temperaments and the ghosts of their homestead pasts. When Monty makes it to New York, and his art is embraced by the budding Harlem Renaissance, he confronts a different set of social mores. They prove just as tightly strangled and repressive as the ones he left behind.

In this, his 10th book, Doig moves well beyond the romanticism of prairie homesteading and takes a level-eyed look at its costs. His characters, for all their worthy ambition and "chore-sharpened" drive, are saddled with the hardness and in each of their cases brutality of their parents' lives.

At times Doig's characters seem obsessed with the past, even as they push beyond it at a breakneck pace.

The plotline, too, takes some unexpected turns into remote corners of Western history. The black "buffalo soldiers" sent west to fight the southern Indian wars ride into the narrative. Their sojourn at Fort Assinniboine forms the backstory for Monty's later sanctuary from the Klan. Doig even brings Meriwether Lewis into the mix. His men's 1806 clash with the Blackfeet, "the first blood spilled by American soldiers in the long contest for the West's upper prairie," evokes a violent past.

All these events dramatize the tide of racism, genocide and conquest that accompanied European settlement of the West. This dark side of our history has not received much play in Doig's previous novels. But its legacy haunts the lives of these characters. At times it threatens to destroy them.

D.H. Lawrence believed that the brutality of the settlement and homesteading experience hardened the American character. In "Prairie Nocturne" Doig gives us a story of redemption. His characters emerge from the shadow of a hateful past to find in themselves the strength of spirit to transcend it.

Tim McNulty filed this review from a fire lookout in the North Cascades. A revised edition of his "Olympic National Park, A Natural History" was recently published by University of Washington Press.

"Prairie Nocturne"

by Ivan Doig

Simon & Schuster, $26

Author appearance

Ivan Doig will read from "Prairie Nocturne" at 7 p.m. tomorrow at Seattle's Elliott Bay Book Co. (206-624-6600). He will appear on the Hugo Stage of the Northwest Bookfest at 11 a.m. Oct. 19. Information: 206-378-1883 or www.nwbookfest.org
An Interview with Ivan Doig by Kathy Ashton

After exchanging the usual pleasantries, Ivan and I settle down to a discussion of his new book *Prairie Nocturne*, which picks up where our previous favorite Doig novel, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, left off. Not just a breathtaking read, *Prairie Nocturne* is a lyrical book about music, the teaching of it, and the great dedication required in its pursuit — and the language is as beautiful as any symphony. Although set in the twenties just before the stock market crash, the book is also about war and its atrocities, racial prejudice, (yes, even in the wide-open spaces of Montana, even then), and has more to say about music than we would have guessed a novelist would know. We think this may be the best Ivan Doig yet, high praise indeed.

KA: Given the title, and the musical nature of the content, we have to ask, are you a musician, and if so, what do you play? If not, why a musical theme?

ID: I am not. On the immediate other hand, I have written songs for every novel, all the way back to *The Sea Letters*, my first piece of fiction, a little snatch of a church hymn that one of my characters has to say as he's faking being drunk during an escape. And, by golly I wrote that.

KA: Then where did you acquire this depth of knowledge about music? The technical side of it?

ID: It's poetry bubbling to the surface. It's all I see it as.

KA: And the technical knowledge about singing and the teaching of it?

ID: That's homework. It's a pretty thin technical knowledge; on the other hand I did enough reading about singing teachers to pretty well tell you how to teach somebody how to sing. Giving Monty songs to sing, was a matter of working with the rhythm of the language, running it through my head, maybe taking lines of poetry I once dabbled with — “Does the hawk know its shadow?” is a line that begins one of Monty’s spirit songs. I was never able to use that in a poem, but its line I thought said a lot. It was a matter of getting those lines down and getting them to sing off the page.

KA: This next question is kind of a dumb one, but I am going to ask it anyway. We were never so delighted as when Jon Hassler came to TKF! for a reading and led a sing-along of forty tunes. He had the whole audience eating out of the palm of his hand. Are you going to grace us with a solo or two on this visit?

ID: (laughing) Well, if we can get the right auditorium....

KA: And the Utah Symphony?

ID: (stalling) Let me think, I have been putting together the reading selections and there may well have to be an example, but my singing voice is largely a chanting voice.

KA: We don’t care, Ivan, we don’t care.

ID: You just want me to make a fool of my self, don’t you?

KA You couldn’t do that if you tried. Have you ever (other than your readings) performed in public? Will you again, at TKF, for instance?

Friday, September 05, 2003 America Online: Ashtonkd
KA: Were you on Garrison Keillor?

ID: No. On Garrison Keillor's ill-fated successor. Noah Adams (who was one of the hosts of All Things Considered, the NPR news program) went to Minnesota Public Radio for a year or so, after Keillor left the show to try to become a New Yorker.

KA: Did he try to become Garrison Keillor? ID: No, but one of the things Adams insisted on was having a writer on every show and having the writer do something with his work. On a preview show that aired only in Minnesota (which was probably far enough, given my performance), I did a piece from Dancing at the Rascal Fair. I believe it was the schoolhouse dance where Angus first dances with Anns Ramsey. For whatever reason, the lyrics of Dancing at the Rascal Fair were to be performed on the air. We were at the rehearsal in the big St. Paul Theater where all these shows are done and Adams turned to me and said we have the lyrics here on this paper, what's the music, the tune? I looked at him and said, "Tune?" Fortunately, there was a brilliant fiddler there, a woman, quite famous in the Midwest, and she managed to work out a tune and I kind of chanted the song out. So my answer is yes. I have had a radio network debut that might be improved on.

KA: (laughing) I just love it. The main characters — Susan Duff, Wes Williamson, Monty. Wes's chauffeur — do a fair amount of reflecting on their parts, especially about the Great War and the losses they suffered because of it, but this work isn't pensive or dreamy. What were you thinking when you arrived at the title? Were you using it in its technical sense (pensive and dreamy) or more because the book is so centered on music and Susan developing Monty's potential as a singer.

