

# 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.

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 again populates his seventh with some familiar

## PRAIRIE NOCTURNE

By Ivan Doig  
Scribner, 384  
pages, \$26

familiar faces and 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.

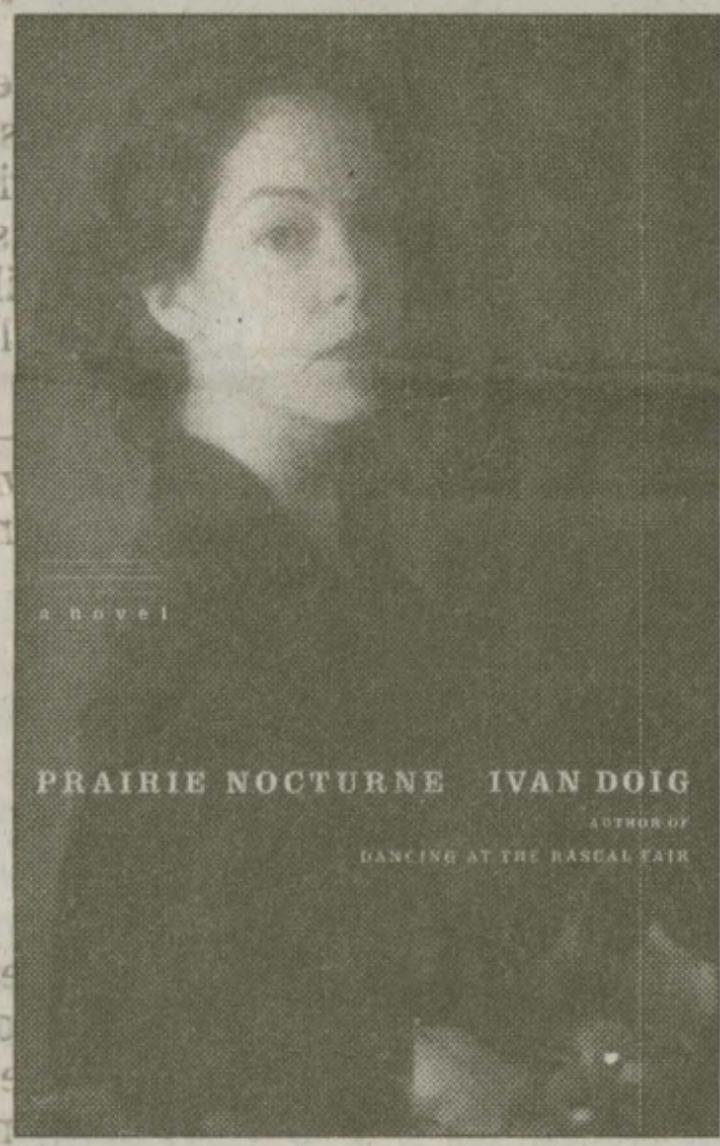
As she tends to the vocal ranges of Helena's children, an old lover comes back into her life, but not for love. Wes Williamson, a charmingly ambitious cattle baron who fell from political grace when his earlier affair with Susan was discovered, seeks something far more unexpected: He asks her to train his black chauffeur, Monty Rathbun, to be a professional singer.

Monty is the son of a Buffalo soldier, one of the black cavalymen 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.

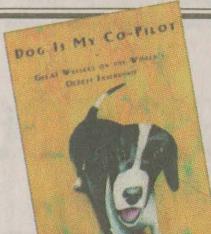
"Bright and early tomorrow, the

SEE PRAIRIE ON 3EE



## More reviews inside

"Dog is My Co-Pilot" collects writings on the spirit and essence of dogs, including selections by Caroline Knapp, Erica Jong, Pam Houston and Thom Jones. K 9



## BOOKS

"The Best American Travel Writing 2003," features 24 travel stories chosen by guest editor Ian Frazier. K 8  
Plus: Two new books look at the phenomenon of Bruce Springsteen. K 8

## BEST BOOKS 2003

PORTALS INTO OTHER WORLDS,  
KEEN INSIGHTS INTO OUR OWN

MARY ANN GWINN

Seattle Times book editor



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 big serio-comic story and descriptions of the natural world that shimmer on the page. (Richard Wallace)

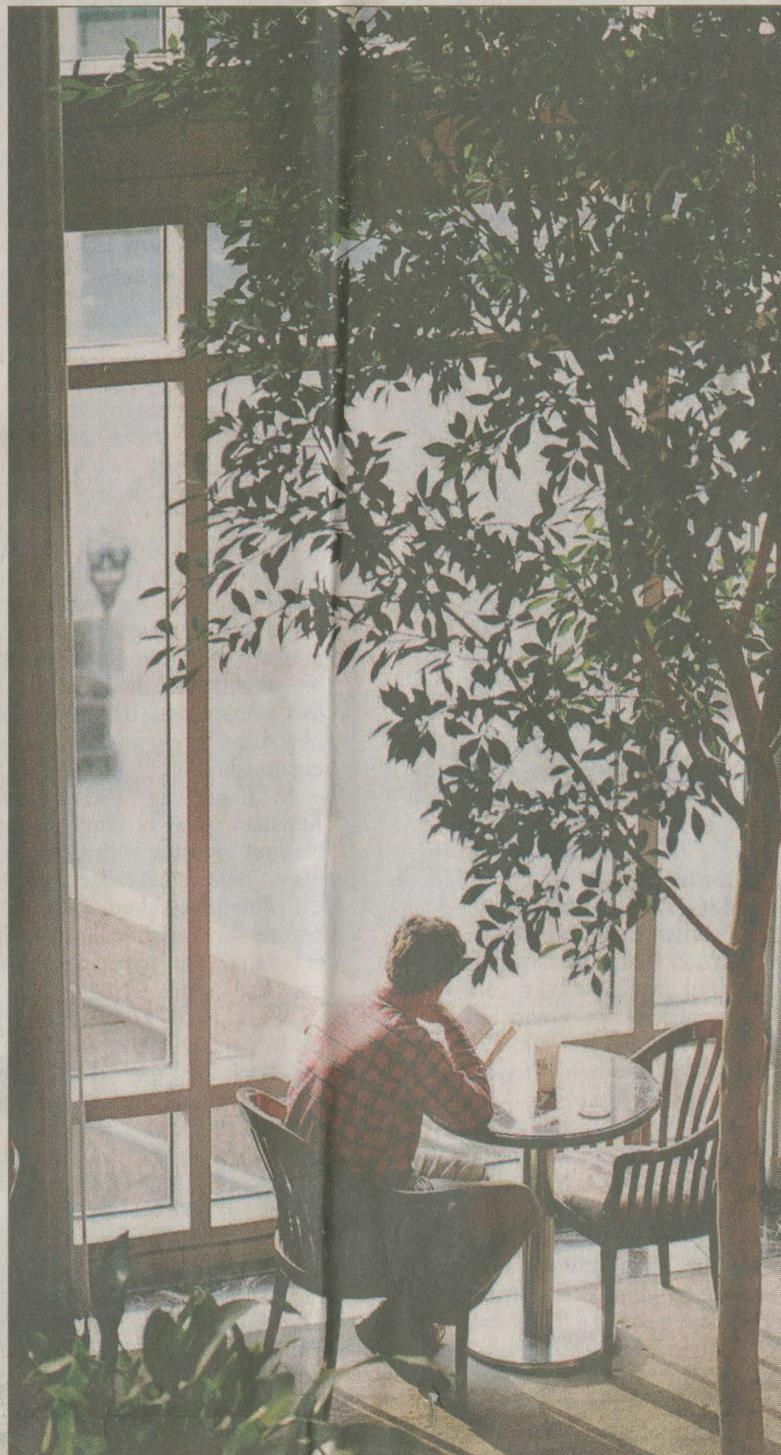
"One-Way" by Didier van Cauwelaert (Other Press). This wily comic novel features an absurd plot critical of France's treatment of illegal immigrants, through the eyes of two characters who borrow each other's stories. The newly translated novel won the 1994 Prix Goncourt, France's highest literary award. (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 hands-down the most enjoyable read of the year. It is one of those uncommon novels that instantly takes you into an imagined world. (Robert Allen Papinchak)

"The Speed of Dark" by Elizabeth Moon (Ballantine). Science-fiction 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)



PHOTODISC

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of his masterpieces, "Love in the Time of Cholera" and "One Hundred Years of Solitude." (John Freeman)

"The Colonel: The Extraordinary Story of Colonel Tom Parker and Elvis Presley" by Alanna Nash (Simon & Schuster). Colonel Tom Parker was Elvis' manager and the person most Elvis fans blame for the singer's demise. But Nash's fascinating portrait goes beyond the rest of the Elvis bookshelf, and her meticulous research into Park's dark past is scholarly and revelatory. "The Colonel" reads at times like a murder mystery, and Parker comes across as an Iago-like character, forever doomed to be a villain of Judas proportions. (Charles R. Cross)

"Visible Bones" by Jack Nisbet (Sasquatch). Nisbet makes the landscape come alive on many levels, historical, biological and cultural. The writing is high quality and engaging. It is clear he cares for and knows the place he writes about, goals we all can shoot for. (David B. Williams)

"Lost in America: A Journey with My Father" by Sherwin B. Nuland (Knopf). Nuland, the Yale professor/physician who wrote "How We Die," set out to exorcise his own demons and make peace with his late father, and the result is this very personal, beautifully crafted book. In placing his family life in historical context, Nuland also confronts the challenges faced by immigrants who arrive in America expecting a golden land of equal opportunity. (Kimberly Marlowe)

## BEST SELLERS

Current national best sellers, as reported by Publishers Weekly.