ID: Nocturne was meant to suggest some of the evening of history that these people were passing through as well as the musical end of it. [The characters] are passing from the glow of promise, particularly in the American West in the homestead era in the Northern Rockies. Just before World War One, there was one of the great agricultural migrations in American history as people took up homesteads in Montana and elsewhere in the Northern West. Then comes 1914 and 1917 and Montana and some of the other Western states are taking the heaviest casualties. Montana, in both world wars, suffered the heaviest proportionate casualties of any of the states. [Young men] were drafted (through some kind of mistake) too heavily in World War One, and scoured to become cannon fodder, young guys straight off ranches, who could handle rifles were put in the front lines pretty readily.

KA: There's a complexity to this novel, very like a Chopin Nocturne. I could almost see the notes on the score, almost more black than white.

ID: I couldn't write the music, but I spent a lot of time composing the story, with pieces of recite where the story goes back to some deeper episode, some of the tall of dialogue as people deal with each other. This is a book about motives; there's a lot of propulsion power for a writer in motives. What are the characters up to, are they up to what they themselves think they are doing, where's it all going? Wes becomes a propulsive figure in himself as all the other characters revolve around him. Why is he everybody's sugar daddy, what's he want out of life here? I was trying to reach into the parts of Western history that I hadn't dealt with in fiction, and had not been dealt with very much in serious fiction: the baronial West in Wes Williamson. He and his family are a huge presence on the prairie. As Susan Duff says, "They're like St. Bernard's in a window box, they're just overpowering." But Wes is not a total black-hatted guy either. Back to the Western suffrage material, I kind of wished I had been able to do more with that, the totally imagined Model T trip (that she takes and is writing the opera about) to gain women's suffrage in Montana and then Monty as an African-American figure in the West.

KA: There were African Americans in the West from way back, but about the only other person who's done much with it in Western fiction that I was aware of was Larry McMurtry.

ID: They've not been written much about in fiction of the region that I'm aware of. I think it was more common in Texas, but I do have Monty and his mother as the only black people in the entire county.

KA: The whole Ku Klux Klan thing surprised me. Why were they so active in a place where there are virtually no black people?

ID: That has not been brought out much in fiction. It's called the "Second Rising of the Klan" The original was against blacks in the South. This was largely anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant, a backlash against immigration, particularly in the 1920s. A lot of it came out of leftover tensions from World War One, the whole boiling pot of change in the 20s. The nomination of Al Smith (the Catholic
governor of New York) was one of the rollings that brought the Klan into this in a brief resurgence.

KA: I think I have asked this question before, but I am going to ask it again. Can you write while listening to music? Is the writing of music and the writing of musical prose similar in any way or entirely different?

ID: I don’t listen to music writing, I listen to music a lot of the rest of the day, though. KA: I have had that same answer from other people whose writing is very musical and lyrical. Almost to a person they say they can’t. ID: I think the old orchestra in the head that has to be listened to is the reason. For the past five years, we have lived here on a high bluff over Puget Sound where we can get the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a wonderfully clear FM signal. So we get an immense amount of classical music flowing into this house. At our previous house where the reception was not that good, I look back and I listened to a lot of cassettes of Country western music especially as I worked in my garden. I just think we are a lot more attuned in this geographical location to the historical music of the world now.

KA: How wonderful for you to live in such a beautiful place, it must be really inspirational. ID: On the other hand, I have to go back to the Rockies and research points like the Montana Historical Society every so often to get back in the history, the historical field of gravity that the characters are living in. There was a WWI diary I came across in the Montana Historical Society that gave me quite a sense of life in the trenches, for instance. That helped a lot. I used hardly any of those details, but it gave me a real depth of feeling for what these guys off Montana ranches and farms found when they were over there in the mud and rats and lice and had half of Europe shooting at them.

KA: There have been other wars, perhaps, that actually took more lives, but the way those young men were fed into the trenches, never to come back...

ID: When Wes is over there after the war and he looks out at the sea of crosses and it comes to him that this is like a stockyard, a slaughterhouse, and without the war going on, he sees the layout of how things operate. Another historical anecdote, for plot purposes, I was trying to think what Susan’s involvement could be in the war, how she had met Wes, so I thought up this Over-There Memorial Committee that she was with. So I put that in the plot and began doing some research. There were immense movements in Britain, particularly, doing exactly the sort of thing that I had imagined. KA: Is the writing of music or musical prose similar to or entirely different from writing music?

ID: I’m conscious of working in rhythms of language, but I don’t have the musical training to say that there is some kind of exact resemblance... I would think that paying attention to the inside of words, whether you’re using soft vowels or hard consonants, must be something like working with what you want the instruments to do in a musical score. I will sometimes put actual rhythms of poetry, iambic pentameter in the prose. I think that has some kinship to musical phrasing. I do wish I had more of a natural bent or musical talent which would probably help my writing. I feel like someone who is perpetually learning by doing.

KA: When it comes to writing, I don’t think you’re learning, you’re teaching, you’ve long since mastered the craft.

ID: When I was trying to come up with these songs for Monty to sing and the ballad that Susan sings to Wes...

KA: (interrupting) I didn’t realize you wrote all the songs too — I just figured you had found old music, you wrote all of that?

ID: I can’t claim ownership of Go Down Moses, or Let Us Break Bread Together on our knees. There are a couple of genuine spirituals in there, but all the other music and poetry in the book is mine. I do that because I think it has to be specific to the story line, to the characters, the personalities of the characters and the mood of the moment. That’s what I mean by learning by doing sitting around here trying to chant out how Susan tells Monty to make phrase breaks: “You know how you get at the end of the road/Trying to stand up under life’s load/Don’t run in and don’t run up and down to a speck/That’s when the right word will lighten your trek.” When Susan is helping Monty regain his voice [after the Klan attack] they figure out a new kind of phrasing for him. Instead of the earlier way, she has him break it up: “Done in/Don’t up/And down/To a speck.”

KA: There is a sad, almost elegiac quality to Prairie Nocturne, as though you were saying good bye to the Twin Medicine Country or perhaps to your readers. Please tell us that this wasn’t your last book. The houses of Scotch Heaven have fallen down, Susan leaves, and Angus is dead. There is this sense of finality to the book.

Friday, September 05, 2003 America Online: Ashtonkd
ID: Yes (I could almost hear Ivan nodding on the phone), it is meant to be an elegy to Scotch Heaven, a goodbye to the homestead period which I have written so much about and which my family came out of. On the other hand, for the next book I'm going to go back at it from a different angle.

KA: Has it been hard for you to do, saying good-bye to the characters who had been such good friends for so many years?

ID: The death of Angus was very difficult to write. Wes's visit to the deserted homestead was one of the hardest too. I rewrote that, tugged it, changed it, moved him around. I didn't want that to take over the whole book, because the book is about Wes and Monty and Susan. To me the Two Medicine homesteads are a very powerful part of where they all come from historically, Susan in particular. And Wes is in there realizing how much his family had to do with truncating the life out of the chances of the homesteaders. He had the chance to help Monty's family by moving them in there. It became a tricky and quite emotional part of the book. Back to the sadly elegiac part of the question, part of that is the characters feeling without entirely knowing, that they have come out of some kind of tragedy back there in the past. Something did not go right in this land of promise. That's the elegiac part.

KA: It's a beautiful ending to a beautiful book.

The good news is that there will be more books in the future, the bad that our time is up. We say good-bye and the interview is over.

--- Original Message ---
From: Ashtonkd@aol.com
To: btker@attbi.com ; BHoaagland2@cs.com
Sent: Friday, September 05, 2003 11:05 AM
Subject: Editorial

Dear Betsy and Barbara, you naughty, naughty girls.
You are very sweet and you're right, that is a run-on sentence, and yes, you did make me cry, but you have also made mistakes in the facts. I did three quarters on a masters at the U, not Westminster and gracious needs to lose the ness in the first para in the second column. My undergrad degree is from Westminster. What can I say, old habits die hard.

If you are wondering how I got a copy, you gave it to me with the chapter which I did proof, many typos, one bad sentence. When you have time, call me and we'll go over it.

I love you both and, yes, mentally I miss doing it more that I can say. Physically, I made the right decision.

Could you please send me a copy of the edited interview so I can send it to Ivan. Thanks.
Love,
K
Variations on a Theme: An Interview with Ivan Doig

by Kathy Ashton

After exchanging the usual pleasantries, Ivan and I settled down to discuss his new book, Prairie Nocturne, which picks up where our previous favorite Doig novel, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, left off. Not just a breathtaking read, Prairie Nocturne is a lyrical book about music, the teaching of it, the great dedication required in its pursuit. Set in the twenties just before the stock market crash, the book addresses war and its atrocities, racial prejudice, and has more to say about music than we would have guessed a novelist would know. We think this may be the best Ivan Doig yet, high praise indeed.

KA: Given the title, and the musical nature of the content, we have to ask, are you a musician, and if so, what do you play? If not, why a musical theme?

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KA: Then where did you acquire this depth of knowledge about music? The technical side of it?

DOIG, continued on page 4

Prep School Odyssey

by Betsy Burton

Old School: A Novel, Tobias Wolff
(Knopf, $22)

The setting of Tobias Wolff’s newest novel is an Eastern prep school that prides itself on ignoring class in favor of accomplishment, a place in which good writing is the highest achievement and good authors are gods. Wolff invests the school’s world with the kind of vivid and haunting detail found in a Bergman film, even while his satiric eye makes his miming of authors from Hemingway to Ayn Rand hilarious. The reader laughs his way through academic and literary posturing, school comedy, school drama, the true nature of the characters comes slowly but surely into focus: some are foolish, some wise, all are achingly human in their vulnerability, wholly understandable in their flaws. Consequently, while almost every chapter could stand alone as a perfect short story, the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts. For all its hilarity, Old School is not just riveting but revelatory, a small gem of a novel possessed of a very large heart.

Fall/Winter Author Events

- Ivan Doig will read from and sign his magnificent new novel Prairie Nocturne, Wednesday, October 22, 7 pm, TKE.
- Tobias Wolff will read from and sign his fabulous new Old School: A Novel at the Downtown Library, Tuesday, December 16, 8 pm, in an event co-sponsored by TKE, The Salt Lake Film Center and The Salt Lake City Library. We will also screen the movie This Boy’s Life at 5 pm on the same day, followed by a reception.

*Please see back page for community calendar of literary events.

Holiday Fun

- The King’s English Annual Holiday Do, Thursday, December 4, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Ye Shall Give, Ye Shall Receive: 10% off everything at TKE, an abundance of booksellers to recommend, wrap, and ship — and leave your receipt behind to give an additional 10% to charity.
- Holiday Books and Bagels, December 7, 9 am. Barbara Hoagland, Betsy Burton, Michelle Macfarlane, Janet Lund will preview books for holiday giving. Have your gifts wrapped and mailed. What could be easier?
Henry's heels as he morphed from boy to man, decade to decade; as Clare watched him disappear, reappear: Clare, wife, lover, and artist, is the true fulcrum of this complex and endlessly surprising tale, reminiscent of *Time and Again*, yet unique — and quite wonderful.

— BB, MacAdam/Cage, $25

*A Venetian Affair*, Andrea di Robilant

This very readable work chronicles the rocky history of true love between a beautiful adolescent of mixed parentage and questionable social standing, Giustiniana Wynne, and a young Venetian patrician, Andrea Memmo. The romance takes place in 18th century Venice and, as far as possible, is a true story. Because the author is a descendent of Memmo, he has access to a wonderful cache of letters by the two lovers who wrote daily, though barred from marriage due to vast social differences. Through these letters and di Robilant's narrative, we follow the trajectory of their affair, learning much about life in the last years of Venice’s greatness, Paris at the end of France’s *ancien régime*, and the boredom of life in London at mid-century. The cast of characters includes countless aristocrats, a king or two, and even Casanova.  