## Hardcover fiction

- "The Da Vinci Code" Dan Brown
- "The Five People You Meet in Heaven" Mitch Albom
- "The Big Bad Wolf" James Patterson
- "Trojan Odyssey" Clive Cussler
- "Wolves of the Calla (The Dark Tower, Book 5)" Stephen King
- "Shepherds Abiding" Jan Karon
- "Bleachers" John Grisham
- "Blow Fly" Patricia Cornwell
- "The Murder Room" P.D. James
- "The Hornet's Nest" Jimmy Carter

## Hardcover nonfiction

- "The South Beach Diet" Arthur Agatston, M.D.
- "The Purpose-Driven Life" Rick Warren
- "Dude, Where's My Country?" Michael Moore
- "Lies: And the Lying Liars Who Tell Them" Al Franken
- "Flyboys: A True Story of Courage" James Bradley
- "The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember" Fred Rogers
- "Who's Looking Out for You?" Bill O'Reilly
- "The Ultimate Weight Solution: The 7 Keys to Weight Loss Freedom" Dr. Phil McGraw
- "America 24/7" Created by Rick

**Prarie Nocturne** by Ivan Doig (Simon & Schuster). Set at the close of the Montana homesteading epoch, its characters are thrown against the hardened edge of the modern West. Doig is at his finest here, weaving history, landscape and passion into a compelling tale of hardship, hope and transcendence. (Tim McNulty)

**"Pattern Recognition"** by William Gibson (Putnam's) Cayce Pollard, a corporate consultant who pinpoints trend sources, searches for the source of a mysterious film as a way of dealing with the psychic fallout from 9-11. Cayce handles baddies like a grimly humorous thirtysomething Girl Scout, using lessons from old James Bond movies and her father's inappropriate bedtime stories. This realistic crossover is science-fiction superstar Gibson at his best. (Nisi Shawl)

**"Our Lady of the Forest"** by David Guterson (Knopf). Bainbridge Island's Guterson is a writer who is willing to take chances. His fable of an itinerant mushroom picker who sees visions of the Virgin Mary in the Olympic Peninsula's woods wrestles mightily with issues of faith and doubt. It's unparalleled in its evocation of the ominous splendor of the rain forest, and is the best portrayal of out-of-work-logger rage I've ever read. (Mary Ann Gwinn)

**"The Great Fire"** by Shirley Hazzard (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). The pain, disruption and loss caused by World War I is explored in the lives of Hazzard's characters. The chaste, poignant beauty of the love story between Aldred, a former war hero, and 17-year-old Helen is the true heart of the novel, as these good people try to make a life in an uncertain, quixotic and dangerous world. Hazzard's command

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)

**"Four Spirits"** by Sena Jeter Naslund (Morrow). This novel focuses on the awakening conscience of the South following the 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, which resulted in the death of four young girls. It wonderfully conveys a sense of place. (Barbara Lloyd McMichael)

**"How to Breathe Underwater"** by Julie Orringer (Knopf). The world of Orringer's nine short stories is a tough and unrelenting place, in which young girls — often the stories' first-person narrators — struggle to grow up amid scenes of devastating loss and trauma. Yet for all their gloom and doom, these stories have a curious power. Orringer's ear for dialogue never fails her as her characters traverse the roadblocks of growing up. (Melinda Bargreen)

**"Waxwings"** by Jonathan Raban (Pantheon). British-born Raban is a keen and quirky observer of America who brings journalistic punch to his story in ways reminiscent of Tom Wolfe's "Bonfire of the Vanities." The plot is no thriller, but I found the author's gifted descriptions of dot-com boom-and-bust Seattle — even when I didn't entirely agree with them — stuck with me long after I'd closed the covers. This one will make locals think. (William Dietrich)

**"Bay of Souls"** by Robert Stone (Houghton Mifflin). A professor at a small Midwestern college dabbles in sin and soon finds himself in over his head, quite literally. The woman with whom he becomes involved takes him to a small Caribbean island where religion, politics, occult practices, sex and contraband are all merely expressions of a single dark craving. His descent into this bay of souls is both allegorical and utterly realistic. (Richard Wakefield)

**"Almost French — Love and a**

**New Life in Paris"** by Sarah Turnbull (Gotham Books). A delightful primer on how to survive in France, written by a former TV journalist from Australia. (Irene Wanner)

**"Still Holding"** by Bruce Wagner (Simon & Schuster). Wagner's panoramic view of the denizens of Los Angeles exposes their neuroses, delusions, dysfunction, hypocrisy and endless neediness. It completes a Hollywood trilogy that includes, "Force Majeure," 1991, and "I'm Losing You," 1996. I found his latest satire especially welcome in our increasingly celebrity-revering culture. (Mark Lindquist)

## Nonfiction

**"My Invented Country"** by Isabel Allende (HarperCollins). More than a recollection of an individual's angst, this memoir focuses on an entire nation — its history, geography, politics and cultural values — and in the process illuminates the person. (Bharti Kirchner)

**"Gulag: A History"** by Anne Applebaum (Doubleday). Here in one volume is a history of the Soviet labor camps. Solzhenitsyn did it first but in an impressionistic and anecdotal way. Applebaum had the use of official archives as well as the stories of survivors, and she presents an organized, thorough account. (Bruce Ramsey)

**"The Emperor of Scent"** by Chandler Burr (Random House). This book offers a fascinating insight into both the olfactory scientific community and the billion-dollar scent business. It also presents the story of Luca Turin, the perfume-collecting scientist who just might have answered the age-old question of how our noses work. (D.J. Morel)

**"Benjamin Franklin: An American Life"** by Walter Isaacson

(Simon & Schuster). Isaacson's portrait of this civic-minded founding father is as fresh and entertaining as it is intellectually rigorous. Franklin brimmed with humor, energy and ideas that we take for granted now, like the lending library and matching fund-raising concept. (David Takami)

**"Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption"** by Randall Kennedy (Pantheon). In dealing with interracial marriage, identity, adoption and sex, it probes areas of American life where taboos are breaking down due to the unyielding humanity of ordinary people against institutional and individual prejudices. This is a most timely book, a must-read for all Americans if we wish not to repeat the wounding mistakes of the 20th century. (John C. Walter)

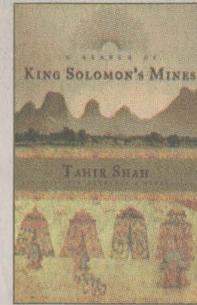
**"A Wilderness So Immense"** by Jon Kukla (Knopf). A well-written (if rather complex) history of the Louisiana Purchase and how the many implications of that event are still unfolding. (Steve Raymond)

**"The Devil in the White City"** by Erik Larson (Crown). Seattle's Larson did a masterful job of bringing history to life in his recreation of Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition, and the book's parallel story of serial killer H.H. Holmes is scary, chilling and sad. (Mary Ann Gwinn)

**"Living to Tell the Tale,"** by Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Knopf). 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

historical context, Nuanu also confronts the challenges faced by immigrants who arrive in America expecting a golden land of equal opportunity. (Kimberly Marlowe Hartnett)

**"In Search of King Solomon's Mines"** by Tahir Shah (Arcade). Shah treats 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. (Deloris Tarzan Ament)

**"Khrushchev: The Man and His Era"** by William Taubman (Norton). Even if you lived through the 1950s, you're likely to be surprised by many of the revelations in Taubman's thought-provoking biography of a brutal leader who nevertheless represented anti-Stalinist reform. Drawing from fresh interviews and recently unearthed Soviet archives, Taubman proposes that "Khrushchev's stunning blend of deception and self-deception is not so much an obstacle to understanding as itself the main point to be understood." (John Hartl)

**"Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers"** by Mary Roach (Norton). Roach examines the many roles that cadavers play in society, from the 19th-century vogue for paint made from mummies to their uses today (as measuring tools for automobile safety, practice models for plastic surgeons and more). The author is consistently authoritative, endlessly curious, drolly funny and notably un squeamish. (Adam Woog)

Mary Ann Gwinn: 206-464-2357 or mgwinn@seattletimes.com

**Solution: The 7 Keys to Weight Loss Freedom"** Dr. Phil McGraw

9. "America 24/7" Created by Rick Smolan and David Elliot Cohen

10. "The Stone Cold Truth" Steve Austin with Jim "J.R." Ross as told to Dennis Brent

Knight Ridder Newspapers

## Local scene

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

## Hardcovers

1. "The Hornet's Nest" Jimmy Carter

2. "The Da Vinci Code" Dan Brown

3. "Lies: And the Lying Liars Who Tell Them" Al Franken

4. "Living to Tell the Tale" Gabriel Garcia Marquez

5. "Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America" Molly Ivins

## Paperbacks

1. "Book Lust" Nancy Pearl

2. "From Hanging Chad to Baghdad" David Horsey

3. "Middlesex" Jeffrey Eugenides

4. "The University of Washington Experience" Thomas Griffin and Stewart Hopkins

5. "The Life of Pi" Yann Martel



University Book Store

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digital smells."



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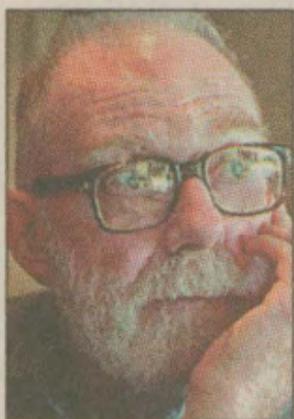
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# Ivan Doig feels at home among Costco bargains

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.



**Doig**

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 shepherders. He has no trouble with this

Please see **Doig, D4**

# 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

*"I meet, in Costco, a lot of people who are like the people where I came from.*

*"These people are not going to come to a fancy-shmancy bookstore for an evening reading."*

**AUTHOR IVAN DOIG**

and 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

teacher to give the ranch hand voice training. This is a rare Western-flavored novel with a protagonist of color.

With Costco's 40 percent discount on the hardcover edition of "Prairie Nocturne," shoppers were picking up two or more copies for Christmas presents. John Ullis of University Place bought an armload as he thought of friends and relatives who'd be able to relate to the book. He added that he wanted to meet Doig himself, "to see what he looks like, hear what he sounds like."

"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



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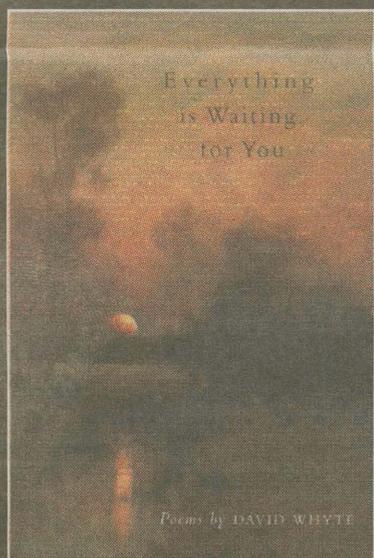
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## BOOKS REVIEWS

# 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 junkie dialect in *Trainspotting*, you may want to stop reading now and go on to the next review, because Heather Woodbury makes Welsh look like a stickler for the Queen's English.



ROBERT STRAIN

Woodbury in performance mode.

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-hour, 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 prefaces 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 tuh da Ay-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

Heather Woodbury will appear at Elliott Bay Book Co. (101 S. Main St., 206-624-6600), 4 p.m. Fri., Nov. 7.

### 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 re-works 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 N.Y.C., 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 direction of that anger—and 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 sure sign that their relationship is doomed (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 depressed people in depressed relationships can be trite, a careful, gifted author like Stern can still make them ring alarmingly true. L.C.

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)

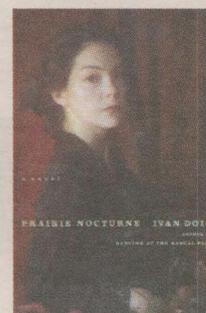
At the start of Ivan Doig's seventh novel, Susan Duff, whose golden voice lit up his 1987 *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, has grown up to be an ultraexact music teacher in Helena, Mont., circa 1924. Scotch blood burns in her veins, giving her spirit the bite of fine whiskey. Ornerly as an unbreakable bucking bronco and high-toned

as Dresden china, Susan gives not one inch to grief when her beau, the plutocratically 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 ailing 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 with a beseeching 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 the sensitive black rodeo-clown-turned-chauffeur 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 habit of kissing people in a way 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 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, then light out for the territory of outrageous lies.



The fiction's meticulous 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. It takes real winds blowing hard and cold from real worlds—mostly Montana—to billow Doig's sails of imagination. I guess it 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.

### THURSDAY

• **Ellen Morris Bishop**, 7 p.m., C & E

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.

## 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.

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

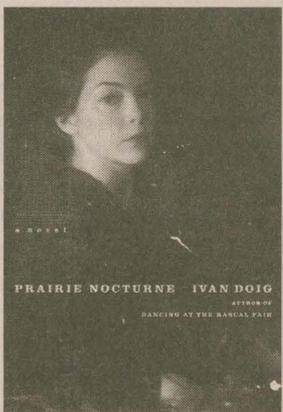
### THURSDAY

• **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 mrrg@peak.org.

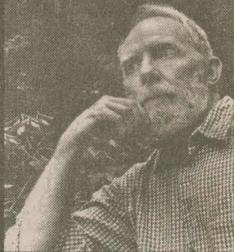
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# IVAN DOIG

READING & BOOKSIGNING

## PRAIRIE NOCTURNE



**OCTOBER 29**

**7:30PM**

**MEMORIAL UNION**  
**LOUNGE**



**osu|bookstore**  
 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.”

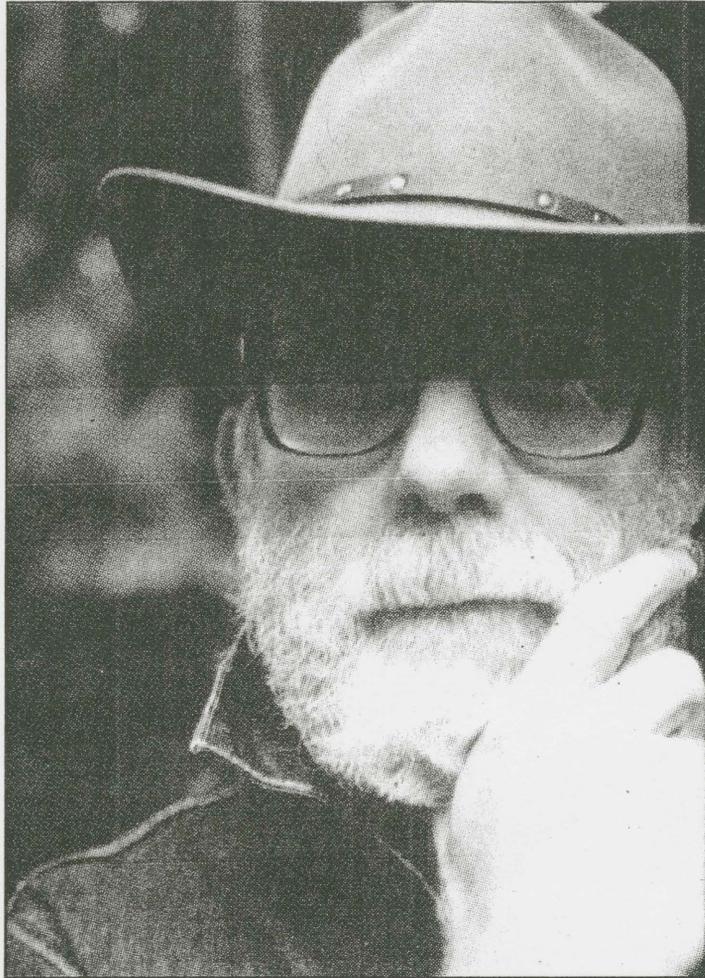
Since that time, he has authored 10 books and become one of the most respected writers of recent times.

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



**IVAN DOIG** has been hailed as one of the most beautiful writers of recent times. He will be at the South Branch Library Oct. 23, 7 p.m.

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, un-pigeon-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 know I’ll never be a Yeats or

Dickinson, but I knew I could write a pretty wicked line.”

He hopes “the rhythms are in the sentences, the metaphors, the descriptions of the land and how people talk,” in his books.

He writes in three-year stints. The only time he isn’t writing is when he is on tour for the new release of a book.

“Yes, we have an interesting household,” laughed his wife, Carol. “He’s fun, funny, a quick wit, a joy to be around.”

Comforting words to readers who want to understand the man behind such acclaimed works as “Dancing at the Rascal Fair,” “Mountain Time,” and “Bucking the Sun.”

“For example,” continues Carol. “We go walking in our neighborhood, a couple of miles, every morning. He doesn’t talk. I can see it in his eyes — he’s writing in his head as we walk.”

“I’m comfortable with that, because at the end of the day, when he comes in for dinner, he’s off work. He’s mine. He’s fun.”

Doig loved reading as a child “long before first grade.” He seems to have absorbed all the words that poured into him.

“Whatever words met my eyes, interested me,” 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.

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 again populates his seventh with some familiar

faces and settings. Doig fans may be astonished to find the indomitable Angus McCaskill

## PRAIRIE NOCTURNE

By Ivan Doig  
Scribner, 384  
pages, \$26

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.

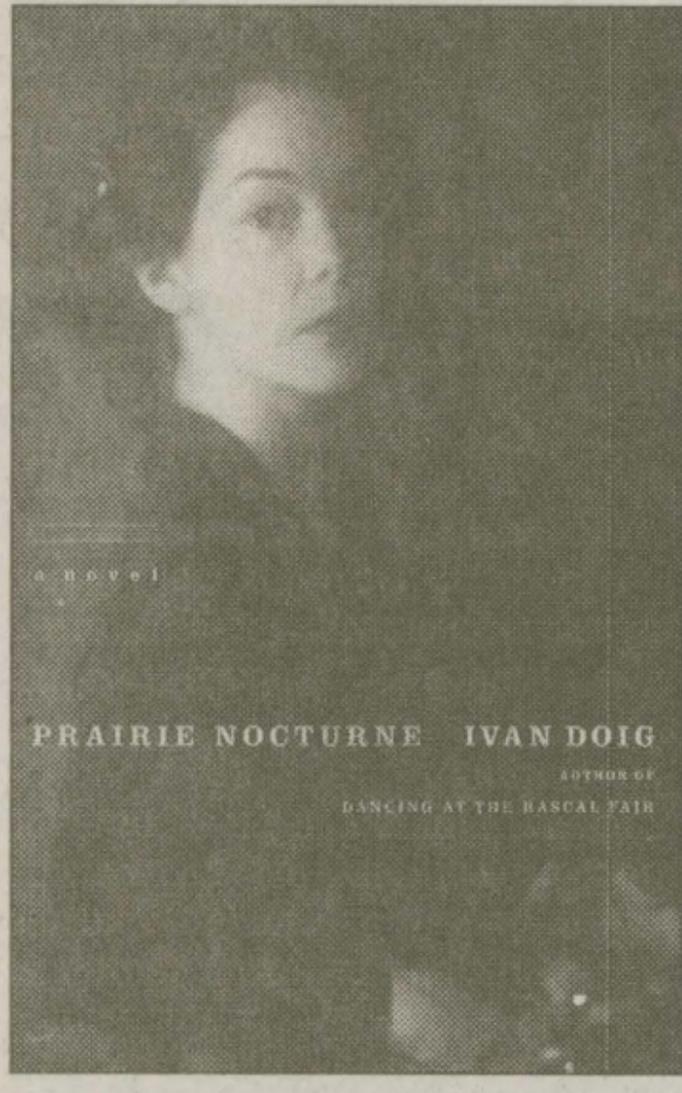
As she tends to the vocal ranges of Helena's children, an old lover comes back into her life, but not for love. Wes Williamson, a charmingly ambitious cattle baron who fell from political grace when his earlier affair with Susan was discovered, seeks something far more unexpected: He asks her to train 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 3EE



COVER  
STORY

# 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 peered 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."*

its center a story of love, it would be a great injustice to describe the novel as a simple love story. Hazzard has taken great pains to create a solid yet intricate construction, artfully weaving her narrative through time and place. The resulting blend of

too small, but like a fairy-tale chair or maybe nature of love that is fated to be, just right.

*Robin Vidimos is a freelance writer who reviews books for The Denver Post and Buzz in the Burbs.*

(Warner Books, \$26.95.) A former Secret Service agent tries for vindication, having lost his job when the candidate he was protecting was killed.  
5. **Fortress of Solitude**, by Jonathan Lethem. (Doubleday, \$26.) This is the story of two boys. They are friends and neighbors, but because one

heard from in months.  
7. **The Lady, the Chef, and the Courtesan**, by Marisol. (Rayo, \$21.95.) A young woman learns lessons from her grandmother's diaries.  
8. **The Pleasure of My Company**, by Steve Martin. (Hyperion, \$19.95.) The story of a troubled man who finds

the Phoenix, by J.K. Rowling. (Scholastic, \$29.99.) The fifth installment in the Harry Potter series.

## NONFICTION

1. **Dude, Where's My Country?** by Michael Moore. (Warner Books, \$24.95.) The liberal commentator takes on the president, corporations, Congress and the right wing.  
2. **Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right**, by Al Franken. (Dutton, \$24.95.) The satirist skewers the right wing in American politics.  
3. **Every Second Counts**, by Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins. (Broadway, \$24.95.) The champion cyclist continues his memoirs begun with "It's Not About the Bike."  
4. **The South Beach Diet**, by Arthur Agatston. (Rodale, \$24.95.) A weight-loss plan designed by a Miami cardiologist.  
5. **Bushwhacked**, by Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose. (Random House, \$24.95.) Two Texas journalists offer up an indictment of the Bush administration.  
6. **Madam Secretary**, by Madeleine K. Albright. (Miramax Books, \$27.95.) Albright brings to life the world leaders she dealt with face-to-face in her years of service and the battles she fought to prove her worth in a male-dominated arena.

450-pound Bengal tiger.  
3. **Riding With the Queen**, by Jennie Shortridge. (New American Library, \$12.95.) The story of Tallie Beck, a 34-year-old washed-up, self-centered, rock 'n' roll singer who has never grown up.  
4. **Angels & Demons**, by Dan Brown. (Pocket Star, \$7.99.) A Harvard scholar tries to save the Vatican from an underground society.  
5. **Middlesex**, by Jeffrey Eugenides. (Picador, \$15.) A saga of a near mythic Greek American family.

## NONFICTION PAPERBACK

1. **Fast Food Nation**, by Eric Schlosser. (HarperCollins, \$13.95.) A journalist's exposé of American eating habits.  
2. **Arts of the Possible**, by Adrienne Cecile Rich. (W.W. Norton, \$13.95.) Essays on the intersection of public and private lives.  
3. **The Power of Partnership**, by Riane Eisler. (New World Library, \$14.95.) Readers are urged to examine their relationships — all of them.  
4. **My Losing Season**, by Pat Conroy. (Bantam, \$14.95.) The novelist remembers his last year playing basketball as a point guard for The Citadel in 1966-67.  
5. **Under the Tuscan Sun**, by Frances Mayes. (Broadway, \$15.) A celebration of life in the Italian countryside.