— CTB, Knopf, $24

*Mirror Mirror*, Gregory Maguire

Few fictional characters are as evil — or as entertaining — as Snow White’s (Bianca’s) wicked stepmother whom Maguire has, aptly enough, morphed into Lucrezia Borgia. And nowhere, Grimm included, does a mirror tell truths with such consequences. Conjure up some dwarves who are stalwart and stubborn as the stone from whence they seem to spring, a kind father, a couple of half-mad household retainers, the absolute prince of darkness (Cesar Borgia) and a novel of startling wit and originality appears. The darkest truth from fairy tales seems to be Maguire’s happy lot in

Continued on page 7

**DOIG, continued from page 5**

**KA:** There have been other wars, perhaps, that actually took more lives, but the way those young men were fed into the trenches, never to come back...

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The good news is that there will be more books in the future, the bad that our time was up. We said good-bye and the interview was over.
"Cultural vitality is an essential part of our economic future," says newly elected Denver mayor John Hickenlooper, "and books are nourishment for the soul." You can say what you want about Denver being a cowtown, but at least we now have a mayor who knows Moby Dick isn't a rock band.

Hickenlooper ran a successful campaign by being the candidate no one knew, the classic outsider. Republicans thought he was a conservative; Democrats thought he was a liberal; the business community recognized one of their own. I like him; hell, everyone likes him but cynics might say there's something wrong when Ken Hamblin and Wellington Webb are backing the same candidate.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the campaign, however, was that in an age of macho politicians most voters thought Hickenlooper was a geek and voted for him anyway. Of course, the mayor isn't really a geek at all. Those of us who've lived elsewhere would recognize him instead as an East Coast intellectual and his sub-Ivy education validates this. He could belong to Porcellian and summer in Newport for all we know. Hickenlooper would no more evince an interest in dress than brag about his bank account. In a stroke of political genius, the mayor and his staff used press releases and television commercials to encourage reporters and voters alike to think he was uncool. Which you have to say is very cool.

What Hickenlooper is, however, is a former English major, which in some peoples' eyes might be worse. Since I've been dealing for 30 years with distraught parents who wondered what their kids would do with an English degree, however, I disagree. Politics is full of lawyers and businessmen; I say we need more candidates who understand scansion and the development of the English novel. In the future, instead of sending people down the hall to career counseling, I'll just suggest our graduates run for office. Still, while it's nice to have a literary mayor, even I find it somewhat alarming to have a litterateur in charge of a major American city. The next thing you know, Hickenlooper will be requiring cabinet members to read Spenser's "Faerie Queen" and hosting sherry parties in his loft.

For all its erudition, however, on a recent morning, Hickenlooper looked like any harried dad as he tried to spoon oatmeal into his son Teddy's mouth while balancing briefing papers and a cellphone and waiting for the cavalry to arrive in the person of his wife, Helen, also a literary sort who used to contribute to the Talk of the Town column for The New Yorker.

Hickenlooper comes by his commitment to literature honestly. He wrote his senior thesis on Dashiell Hammett at Wesleyan University and continues to read widely, from Richard Ford and Ivan Doig to Kurt Vonnegut, a friend of his father who actually endorsed Hickenlooper in the campaign.

The mayor sees no contradiction between his literary background and his move into politics. "There's a great value to having politicians and business people interact with poets and writers," Hickenlooper says. "He's done this part, too, by serving as a sponsor for the Evil Companions colloquium and hosting dinners for such writers as Tom McGeaane and Mike Harrison. The creative class will drive the economy of the 21st century and creative types aren't loyal to companies but to place," Hickenlooper went on. "I believe that next year Denver will become a cultural destination because of the library, the art museum and the scientific and cultural facilities district. That would be great for the city and great for business.

Such goals are laudable but times are tough and poetry won't solve the city's fiscal crisis. The fact is that despite the mayor's commitment to writers and writing, the library's budget is under attack and local branches are laying off staff and closing one day a week. The library is one of the crown jewels of the city," Hickenlooper says, "but revenues are going to be down 3 percent or more and the question before us is how to maintain what we have, how to prioritize? Is it more important to have police on the street or more books for the library? We
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"The creative class will drive the economy of the 21st century and creative types aren’t loyal to companies but to place," Hickenlooper went on to say, "and it’s quite possible that overnight Denver will become a cultural destination because of the library, the art museum and the scientific and cultural facilities district. That would be great for the city and great for business."

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One mistake Hickenlooper says he won’t make is to inaugurate a one-book-one-city program with a novel by a New York newspaperman, or even a political novel like “All the King’s Men” or "The Last Hurrah." "I think we should celebrate the authors we have here," he says. "Local writers need to be read by people in Denver."

The mayor stopped short of actually announcing anything, however. "I think I’ll name a committee," he said with a smile. "People like Rick Ashton, some writers and local booksellers. That way no one can blame me for the eventual choice. We might have a decision by the end of September."

Of course the idea of everyone having to read the same book sounds a little like high school to some of us but it could be worse. Local book guru Margaret Maupin of the Tattered Cover says that a one-book-one nation idea was making the rounds at the Book Expo in Los Angeles last June. Am I the only one who finds the idea of George Bush selecting our reading material to be a bit scary?

In politics as in life timing is everything. Therefore, I’d say the next step is a write-in campaign for Kent Haruf’s masterful “Plain-song” as the first one-book-one-city selection. I’ll deliver the petition to the mayor myself.
Man of many words

Ivan Doig continues the Two Medicine trilogy with 'Prairie Nocturne'

By MARY STEWART SAILE for the Missoulian

The silver-voiced Susan Dutt was a bossy schoolgirl in "Dancing at the Rascal Bar," the best-selling of Ivan Doig's novels. Now his Montana Two Medicine trilogy continues with Miss Susan, a small-town schoolteacher and chauffeur as a concert vocalist. The year is 1924, Helena. Many of her voice students have fallen by the wayside, their parents discouraged by wagging tongues about Miss Dutt's song-led matches for the right of women to vote. Yet the truth is, the sweet little songs still come to be trained by the best, the tall, indomitable former stage performer with the 'course-ground B.F. butt,' cinnamon eyes, and Scottish tenacity.