# Tattered Cover Presents

## Literary Happenings:

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

LAMA SURYA DAS, 2:00 pm, LoDo

Lama Surya Das will discuss and sign **Letting Go of the Person You Used to Be: Lessons on Change, Loss, and Spiritual Transformation** (\$25.00). Free tickets for the event will be available at 1:00 pm; one ticket per person in line.

#### 3RD ANNUAL BANNED BOOKS WEEK ESSAY CONTEST

#### AWARDS RECEPTION & READING, 2:00 pm, LoDo

The winners of our 3rd Annual Banned Books Week Essay Contest will read their essays and collect their prizes at a reception in their honor.

#### MEET THE AUTHOR STORYTIME

ELIZA WOLOSAN, 2:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Local author Eliza Wolosan will read from and sign **My Friend Isabelle** (\$14.95).

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 20

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

IVAN DOIG, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Ivan Doig, one of the greatest novelists of the American West and author of the highly acclaimed **Montana Trilogy**, will read from and sign his new novel **Prairie Nocturne** (\$26.00 Scribner). This surprising and riveting story set in Montana and New York during the Harlem Renaissance, draws together an unlikely set of thwarted performers in one last inspired grasp at life's set of gold rings: love and renown.

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

STEPHEN HUNTER, 7:30 pm, LoDo

Stephen Hunter, bestselling author, film critic for *The Washington Post*, and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 2002, has written eleven novels, including **Pale Horse Coming, Hot Springs, Time to Hunt, Dirty White Boys, and Point of Impact**. Hunter will read from and sign his new novel **Havana** (\$24.95 Simon & Schuster). In **Havana**, Hunter has produced an epic adventure story, shot-through with violence, eroticism, and the pressures of big money and big politics, set in a legendary time and place.

### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

JUDY COLLINS, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Renowned singer/songwriter Judy Collins will discuss and sign **Sanity and Grace: A Journal of Suicide, Survival and Strength** (\$22.95 Tarcher). In this deeply moving memoir, Collins reveals with unflinching honesty the events leading up to and following the death of her only child, culminating when she picks up the pieces of her shattered heart and gathers the strength to move forward. Free tickets for the event will be available at 6:30 pm; one ticket per person in line.

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

MICHELLE KODIS, 7:30 pm, LoDo

Michelle Kodis, a freelance writer, editor, and author will discuss and sign **Blueprint Small: Creative Ways to Live with Less** (\$24.95 Gibbs-Smith). In **Blueprint Small**, Kodis examines small spaces (each 1,500 square feet or less) from a wide spectrum of locations, budgets, and individual styles—each chosen because they illustrate that scaling back in size doesn't have to mean scaling back in comfort, spaciousness, or beauty.

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22

#### PROFESSIONAL PURSUITS PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

BILL GEORGE, 5:30 pm, LoDo

Bill George is former chairman and CEO of Medtronic, the world's leading medical technology company. He is a board member of Goldman Sachs, Target, and Novartis and executive-in-residence at Yale. George will discuss and sign his timely new book **Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value** (\$27.95 Jossey-Bass), which provides a tested guide for character-based leaders and all those who have a stake in the integrity and success of our corporations.

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

SHARON KAY PENMAN, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Bestselling historical novelist and mystery author Sharon Kay Penman will read from and sign **Dragon's Lair** (\$23.95 Putnam), the long-awaited third novel in her much-loved medieval mystery series. It is July 1193 and Richard Lionheart languishes in an Austrian dungeon. Lusting after the crown in England, his brother John plots with King Philippe of France, to see to it Richard never leaves Austria alive. Into this maelstrom, Eleanor of Aquitaine sends her trusted man, Justin de Quincy—and murder soon follows.

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

ADRIAN MCKINTY, 7:30 pm, LoDo

Local author Adrian McKinty grew up in Northern Ireland at the height of the Troubles. He studied politics at Oxford University and moved to New York City in the early 1990s. He found work as a security guard, mailman, door-to-door salesman, construction worker, bartender, rugby coach, bookstore clerk, and schoolteacher. McKinty will read from and sign his debut novel **Dead I May Well Be** (\$24.00 Scribner), an Irish bad-boy thriller, set in the hardest streets of New York City, which brims with violence, greed, and sexual betrayal.

### 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 **Lord John and the Private Matter** (\$23.95 Delacorte), the first book in a new trilogy featuring many of the characters from the **Outlander** books. "Gabaldon takes readers for a walk on the wild side... (Lord John is) a compelling and unique period mystery for the author's legion of fans." (*Kirkus Reviews*) Free tickets for the event will be available at 6:30 pm; one ticket per person in line.

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

EDWARD P. JONES, 7:30 pm, LoDo

Pen/Hemingway Award-winning author Edward P. Jones's first novel **Lost in the City** was short-listed for the National Book Award. Jones will read from and sign **The Known World** (\$24.95 HarperCollins), an ambitious, luminously written novel that ranges seamlessly between the past and future and back again to the present. Weaving together the lives of freed and enslaved blacks, whites, and Indians—this book gives readers a deeper understanding of the enduring world created by the institution of slavery.

### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

DAVID MARANISS, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

David Maraniss is an associate editor at *The Washington Post* and the author of two critically acclaimed and bestselling books, **When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi** and **First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton**. Maraniss will discuss and sign his new book **They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967** (\$29.95 Simon & Schuster). Bringing this catastrophic time back to life, Maraniss examines questions about the meaning of dissent and the official manipulation of truth, issues that are as relevant today as they were decades ago.

The event with PETER DOMINICK & RANDY JOHNSON is postponed until Friday, December 5, 7:30 pm, LoDo.

### SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25

#### ROCKY MOUNTAIN LAND SERIES WORKSHOP

ANNIE PROULX, DUDLEY GARDNER, PH.D. & MARTIN STUPICH

9:30 to 4:30 pm, LoDo

Tickets are \$150.00 per person, and space is limited. Call 303-322-1965 ext. 2729 for reservations and more information.

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

PATRICIA STACEY, 11:00 am, Cherry Creek

Patricia Stacey, a writer, college teacher, and former *Atlantic Monthly* staff member, will discuss and sign **The Boy Who Loved Windows: Opening the Heart and Mind of A Child Threatened with Autism** (\$25.00 DaCapo). This enthralling memoir takes the reader into the life of one family willing to do anything to give their son a rich and emotionally full life.

#### MEET THE AUTHOR STORYTIME

ROBERT GOULD, 2:00 pm, Cherry Creek

Photographer and author Robert Gould will present his newest creation **Time Soldiers 3: PATCH!** (\$15.95).

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26

#### 20TH ANNUAL SCARY STORY CONTEST AWARDS RECEPTION & READING, 2:30 pm, Cherry Creek

The young winners of our 20th Annual Scary Story Contest will read their stories and collect their prizes at a reception in their honor.

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 27

#### PRESENTATION & BOOKSIGNING

HOMER HICKAM, 7:30 pm, Cherry Creek

Homer Hickam will read from and sign **The Keeper's Son** (\$24.95).

For complete information on upcoming events please visit [www.tatteredcover.com](http://www.tatteredcover.com), pick up an in-store event flyer, or call 303-322-1965 ext. 7446. Events are subject to changes beyond our control.

If you'd like to receive information at home about our events, sign up for our monthly e-mail newsletter, the TC Times. Just send an e-mail to [newsletter@tatteredcover.com](mailto:newsletter@tatteredcover.com) with "subscribe" in the subject line.

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6. *The Lady, the Clerk, and the Courtesan* — Marisol

9. *The Pleasure of My Comany* — Steve Martin

10. *Loamhedge* — Brian Jacques

■ **Nonfiction**

1. *Dude, Where's My Country* — Michael Moore

2. *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them* — Al Franken

3. *South Beach Diet* — Arthur Agatston

4. *Every Second Counts* — Lance Armstrong and Sally Jenkins

5. *Madam Secretary* — Madeleine K. Albright with Bill Woodward

6. *Bushwacked* — Molly Ivins and Lou Dubose

7. *The Bounty* — Caroline Alexander

8. *Fish Sticks* — Stephen Lundin

9. *Not Fade Away* — Laurence Shames and Peter Barton

10. *Under the Banner of Heaven* — Jon Krakauer

Information for this week's Denver-area best-seller list is provided by the Tattered Cover Book Store, Borders Books in Englewood and the Boulder Book Store.

# 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 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 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.

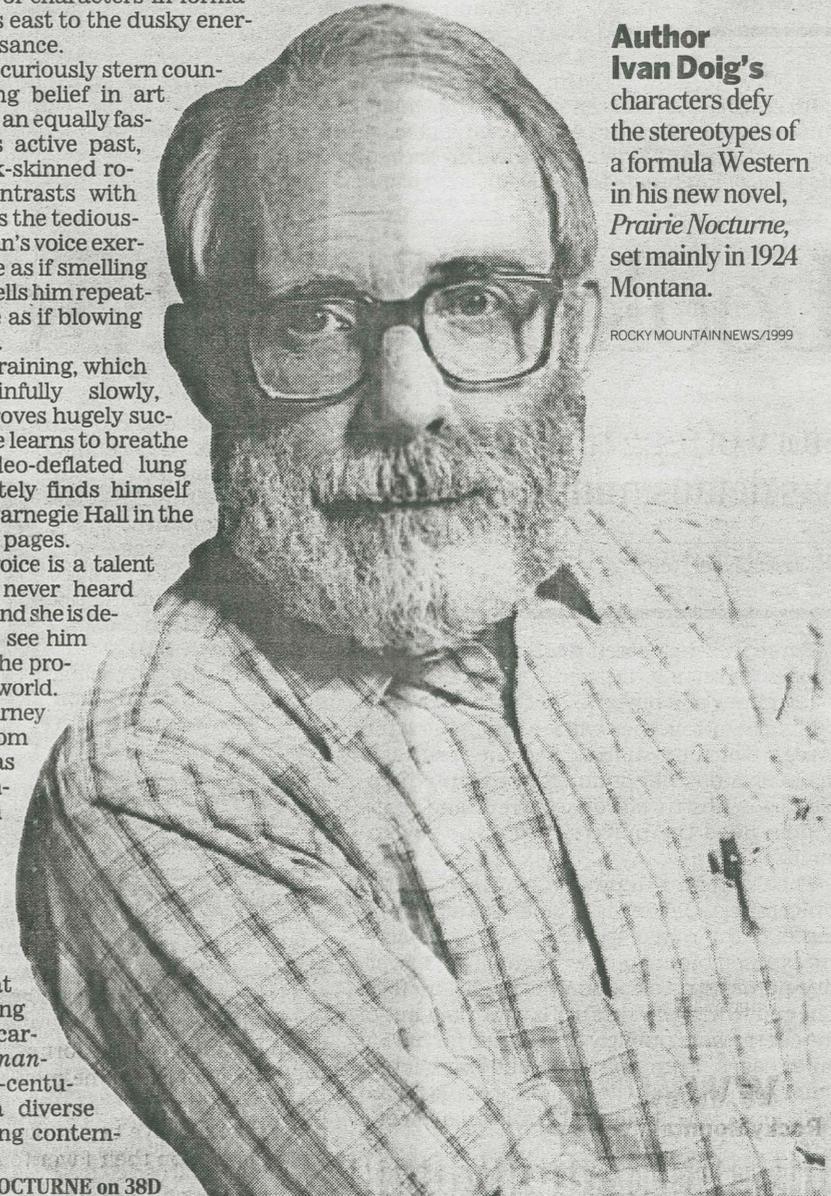
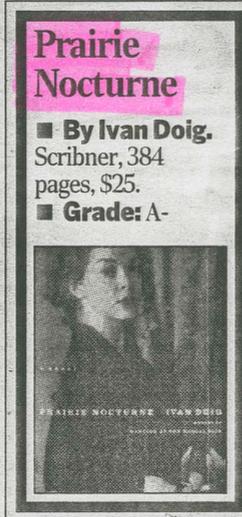
Monty's voice is a talent Susan has never heard the likes of, and she is determined to see him succeed in the professional world. But the journey is far from smooth, as Susan, Monty and even

Wes find themselves repeatedly battling the violent hatred of the Ku Klux Klan.

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 contem-

**Author Ivan Doig's** characters defy the stereotypes of a formula Western in his new novel, *Prairie Nocturne*, set mainly in 1924 Montana.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS/1999



Flip to NOCTURNE on 38D

Rocky MT. News / Fri. Oct. 17, 2003



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2003

# Nocturne: Novel builds gradually

Continued from 31D

porary 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 flivver 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*.

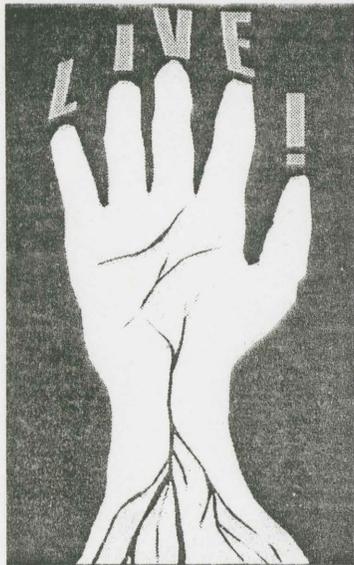
Despite its minor flaws, *Prairie Nocturne* undoubtedly ranks as one of his most ambitious projects yet with its complexity of social and cultural issues nestled in the deceptive serenity of the American West.

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

CRITICS' CHOICE

Quarter of a designers State Uni- ins have oking for from po- to artis- rm. The e of this torado In- Poster Ex- ore than ists, with naugural ne show. s on view e school's i Hatton p-to-date phic Re- able at



Sascha Nicolaus, Germany, *Water Is Life II*

31-7634 Chandler



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 **Lakewood 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 Shulgold

**G**ankosushi ver go back w fish and rthern Jap- 30-plus raw and vegeta- lly arrayed ned rice in on't ask for abi — you this tradi- Other en- with seven shes — ink-fried sea-

food with a choice of three sauc- es; *nagamono*, uniting soft so- ba noodles with teriyaki shrimp topped with fried egg; and *nabe- mono*, a clay pot packed with a pepper-spiked brothly stew of fish, meat, sea and land vegeta- bles and tofu. This simply ex- traordinary 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

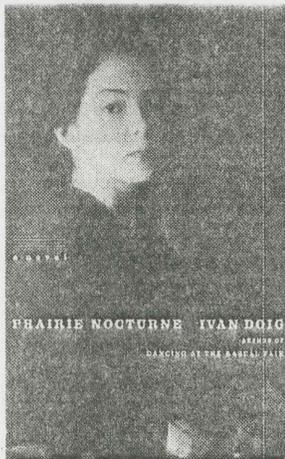
John Lehdorj,

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](http://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. Stay tuned.

Mark Brown

BOOKS



In press material, **Ivan Doig** is referred to as a "great novelist of the American West." But that's a disservice. He deserves to be dubbed a "great novelist," period. Readers would be hard-pressed to find more assured, muscular prose or more carefully nuanced characters, each of whom seem to live beyond the pages of any book. Doig's newest novel, set in Montana and New York during the Harlem Renaissance, is titled **Prairie Nocturne** (Scribner, \$25). He will appear at 7:30 p.m. Monday at the Tattered Cover in Cherry Creek, 2955 E. First Ave. (303-322-7727), and at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Boulder Book Store, 1107 Pearl St., Boulder (303-447-2074).

Patti Thorn

ALSO ...

FILM

- **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. 303-893-4100
- **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. Teikyo Loretto 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. 303-777-1003
- **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. 303-837-9355, [www.mizelcenter.org](http://www.mizelcenter.org)
- **The Balcony** LIDA Project Theatre, 2180 Stout St. 303-282-0466, [www.lida.org](http://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
- **Sonya Doctorian**, Photo Editor
- **Brian James**, Design

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**Fax:** 303-892-2833

# 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 40-ish, 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.

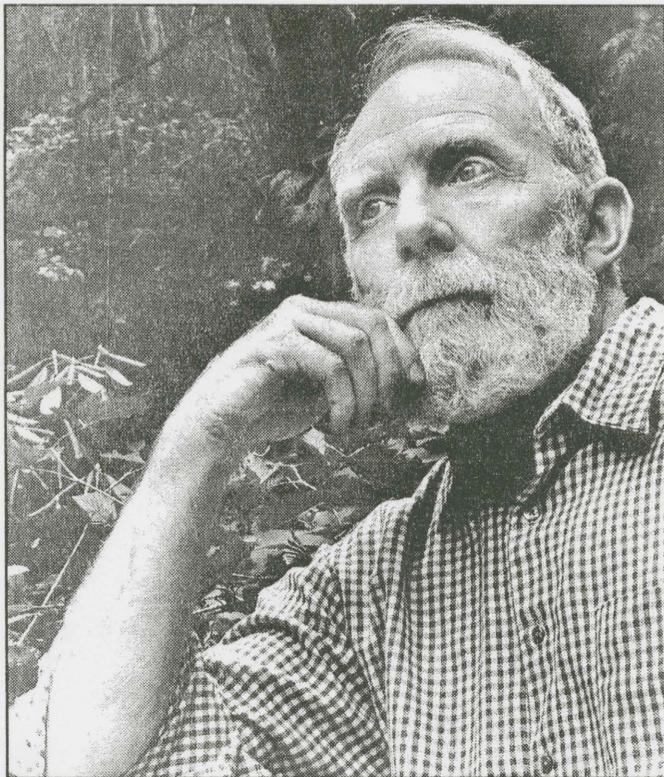
Review of *Prairie Nocturne*. D6

"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



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.

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

## 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.

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."



# Doig's 'Prairie Nocturne' is ornate, but lacks insight

## Prairie Nocturne

By Ivan Doig; Scribner; \$26

BY MARTIN NAPARSTECK  
*Special to The Tribune*

*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 comfortable 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 doubt he's evil and whoever opposes him is good. Put the KKK in a story and 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 WEST UNDER COVER

*Book reviews  
of regional interest*

architecture. It's the artifice that attracts them, the very visible creation of the craft. And Doig excels in this.

Consider this sentence: "Wes wondered wearily whether the two of them were always going to be like people on passing trains, her chronically in the West and him chronically due back East, coinciding once in a while in the middle of nowhere as in their Fort Assinniboine night together and then the distance doubling between them over and over, from the split second the engines

of their lives flashed past each other again."

Seventy words to construct a metaphor that's merely a variation of a cliché, "two ships passing in the night," but more elaborate, more complete, and, simply by virtue of being a little different, more interesting. None of that equals more insight into character or illumination on society. It's interesting because it is, compared to the cliché, ornate.

Or this sentence: "For what seemed an hour, she trooped him back and forth through the whole enterprise, the considerably mystifying workings of backstage, the angles of getting on and off the stage without becoming encumbered in the curtain, the exact unarguable line of sight necessary between

accompanist and singer, the carefully considered plank of the stage that should be his mark to sing from and that she chalked an unmissable X on, protocol after protocol that he tucked into so many corners of his head that he began to wonder if would run out of space."

This time, 94 words of what could easily be converted into a series of four or five simple declarative sentences, but which combined capture the reality of the way the mind melts differing thoughts together, and in the process disguising what in a lesser writer would be an awkward switch in point of view from her (Susan) to him (Monty). These two sentences, and this

entire book, is a pleasant reminder, if nothing else, of the beauty available in the long sentence.

Is the art of the sentence, the rococo quality of the writing, enough to save *Prairie Nocturne*? The question might be phrased differently: Is Shakespeare a great writer because of the beauty and wit with which he uses language (consider the sonnets and "A Midsummer Night's Dream") or because of his insights into the darkest reaches of the human psyche (consider "King Lear" and "Hamlet"). If language is more important than insight, you will like Doig. If insight is more important or if you insist on both, you won't.

*Martin Naparstek reviews books from and about the West for The Salt Lake Tribune.*

Standard-Examiner

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**4D** Sunday, October 19, 2003

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*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."

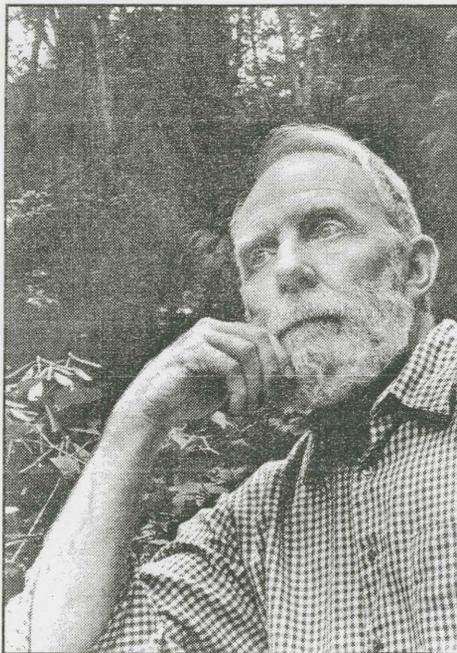
He could see, even as a child, the basic pattern of the Gordons' lives. They were solitary, said Doig. "The only people of color in the entire county. They were the most courtly people in town. Always, 'How do you do?' They had impeccable manners."

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



Ivan Doig

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.

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)

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

## BOOK REVIEW

# '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 gov-

ernor.

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.