In the lyric opening scene, there is a knock on the door, and an old presumably big and brown with a sense of social justice are characterized. Susan's songs end their usual repertoire with a sense of social justice are characterized. The writer's investment on the page, that's a Montana in the 1920s) foists its second volume of mostly his home in Meagher County, the Rocky Mountains, and now lives in Seattle, Washington.

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Fuhrman

Continued

own words. He makes clear that it is difficult being an elected prosecutor, because putting criminals in prison is a complicated process dominated by rights for the guilty.

The trouble is, as former cop Fuhrman has come to realize, when those rights are violated, the guilty sometimes go free on procedural grounds. That serves the community poorly by wasting precious tax dollars, putting a dangerous individual back on the street and sabotaging confidence in the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, rights violations by prosecutors such as Macy and pro-prosecution scientists such as Gilchrist can lead to convictions of innocents, as Fuhrman delineates in case after case. That is a shame for more than the wrongly prosecuted individual. It also means that the real perpetrator is at liberty to murder, rape or rob again.

Fuhrman acknowledges the shame of the criminal justice system in some jurisdictions. Because he has come to believe that innocent men and women are convicted on a regular basis, he no longer supports the death penalty. After reading this well-reasoned, well-researched book, you may agree.

Man

Continued

Faulkner.

Doig employs words that send one scrambling for Webster’s: abattoir, palimpsest, legerdemain. The Scottish ones: shinnying, fliwer and hawkshaws; more in

French: billets doux, poseur garrets, avoirdupois.

There’s little of the weighty melancholy found in some of his earlier books, particularly “This House of Sky,” even in the face of some grim doings in “Prairie Nocturne.” Memorable scenes in Helena’s Broadwater Hotel and New York’s Harvard Club linger, and as Monty cavorts with rodeo bulls in whiteface, there is artful humor and a touch of the light-heartedness of this reader’s favorite Doig volume: “Ride With Me, Mariah Montana.”

Prairie Nocturne is a fine way to savor 365 pages by the fire.

Mary Stewart Sale earned a master’s in creative writing at the University of Montana.

Memories

Continued

imaginatively into other people’s shoes and skin if we’re ever going to blur away the problems of race at all. We’re in everlasting trouble if writers are confined to an apartheid of the imagination – if we’re not going to try to cross the skin lines.”

In the case of Monty Rathbun, Doig’s black singer, “skin lines” are what send the KKK after him – dues-paying members totaled some 5,200 in Montana in the 1920s, about 1 percent of the state’s population – what threatens his burgeoning performing career, and what keeps him away from the white woman he loves.

Novel’s end finds Monty headed for Europe, which would seem to rule out a sequel for the Montana-loving Doig – but he laughs when asked, and gives a “Never say never” reply.

One thing he can say is that never, as long as he lives, will he run out of Montana landscapes to evoke or the desire to find new ways to write about them. Says Doig: “No writer ever has enough decades in his life to exhaust a vividly imagined area.”
Doig returns to several of the characters from his much-loved *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* (1987) in this gripping story set not only in Montana's Two Medicine country, the landscape indelibly associated with the author, but also in New York during the Harlem Renaissance. It's 1924, and Susan Duff, the headstrong schoolgirl from *Rascal Fair*, is now a middle-aged voice teacher in Helena, resigned to spinsterhood after her affair with gubernatorial candidate Wes Williamson cost him the election. Then Wes seeks her out with a proposition: teach his black chauffeur, Monty, to sing. Returning to Two Medicine country, Susan does just that, as the narrative twists and turns its way back into the pasts of the three principal characters and ahead into their shared futures in New York: Monty on the concert stage and Susan and Wes, their relationship still tumultuous, in the wings.

As always, Doig incorporates a vast amount of fascinating historical material into his personal drama: the story of the "Buffalo soldiers" of the tenth cavalry in the late nineteenth century; the saga of the Ku Klux Klan's incursion into Montana; and, of course, the Harlem Renaissance itself. The heart of the matter, though, is the three-sided relationship among Susan, Wes, and Monty; skirting the melodrama into which this triptych might easily have tumbled, Doig tightens the reins on his sometimes mannered prose and constructs a subtle, highly textured love story, nicely balancing period detail and well-modulated emotion. *Bill Ott*

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Ivan Doig tells epic stories. Maybe it's the backdrop of the sweeping Montana frontier where his stories are set. The land is larger than life, so the people and situations seem so, too.

With this novel, he revisits his famed "Montana Trilogy," the best and most epic of which is the beautiful "Dancing at the Rascal Fair."

Doig picks up on the lives of minor characters from that novel -- the Williamson family, the greedy cattle operation that tries to buy the prairie out from under the honest, hardscrabble homesteaders, and Susan Duff, then a mere schoolgirl child of one of those homesteaders.

Now Susan is 40 and a voice teacher in Helena, and the Williamssons have effectively accomplished their goal of scooping up all the property in sight. Despite the enmity between Susan's now-dead father and the cattle barons, we discover Susan has had an affair with Wes Williamson, a war hero, one-time gubernatorial candidate and partner in the ranch empire.

When we meet her, it's four years after the affair. Wes lets himself into her house with his old key, but not for a tryst. He comes to ask Susan to take on the best vocal student she's ever trained.

Problem is, the potential student is a black man. And she's a white woman. And it's 1920.

Wes proposes moving Susan from Helena to her family's old homestead, where she can train the young man, Monty Rathbun, a Williamson ranch hand, in relative privacy.

Despite her sharp-tongued stubbornness, Susan accepts because Monty's voice really is something

special, but maybe also because she still has feelings for Wes.

They end up meeting the full wrath of the Ku Klux Klan.

These three characters and their relationships form the heart of the novel. Bossy, indomitable Susan is the one who really keeps the Pygmalion project going; she refuses to yield even when the Klan threatens her and Monty.

Wes is harder to read, shuffling between motivations that we suspect confuse even him:

Did he set up these lessons as a scheme to stage a showdown with the Klan he's always wanted to conquer? Or to get back together with Susan? Or to assuage some guilt over his family's relationship with the Rathbuns?

Monty, perhaps, is the most intriguing of all. He dwells on his mysterious past, when his once-respected, war-decorated father disappeared one day. He's haunted by this, and it comes out in his singing.