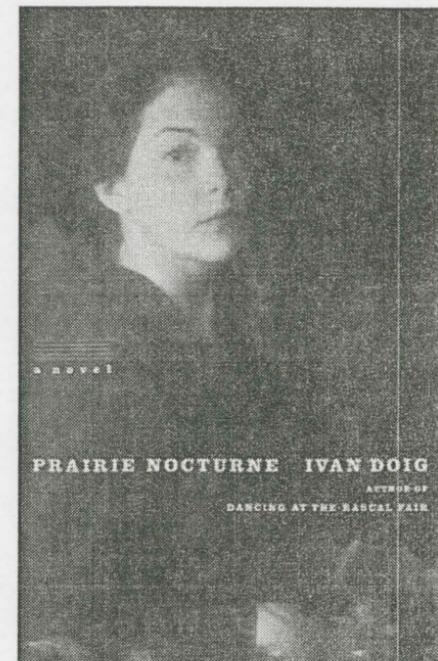
Still, for all its beauty, there is a catch to this book. You have to be able to believe that two Western white people in the early 1920s could be beyond racism. You also have to believe that, even though they've been lovers, they've always held a part of themselves back.

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](mailto:susan@desnews.com)

Scribner Invites You to Meet

# IVAN DOIG

at a book signing of

## Prairie Nocturne

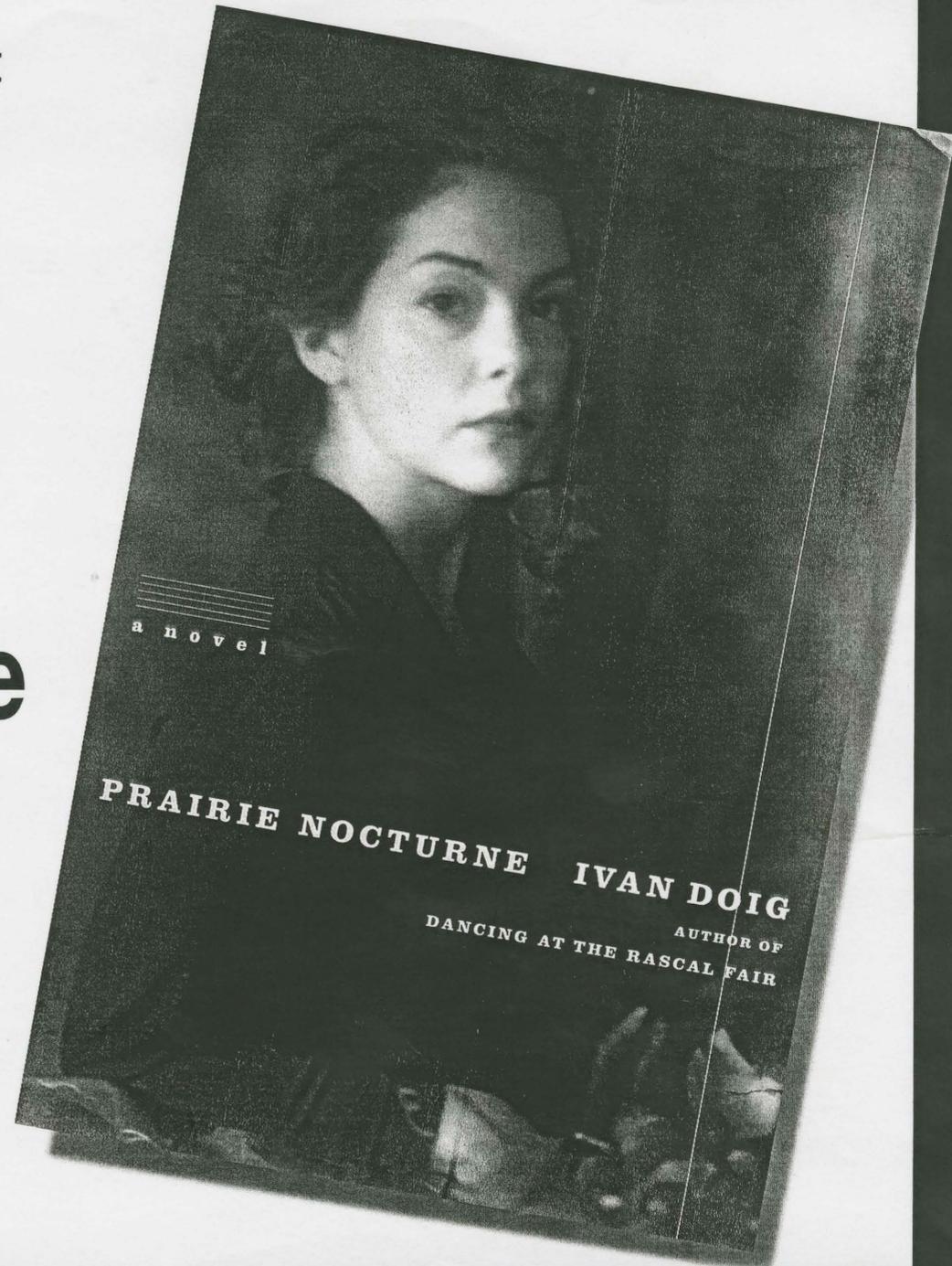
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# BOOKS

## Scene of the Crime

Adam Woog looks at the latest  
mysteries, including Sara Paretsky's  
"Blacklist." K 11



## BEST SELLERS

### Local scene

Current best sellers at  
Parkplace Books, 348  
Parkplace, Kirkland. 425-  
828-6546.

### Hardcovers

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"  
*Francesca Meyer*

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



'I steer  
between  
smut and  
chastity.'

**IVAN DOIG**

Author, answering  
a question about  
his philosophy for  
using sex scenes in  
his work

## 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.

PLEASE SEE *Bookfest* ON B 4



TOM REESE / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Author Lauren Kessler talks with a member of the Northwest Bookfest audience Saturday after taking part in a panel discussion on the lives of unusual women in American history.

## Smaller-than-usual NW Bookfest didn't dampen literary spirits

### BOOKFEST

CONTINUED FROM B 1

"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 fol-

low 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.

Questioning our existence, he said, "makes us human."

"Answers scare me," Guterson said. "But questions brought to the surface, I think, are really important."

Alexie provided a dose of com-

ic relief yesterday when he read some of his short stories and poems. Not one to avoid political jabs, he offered at the onset 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 was 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.

Tyrone Beason: 206-464-2251 or  
tbeason@seattletimes.com

# 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 company 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, like 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 (206-378-1883 and [www.nwbookfest.org](http://www.nwbookfest.org)).

## SATURDAY

With his *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: Seasons of Life and Land*, Boeing-engineer-turned-wildlife-photographer **Subhankar Banerjee** became a cause célèbre this summer, when his photos were relegated to the basement of the Smithsonian and his descriptions of them censored because of Republican eagerness 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 KUOW's Marcie Sillman (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 boom-and-bust novel *Waxwings* (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 Pierce** (*Eccentric 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 ne'er-do-wells in *Well*; **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 Nocturne*, 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 Joufflas**, 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

**David Guterson** is such a big shot he doesn't have to share the stage with anyone, even a moderator. Our Appelo liked *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 ineffably sensitive and the effing horny" (12:30 p.m., Hugo Stage).

For a discussion on "The Meaning of Everest," *Outside* contributing editor **Bruce Barcott** (an SW alumnus 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 Cut Press showcase, which features a dozen authors published by Matthew Stadler's new Astoria, Ore.-based publishing outfit (2:15 p.m., McCarthy 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). [info@seattleweekly.com](mailto:info@seattleweekly.com) **SW**

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 Brant Rumble

FROM: Alison Kling

RE: *Prairie Nocturne* by Ivan Doig

Ivan,  
 Here's the Rocky Mt.  
News review. Also, fyi,  
 the review that appeared  
 in the Milwaukee-Journa  
 has now appeared in  
The Denver Post.

-Brant

*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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October 19, 2003 Sunday ALL EDITION

**SECTION:** CUE; Pg. 08E

**LENGTH:** 505 words

**HEADLINE:** Racial undertone enriches a lode as vast as the Montana prairie

**BYLINE:** RON FRANSCCELL Special to the Journal Sentinel

**BODY:**

**Prairie Nocturne.** By Ivan Goig. Scribner. 384 pages. \$26.

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.

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 from her: He asks her to train his black chauffeur, Monty Rathbun, to be a professional singer.

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



More great coverage.

- Brant

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Deseret News (Salt Lake City, Utah)

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

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](mailto:dennis@desnews.com)

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



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Deseret News (Salt Lake City, Utah)

October 19, 2003, Sunday

**SECTION:** ARTS; Pg. E12

**LENGTH:** 487 words

**HEADLINE:** 'Prairie Nocturne' hits right notes

**BYLINE:** By Susan Whitney Deseret Morning News

**BODY:**

**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 watering it down that way -- and that was the extent of it."

E-mail: susan@desnews.com

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

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October 19, 2003, Sunday

**SECTION:** Final; Pg. D5

**LENGTH:** 841 words

**HEADLINE:** Muffled realities and vocal dreams in Ivan Doig's 'Prairie Nocturne'

**BYLINE:** Christy Karras , The Salt Lake Tribune

**BODY:**

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 40-ish, 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 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.

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

## 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.



Rocky Mountain News © 1999

Author Ivan Doig's characters defy the stereotypes of a formula Western in his new novel, *Prairie Nocturne*, set mainly in 1924 Montana.

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 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 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.

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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 fliivver 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.

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**Rumble, Brant**

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**Subject:** FW: Prairie Nocturne

-----Original Message-----

From: LexisNexis Print Delivery [mailto:lexisnexis@prod.lexisnexis.com]  
Sent: Tuesday, October 14, 2003 7:17 AM  
To: brant.rumble@simonandschuster.com  
Subject: Prairie Nocturne

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The Seattle Times

October 12, 2003, Sunday Fourth Edition

SECTION: ROP ZONE; Books; Pg. K12

LENGTH: 877 words

HEADLINE: Western voices sing a different tune

BYLINE: Tim McNulty; Special to The Seattle Times

BODY:

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 strictured 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 Assiniboine 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](http://www.nwbookfest.org)

Subj: Re: Editorial  
 Date: 9/5/2003 2:47:49 PM Mountain Daylight Time  
 From: btke@comcast.net  
 To: Ashtonkd@aol.com  
 Sent from the Internet (Details)

Betsy  
 Kelly -- phone 801-582-0431

~~Hi all you~~

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 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 forties tunes. He had the whole audience cating 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?

ID: (long pause) Actually, I did, for Minnesota Public Radio.

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 Anna 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 pasts, 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 WWI, 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 WWI, and tended 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 reverie where the story goes back to some deeper episode, some of the trill of dialogue as people deal with each other. This is a book about motives; there's a lot of propulsive 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 has 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. Bernards in a window box, they're just overpowering." But Wes is not a total black-handed 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 WWI, 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, even 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 insides 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.

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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/Done in and done 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/Done 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 Two 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.

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, trimmed 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 tromping 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: btke@attbi.com ; BHoagland2@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



The King's English Bookshop  
1511 South 1500 East  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84105  
801-484-9100

# The Inkslinger

Volume 11, Number 2

Fall 2003

**BOOK**  
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## Variations on a Theme: An Interview with Ivan Doig

by Kathy Ashton

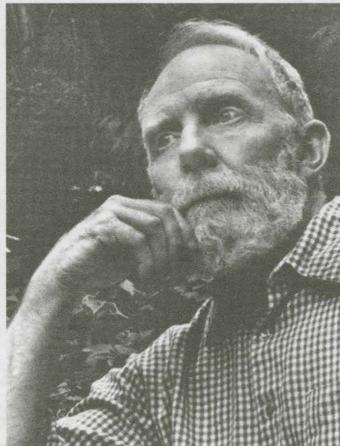
After exchanging the usual pleasantries, Ivan and I settled down to discuss his new book *Prairie Nocturne*, which picks up where our previous favorite Doig novel, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, left off. Not just a breathtaking read, *Prairie Nocturne* is a lyrical book about music, the teaching of it, 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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*Sea Runners*, my first piece of fiction, a little snatch of a church hymn that one of my characters has to sing 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?



Ivan Doig will read, sing from, and sign *Prairie Nocturne*, Wednesday, October 22, at 7 p.m., at TKE. Please see review on page 2.

DOIG, continued on page 4

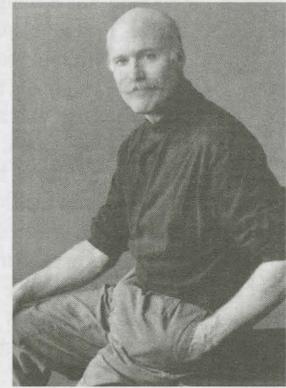
## Prep School Odyssey

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 narrator, a middle-class teenage Odysseus, navigates his often comic course through the supposedly invisible shoals of class, religion, and honor — not to mention the more clearly visible snags in the on-flowing channels of literary scholarship. In the end, however, these trials pale in the face of his struggle to reveal the fact beneath the fiction of his own life; the implicit, glorious irony is the fact that fiction itself cannot operate successfully except in the harsh light of truth.

As the narrator works his way through author after author and from class to class in the school, concealing his lack of 'class' in the process, he peels away the layers of pretense that conceal truth. As 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.



Tobias Wolff will read and sign *Old School: A Novel*, at the new City Library downtown, Tuesday, December 16, at 8 p.m. Movie screening at 5 p.m.

## 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?

## NEW BOOKS

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

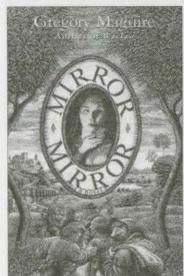
**A Venetian Affair**, Andrea di Robilant  
This very readable work chronicles the rocky history of true love between a beautiful adolescent of mixed parentage and questionable social standing, Giustiniana Wynne, and a young Venetian patrician, Andrea Memmo. The



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 regime*, 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. Teasing 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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**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 storyline, 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/Done in and done 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/Done 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 Two 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.

**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

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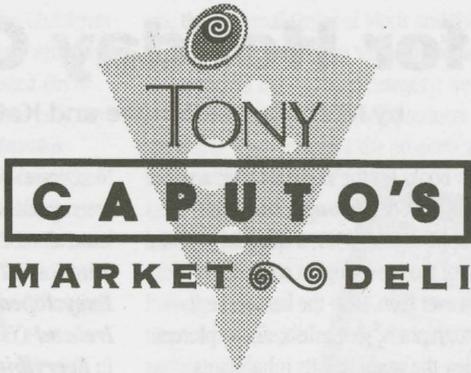
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very difficult to write. Wes's visit to the deserted homestead was one of the hardest too. I rewrote that, trimmed it, changed it, moved him around. I didn't want that to take over the whole book, because the book is about Wes and Monty and Susan. 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 tromping 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 was up. We said good-bye and the interview was over.



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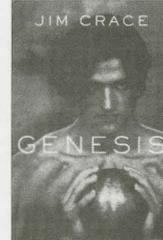
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## NEW BOOKS

life and nowhere does he do it with a backdrop more intriguing in terms of history, with more humor, or with such mystic lyricism. — BB, HarperCollins, \$24.95

**Genesis**, Jim Crace

Felix Dern, a successful actor, lives in a nameless and politically troubled city

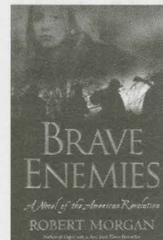


and seems to have it all: an international career, fame, women, money, and enough standing to be insulated from the waves of anarchy and political repression that sweep his

native city. But, there's a catch or two. We learn quickly that he doesn't *dare* often enough; on stage, he has the nerve to act, offstage he doesn't. So, he ambles through life, missing opportunities to act heroically. Even the women he impregnates usually choose him, and every woman he dares to sleep with bears his child. Although **Genesis** focuses on the sex lives of its characters, it is cool, sometimes clinical, and oddly unerotic. Crace has written a novel of ideas, a very *literary* work that examines the tenuous connections of sex and love and the necessity for courage. — CTB, FSG, \$23

**Brave Enemies**, Robert Morgan

Josie is sixteen when her stepfather molests her, as her mother stands by and



refuses to interfere. Josie fights back, and kills the man. But personal upheaval is not the only kind occurring in this fascinating tale, as the American Revolution ferments

in the Carolina mountains surrounding Josie's home. She steals her stepfather's clothes and runs away, joining the ragtag revolutionary forces as a means of protection (she thinks) as well as escape. Josie's emotions rise and fall in tandem with the action as she meets and falls in love with an itinerant Methodist preacher. A wonderful book, as wise in the ways of love and redemption as its predecessor, **Gap Creek**. — KA, Algonquin, \$24.95

**Lunch at the Piccadilly**,

Clyde Edgerton

You don't have to live in an old folks'

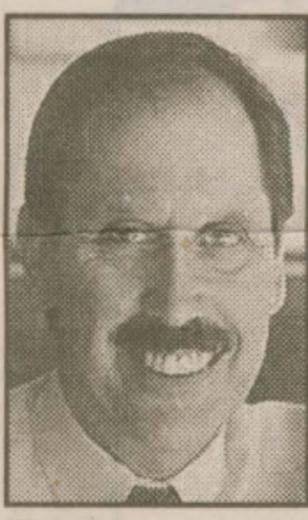
*Continued on page 8*

# Bookish mayor will help Denver

## Hickenlooper supporting literary feats noteworthy

"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



**David  
Milofsky**

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 his 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 his part, too, by serving as a sponsor for the Evil Companions celebrations and hosting dinners for such writers as Tom McGuane and Jim 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 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."

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 streets or buy more books for the library? We

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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.

---

*David Milofsky is a novelist and professor at Colorado State University.*

# Man of many words

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

By MARY STEWART SALE for the Missoulian

The silver-voiced Susan Duff was a bossy schoolgirl in "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," the best-selling of Ivan Doig's novels. Now his Montana Two Medicine trilogy continues with Miss Susan, a square-shouldered, middle-aged spinster



Review "Prairie Nocturne" by Ivan Doig (Scribner)

gazing out her Victorian gabled window at the "giant's copper helmet" of the state capitol dome, pondering notes for her half-finished operetta, "Prairie Tide."

The year is 1924, Helena. Many of her voice students have fallen by the wayside, their parents discouraged by wagging tongues about Miss Duff's song-led marches for the right of women to vote. Yet the truly gifted songbirds still come to be trained by the best, the tall, indomitable former stage performer with the "course-ground Fife burr," cinnamon eyes, and Scottish tenacity.

In the lyric opening scene, there is a knock on the door, and an old paramour mounts the staircase to her aerie.

"Susan? You might have changed the lock," remarks Major Wes Williamson, cattle baron and former gubernatorial candidate in full dress uniform, medals and all, with his signature gentility and fine manners.

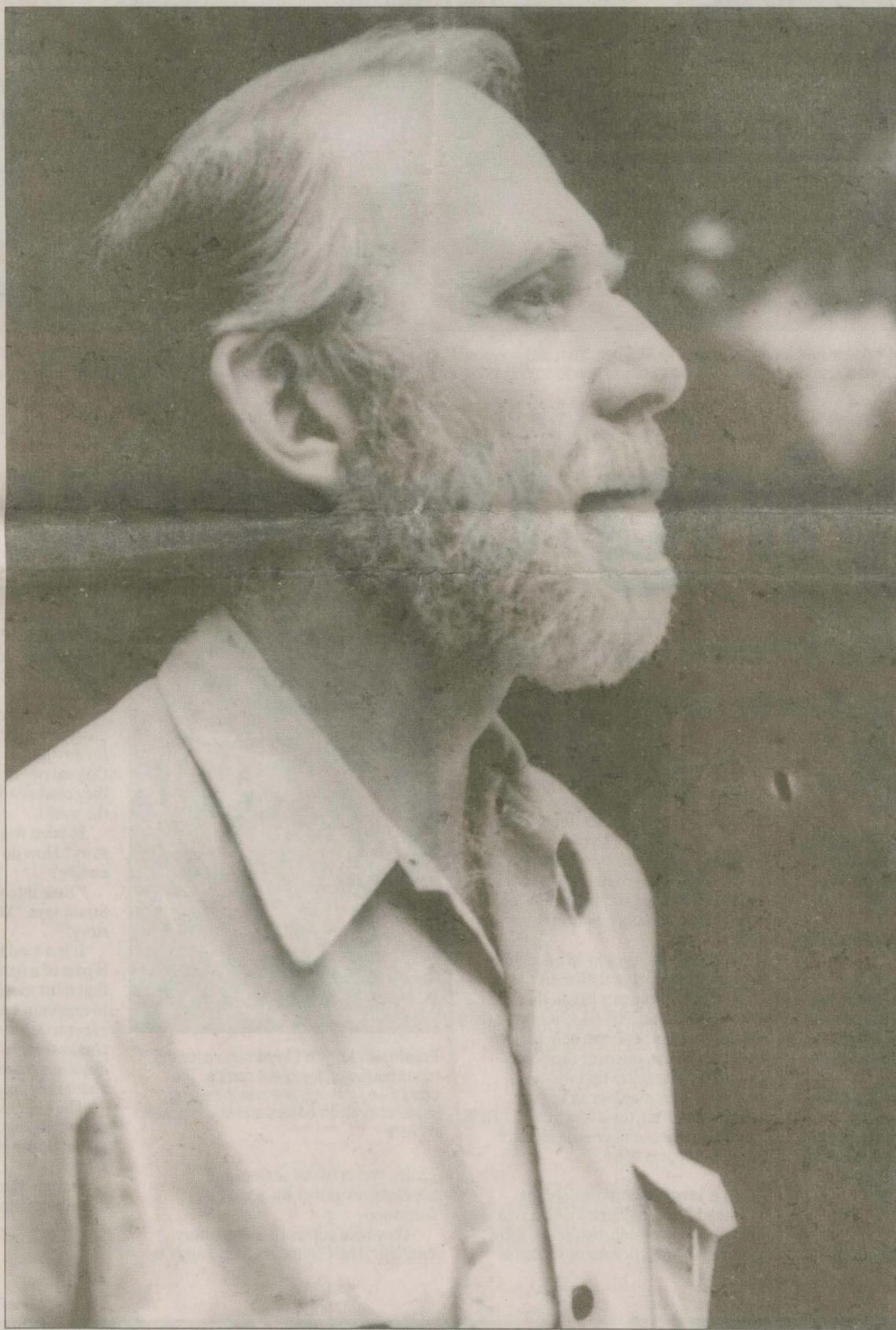
The dialogue between them "snips and snaps," born of an intimacy begun "in the old gray stone stratosphere of Edinburgh," and continued in half the countries of Europe and this very room perched above the gossips of Helena.