At times he displays fierce courage in the face of the Klan, at other times he would rather abandon the voice he's struggled to train and be the common laborer he's expected to be.

But the novel, like Doig's others, is at the same time larger than these characters. It's a sweeping story of racial divides and the effects of war -- the types of themes that drive great literature.

But is it great literature?

In the end, I have to say no. It's definitely not "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," which is a hauntingly beautiful story that ultimately rings true.

"Prairie Nocturne" contains many great scenes, but something doesn't quite ring true, particularly in Susan, who clomps around in haughty (though likeable) independence, then suddenly develops a tender side.

Yet a book can fall short of being great literature and still be worthwhile, complex and intriguing. This book is all of those things.

Rebecca Sodergren is a free-lance writer living in Wichita Falls, Texas.

LOAD-DATE: October 12, 2003
Character study

In ‘Prairie Nocturne,’ Ivan Doig returns to familiar names and larger-than-life landscapes

Details on Kalispell appearance — Page 3

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Intimate portraits
Ivan Doig masters humans and history in newest novel

By CAROL MARINO
The Daily Inter Lake

Ivan Doig, recognized as one of the great novelists of the American West, will sign his latest novel Wednesday at Books West in Kalispell.

Doig, renowned for both his fiction and memoirs, revisits the Rocky Mountain front and the characters of his beloved Two Medicine trilogy in "Prairie Nocturne," a companion to the trilogy.

"English Creek," the first novel, was set in Montana during the Depression. In "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," he went back to the home-stead ing era of the late 19th century. And in "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," he returned to more contemporary times — Montana's centennial summer of 1989 — completing a journey across a century of western history.

Now in "Prairie Nocturne," the Scottish family names of McCaskill and Duff are resurrected. From the stark and beautiful open prairie to the grit and hustle of the Harlem renaissance, the tangled lives of three people and their interlocking destinies provoke questions of allegiance, the grip of the past and the cost of fame and passion. The story is set in the '20s where the smear of racism and the cloaked Klu Klux Klan can be found even in the isolated ranchlands of Montana.

Recognizing a need to write about the African-American experience in the West, Doig introduces the character of Monty Rathbun, a black ranch hand and chauffeur to a cattle baron. Rathbun leaves Montana to seek fame in Harlem in the '20s and '30s — an extraordinary time of creativity, when such talents as Josephine Baker and Duke Ellington were flourishing.

Doig grew up in the '40s and '50s along the rugged rim of the Rocky Mountains, first in White Sulpher Springs, and then in the Dupuyer and Valier areas. His life was formed among the sheep herders and characters of valley ranches and small-town saloons.

As a graduate student in history at the University of Washington in the '60s, Doig felt alienated. He had worked in a lambing shed, and driven a power buckrake during haying time, a D8 Cat pulling a harrow during summer fowling, and a grain truck at harvest. He'd herded and trailed sheep but found no one else who had done any of that.

In those years of self-questioning, I was, as usual, out of step. It was becoming clearer and clearer to me what I was in life. I was a relic. The son of another relic. And the grandson of yet another, a third relic," he recalls.

In a recent phone interview, Doig talked about the "historical ore" that runs in his veins.

"I wrote the Two Medicine trilogy in the '80s. It was the Faulkner-like territory of memory and imagination that I know. These characters carry out the stories of life I'm trying to tell."

Doig has 35 years of research wrapped up in those stories.

He is intent on continuing his passion for the Two Medicine country and the characters he has developed. He says his next novel may be set during the time of the great irrigation project near Valier, which at that time had been planned to reach 10,000 people but made it to only 1,000.

Doig also plans to continue to write about Montana's homestead period.

"It was a colossal migration when a quarter million people came west to Montana, perhaps the biggest single agricultural-based migration in American history," he said.

He talked about his interest in the ultimate clash with the Blackfeet that set the course of western history for the next 100 years, "from the military expedition led by Capt. Meriwether Lewis and the opening shot of the long prairie war to its climax at Wounded Knee."

DOIG KICKS off his Northwest book-signing tour for "Prairie Nocturne" at Books West from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday. For those unable to attend, Books West will reserve copies of "Prairie Nocturne" in advance, and the store will see that they are signed.

Books West is located at 101 Main Street. For more information, call 752-6900 or 1-800-471-2270.

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THE DISTANCE FROM NORMANDY, by Jonathan Hull
(Martin's, $24.95, 0312314116) "I love The Distance from Normandy. This story of a widowed World War II veteran and his grandson who are struggling through war to understand each other should be required reading for anyone who has, knows, or teaches teenage boys."—Liz Murphy, Learned Owl Book Shop, Hudson, OH

THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE, by Jonathan Lethem
(Doubleday, $26, 0385506996) "Everything Jonathan Lethem has written thus far has been extraordinary. What he does in this novel tops even what he has previously done, however, as he has delivered a unique, dense, compelling whirring book of a story, a book that takes readers through several life-altering, threshold moments in its central characters' lives. This book flies."—Rick Simonson, The Elliott Bay Book Company, Seattle, WA Also a Random House Audio (Unabridged cassette, 0739390646)

FOUR SPIRITS, by Sener Jeter Naslund
(Morrow, $26.95, 0606212383) "With this powerful new novel of the civil rights struggle, Senna Jeter Naslund has topped the literary magic she created in Ahab's Wife. Four Spirits will move you."—Jake Reiss, The Albatross Booksmith, Birmingham, AL Also a HarperAudio (Unabridged cassette, 0060594925)

HOW TO BREATHE UNDERWATER: Stories, by Julie Orringer
(Knopf, $21, 1400041112) "Orringer's luminous debut collection takes us into the lives of young girls finding their way through the emotional minefields of childhood and adolescence. These nine stories resonate with wisdom and compassion, and welcome one of this fall's freshest and brightest voices."—Karl Kilian, Brazos Bookstore, Houston, TX

IDLEWILD, by Nick Sagan
(Putnam, $24.95, 0399150978) "Idlewild opens in a Tim Burton-esque world, flowing into The Matrix, and ending in a world reminiscent of Philip K. Dick. Our narrator, Halloween, wakes up with a host of amnesia and the feeling that someone is trying to kill him. As he slowly regains his memory, he learns that life real and virtual is not what he thinks. Sagan's brilliant!"—Erin Coston, Davis-Kidd Bookstores, Memphis, TN Also a Highbridge Audio (Unabridged cassette, 1565179905)

ISLE OF PALMS: A Lowcountry Tale, by Dorothy Benton Frank
(Berkley, $22.95, 0425191562) "Isle of Palms was good from the first page. The writing is seamless through changes of time, and it is full of the wonderful humor that is signature of the author, I love it."—Christine Stanley, Bay Street Trading Co., Beaufort, SC

JAMESLAND, by Michelle Hanusen
(Knopf, $24, 0375413859) "In a riff on The Varieties of Religious Experience, Hanusen follows a group of soul-searching folks, including William James' great-granddaughter, her semi-artist, her wife, and the Unitarian minister who is doing battle with the church elders for being too churchy. In their quest for life's answers, whether religious, psychiatric, or just plain psych, Alice and her cohorts bounce off each other like protons, finding solace and even some answers in each other's friendship."—Daniel Goldin, Harry W. Schwartz Bookshop, Milwaukee, WI

THE LORD OF CASTLE BLACK: Book Two of the Vicount of Adr印花lanka, by Steven Brust
(Tor Books, $27.95, 01312855826) "Returning to Brust's Dragaeran, where the adventure continues! From the ashes of the fallen empires a new empire is struggling to rise—with swashbuckling nobles and opportunistic highwaymen, witchcraft and sorcery, revenge, battle, and true love! Brust spins a tale worthy of Dumas' The Three Musketeers (complete with courtyard manners and intrigues). I cannot recommend this series highly enough."—Scott Werbin, The Tudor Book Shop and Cafe, Kingston, PA

LUCKY GIRLS: Stories, by Nell Freudenberger
(Ecco, $22.95, 0060088796) "The five longish stories in this book luminously describe the lives of five women—all expatriates in one way or another—making their ways through worlds they may not have chosen, but which they are determined to own. Freudenberger is definitely an author to watch."—Catherine Weller, Sam Weller's Book Shop, Salt Lake City, UT

LUNCH AT THE PICCADILLY, by Clyde Edgerton
(Algonquin, $22.95, 1565121953) "In our store we have a one-session review for Edgerton's Walking Across Egypt —This is one of the funniest books I've ever read! Now, we have Lunch at the Piccadilly, which is evenfunner. I can't wait to hand sell this one."—Linda Johnson, Books at Stonehenge Market, Raleigh, NC

MAILMAN, by J. Robert Lennon
(Norton, $24.95, 0395057313) "The manic, hypnotic obsession of this novel as displayed through its wildly engaging main character, Albert Lippincott (the mailman in question), mirrors the reader's kinetic attachment to this funny, disturbing, and exhilarating novel. This is the kind of book you enjoy so much you wonder if there is something wrong with you."—Robert Sinclair, Third Place Books, Lake Forest Park, WA

MY GOLD WAR, by Tom Piazza
(Regan Books, $24.95, 060633404) "The legacy of family, the irresistible grip of the past on the present, history itself and how we struggle to understand it—the themes in this book are compelling and memorable. This novel is a tour de force."—Bob Sommer, Changing Hands Bookstore, Tempe, AZ

THE NAMESAKE, by Jhumpa Lahiri
(Houghton Mifflin, $24, 0395927218) "The Namesake is a beautifully written novel about two generations of Bengali-Americans facing the challenges of assimilation and identity that have confronted immigrants from many countries who have come here seeking the 'good life.' This is a good tale, admirably told."—Bob Sommer, Changing Hands Bookstore, Tempe, AZ

THE POLISHED HOE, by Austin Clarke
(Alfred A. Knopf, $24.95, 0307255563) "Set on the island of Bermuda in the West Indies, The Polished Hoe occurs in just 24 hours as Mary-Mathilda gives her statement about murdering Mr. Bellfeels, the plantation owner to whom she is mistress. The statement encompasses the entire history of each sentence unrolled. It is a riveting, absorbing and intelligent writer."—Joci Tilsen, Valley Bookseller, Stillwater, MN

PRESENT VALUE, by Sabin Willett
(Villard, $24.95, 1400668689) "A decent man is caught up in the downfall of both his Fortune 100 Company and his personal life in this witty novel about corporate greed. Willett's social commentary is both hilarious and profoundly sad. A truly American novel, and maybe a great one."—Brendan Kiely, The Book Sense, Boston, MA

THE RABBIT FACTORY, by Larry Brown
(Free Press, $25, 0743245357) "Larry Brown's latest novel is a wild departure from his previous work. It begins in Memphis with a man rescuing a dog who is no longer able to perform his duties, and then, like a Robert Altman film, we follow various characters and their stories—a prostitute, a boxing sailor, an incompetent gangster, and others who may never meet, but whose lives are connected nonetheless. Readers have an excellent view from above as we watch these sordidly funny stories of the human comedy unfold."—Lyn Roberts, Square Books, Oxford, MS Also a Recorded Books Audio (Unabridged cassette, 140254633X)

SAUL AND PATSY, by Charles Baxter
(Pantheon, $24, 0375410295) "Charles Baxter continues to cement his place in the upper echelon of current authors. Saul and Paty is a brilliant novel of obsession and the toll it can take upon faith and belief."—Bill Casumano, Nicole's Books, Ann Arbor, MI Also a New Millennium Entertainment Audio (Unabridged cassette, 159007672X)

SECOND SUNDAY, by Michele Andrea Bowen
(Warner Books/Walk Worthy Press, $22.95, 0446530336) "Second Sunday takes a hilarious look at the politics, players, and inner workings of African-American church life. Gemeinschaft Missionary Baptist Church members are faced with an unexpected turn of events just as the church is preparing for its 100th Anniversary. The feeling begins, sides are selected, and each camp wants the other to 'bring it on!' Bowen opens our hearts to appreciate people who are generally not associated with the right looks or lifestyle, and Second Sunday demonstrates how when spiderwebs unite the lion can be conquered."—Emma Rodgers, Black Images Book Bazaar, Dallas, TX

SECRET FATHER, by James Carroll
(Houghton Mifflin, $25, 0181528499) "Carroll's novel is a fast-paced thriller, an historical novel, and a wonderful study of what it means to be a father. Set in the '60s in the divided city of Berlin, Secret Father is elegantly written, with wonderfully drawn characters. I can't think of anyone I know who wouldn't enjoy it."—Mary Gleyeste, Eagle Harbor Book Company, Bainbridge Island, WA

THE 6TH LAMENTATION, by William Brodrick
(Viking, $24.95, 0670031917) "An older woman in London, knowing she has not long to live, sees a familiar face on TV and decides that she wants her beloved granddaughter to know about the secrets of her past: namely, that she worked for the French resistance to help Jewish children escape, but that things went terribly wrong. Then a German SS officer seeks refuge in an Episcopal priory in rural England. These two compelling stories are deftly tied together, and you will find this novel hard to put down."—Pat Kelte, The Raven Bookstore, Lawrence, KS Also a Highbridge Audio (Unabridged cassette, 1565171861)

THEATER OF THE STARS, by N. M. Kelby
(Hyperion, $23.95, 0786885889) "This beautiful, mysterious, and frightening book has me under its spell. This story about the tragedy of war, the Manhattan Project's impact on the world of physicists, and mothers and daughters, will interest a wide range of readers. Kelby is a gifted and intelligent writer."—Joci Tilsen, Valley Bookseller, Stillwater, MN

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AUTHOR AT WORK: Author Ivan Doig signs a copy of his new book “Prairie Nocturne” for Bill Rappold of Dupuyer at Barnes and Noble Thursday. Doig will be in Bozeman Friday at the Country Bookshelf and in Helena on Saturday at noon at the Montana Book & Toy Co.
Doig focuses on characters, not environment, of West

By Dan Webster
Staff writer

"Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above,
Don't fence me in."
— Cole Porter

Whatever you do, don't tell Ivan Doig that, as a writer who lives in the West, his books are studies of space. "That really raises my hackles," he says with a laugh. "We ain't writing travelogues."

"We," in this case, includes all the great writers of the American West — from A.B. Guthrie to Wallace Stegner, Grace Stone Coates to Terry Tempest Williams — whose work captures what it means to live, love and survive in the expanse of land west of the Mississippi.

In particular, though, it means Doig himself — author of seven novels, the latest of which, "Prairie Nocturne" (Scribner, 384 pages, $26), is another exploration of his native Montana.

Doig's previous novels have captured a range of experiences over different times in the state's history. His noted trilogy is a perfect example. "English Creek" (1984) is set in the 1930s, "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987) spans the years between 1889 and 1920, and "Ride With Me, Maria Montana" (1990) jumps all the way forward to 1989.

"Prairie Nocturne" is set in the 1920s.

OUT LOUD

Ivan Doig will read from his new novel "Prairie Nocturne" at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday at Auntie's Bookstore, 402 W. Main.

A.B. Guthrie to Wallace Stegner, Grace Stone Coates to Terry Tempest Williams — whose work captures what it means to live, love and survive in the expanse of land west of the Mississippi.

It's a time of change, when cars and telephones have made it harder to find the seclusion so much a part of traditional

Continued: Doig/F5
Montana living.

In this setting, Doig has placed three main characters:
- Susan Duff: A minor character in "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," Susan is now in her 40s and returned from Europe, where she had toured as a singer. Settled in Helena, she makes her living as a teacher of singing.
- Wesley Williams: A cattle baron and once-promising candidate for governor, he has seen his political career ruined because of an adulterous affair with Susan. Written, Doig says, as an example of an "old-line Catholic of the time," Williams loses Susan after refusing to leave his wife.
- Finally, there's Monty Rathbun, Wesley's African American chauffeur: At Wesley's urging, Monty is taken on by Susan as a student. Boasting a natural talent, Monty develops quickly—even in the face of the KKK-style prejudices that end up threatening, and in various ways harming, all three characters.

Those prejudices thrive both in Montana and in New York, where Monty becomes a star of the Harlem Renaissance.

As always, Doig borrows from real life to give his work a sense of authenticity.

Monty was inspired by a real person, Taylor Gordon, whom Doig remembers seeing around White Sulphur Springs as a child. Gordon, who told his own story in the book "Born to Be" (University of Nebraska Press, 236 pages, $11), was a noted spiritual singer who earned at least a footnote in Harlem Renaissance history.

“Taylor went off in the 1920s, singing spirituals," Doig says. “He made it to Carnegie Hall, went through his money like confetti, and by 1933 was back in our home county of Montana, broke and herding sheep.”

As one of only two African Americans in Meagher County, Gordon (who had a sister) always intrigued Doig. So interested was he that, in 1968 as a graduate student at the University of Washington, he interviewed Gordon as part of an article that he planned to write for Montana's Magazine of Western History.

“And then the magazine didn’t have the guts to run it,” Doig says. As he explained further to USA Today: “I guess it wasn’t the kind of history that they thought people wanted to read.”

It was, however, the kind of story around which, three decades later, Doig figured he could craft a novel.

“The idea of the strength of a voice carrying a guy all the way to Carnegie Hall, from what I recognized was just a wide spot in the sagebrush, stayed with me,” he says.

Doig ended up changing “the character as utterly as I possibly could.” His intent, he says, was both to study the nature of motives, “and how they count,” and to “tell the story of a guy making it.”

And, yes, that guy hails from the West. Yet instead of dwelling on the landscape, Doig’s focus is clearly on him and the other characters who people the West.

“To me, writing is trying to bring in a lot of sides of human life,” Doig says, “and some of them have different skin complexions and a different gender than maybe people are expecting guys like me to write about. But by God, I am writing it.”
The Seattle author will read from his new novel, “Prairie Nocturne,” Saturday in Lake Forest Park.

SEE “LITERARY EVENTS.”