Their affair cost him the governorship, yet the four years since seem merely a blink as they begin anew a delightful repartee between equals, both mindful of a "barely simmering love" and his wife and daughters who stand between them. From her tree-house view, they look down at his yellow Duesenberg, lovingly attended by Monty, the "bravely outfitted Negro chauffeur." The major has an outrageous request: that she vault over the "era's dangerous barrier of color" and train the former rodeo clown and chauffeur as a concert vocalist.

In another dyed-in-the-wool Montana scene on an excursion boat at the Gates of the Mountains on the Missouri, Monty first sings for Susan. Echoing off the stone walls, Monty croons a spiritual learned from his momma's momma: "Go down, Moses, /Way down in Egypt land, /Tell old Pharaoh/ To let my people go."

Susan locks eyes with him with "the stare that had conquered a thousand pupils." And therein a journey is launched that ebbs and flows and dances like the river it begins on and reverberates long after.

Tucked away on her father's Scotch Heaven homestead on the Montana prairie, Susan discreetly begins Monty's lessons. When the Klu Klux Klan (having a white-hooded



CAROL M. DOIG/Simon & Schuster

In his new book "Prairie Nocturne," Ivan Doig writes about a Helena spinster and music teacher Susan Duff as she teaches her lover's talented black chauffeur to sing.

### If you're interested

Ivan Doig, who grew up in Montana and now lives in Seattle, has several signing scheduled in the Missoula area:

- Monday, Sept. 29, noon, at Costco in Missoula.
- Monday, Sept. 29, 7:30 p.m., at Chapter One Book store in Hamilton.
- Tuesday, Sept. 30, noon to 1 p.m., Waldenbooks, Southgate Mall.
- Tuesday, Sept. 30, 7:30 p.m., Fact and Fiction, 220 N. Higgins Ave.

chapter in nearly every county in Montana in the 1920s) foists its ugliness at them, teacher and student repair to the even more remote Fort Assiniboine (dubbed Fort Skin-and-Bone by Monty) at Medicine Line. From the Zanzibar-colored bar in Helena, to the Harlem Renaissance in New York, and in letters of blacks in the trenches in WWI, the reader

sees snapshots of a marginalized people in the throes of a cruel history.

Called the "music witch woman" as she carries a doctor's bag through Harlem for cover, Susan and her ilk with a sense of social justice are challenged and tossed about in the unnavigable sweep of events. Doig was trained as both a historian and a journalist, and as Bill Bevis in "Ten Tough Trips: Montana Writers and the West" declares, his facts and situations and dialects can be trusted. Doig crescendos his drama like the swelling of Susan's operetta at Carnegie Hall with the student of a lifetime, and hints of an even more forbidden love.

Here are characters one won't forget, on the hauntingly harsh and beautiful Montana landscape this wordmeister writes is "geography with a habit of kissing people in a way they never get over." Doig was raised in Meagher County, "a couple of thousand square miles of mostly sagebrush, its population less than two thousand and sinking." But where do the timeless characters

come from?

In a speech to the Northwest Booksellers Association in the fall of 2003, Doig muses aloud about the "seductive flowering" of character into the likes of Susan, Monty and their sugar daddy major. There really was a black spiritual singer, Taylor Gordon, who made it to Carnegie Hall and wrote the book "Born To Be" in 1929, later to return to Doig's home county, broke and herding sheep.

But it was as Doig tagged along with his father in the colorful nine taverns of their "nowhere" hometown, hiring hay crews, that his study of the undercurrent of character began, the seedier the character the better for a young boy with a "devilish liking for stories."

Doig's is not an easy style; he writes long, ponderous sentences with many dependent clauses. But, like Dickens, it's worth the schlep. Bevis in the aforementioned "Ten Tough Trips" calls his style "stunning," and likens the rhetoric and love of language to

## Childhood memories feed Doig's writings

By SHERRY JONES of the Missoulian

"A lasting canvas" is how Ivan Doig describes Montana, a place he hasn't lived in for 37 years yet which continues to draw the heart of the man and his writing across page after page, book after book.

"This is fairly basic to a lot of writers, I believe," Doig says in an interview from his home in Seattle, where he has lived since 1966. "We tend to go back to the country of childhood, to the country of memory ... and once a writer launches really seriously into a piece of physical and social geography he often keeps exploring it."

In "Prairie Nocturne," his latest novel, Doig caresses the contours of the Montana landscape with the same lover's languor he employed in "This House of Sky," "English Creek," "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana."

"Gulches to nowhere, slabs of cliff around every corner, round-shouldered summits that didn't amount to that much," he writes of Helena's Big Belt Mountains from the point of view of a newcomer. "Not like the resounding wide-open Two Medicine country he was lifelong used to, with its dune shapes of the Sweetgrass Hills way over east there with the prairie in between as if they were pretty mirages that miraculously never faded, and the mighty reefs of the Rockies pushing up everywhere into the sky to the west."

It's a mouthful to describe a single sweep of mountain view, and it doesn't end there. Passages like these are almost certainly the reason Publisher's Weekly criticized the book for its slow pace (Kirkus Reviews, on the other hand, loved it). But Doig doesn't mind too much. In today's fast-food, prosaic-prosed literary environs, Doig enjoys offering words on which to actually chew.

"The language, as I see it, from what I'm trying to do, is part of the story. The language has a life of its own; it's got its own habits perhaps in the way it comes out of my characters. It reaches for the landscape, it kind of shimmers behind the story and a kind of poetry."

"And I like books that have some leisure to them - as long as you can see the writer's investment on the page, that the writer is interested in the language, is putting his mind to work on the possibilities of the language."

Plot is important, too, of course, and for "Prairie Nocturne" Doig has fashioned a complex one, involving a voice teacher, her married-wealthy-rancher lover, and his African-American ranch hand with a Carnegie Hall dream and a talent to match. The reader's ride, admittedly slow at first, is punctuated with jolts of Ku Klux Klan activity and World-War-I flashbacks, then shifts into high gear as Susan, Monty and Wes chase those rainbows all the way to New York City.

Doig has neither been an African-American, a woman, a filthy rich rancher or a 1920s New Yorker, but he never hesitated to plunge into the lives of others and write his way back out.

"We have to try to put ourselves

### Fuhrman

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#### 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

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#### Continued

Faulkner.

Doig employs words that send one scrambling for Webster's: abattoir, palimpsest, legerdemain. The Scottish ones: shinnying, flivver 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

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#### 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."

***From Booklist***

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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October 12, 2003 Sunday REGION EDITION

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LENGTH: 575 words

HEADLINE: CHARACTERS DON'T QUITE MEASURE UP TO DOIG'S LARGER-THAN-LIFE  
STORYTELLING

BYLINE: REBECCA SODERGREN

BODY:  
"Prairie Nocturne"

By Ivan Doig

Scribner (\$26)

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 Williamsons 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.

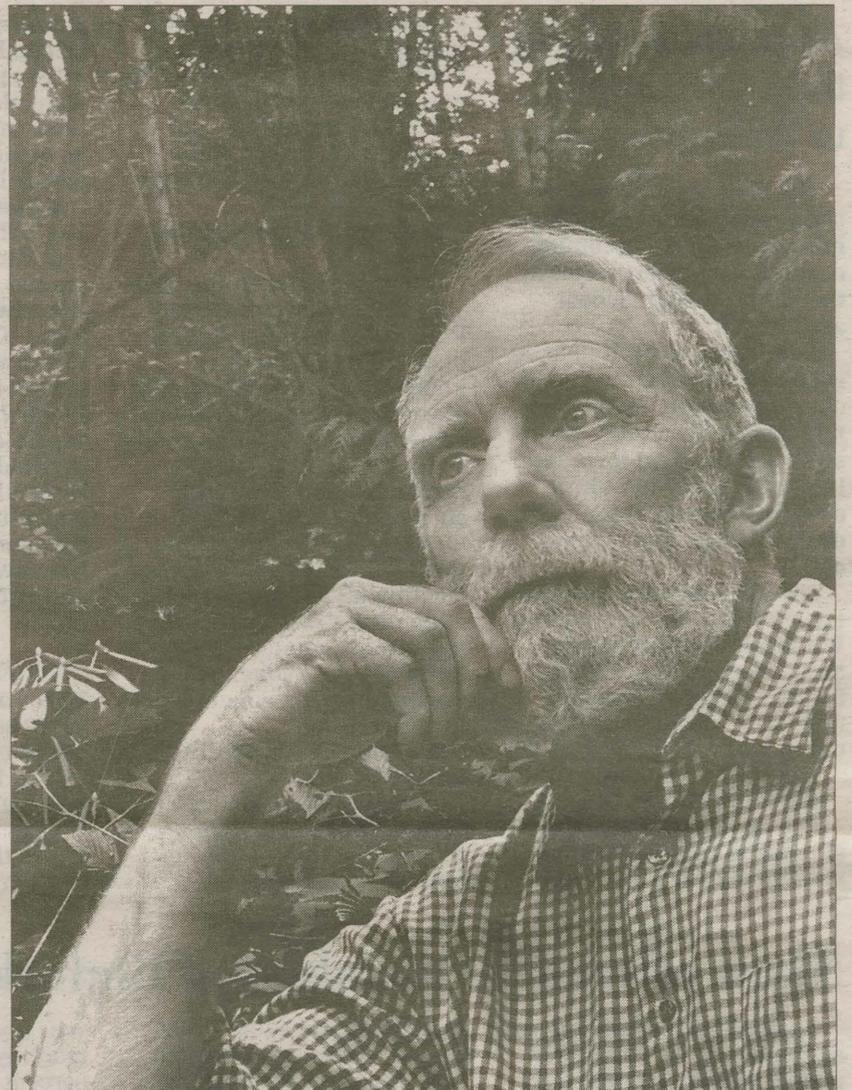
Rebecca Sodergren is a free-lance writer living in Wichita Falls, Texas.

**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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## Cover story

# 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 homesteading 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 bustle 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.

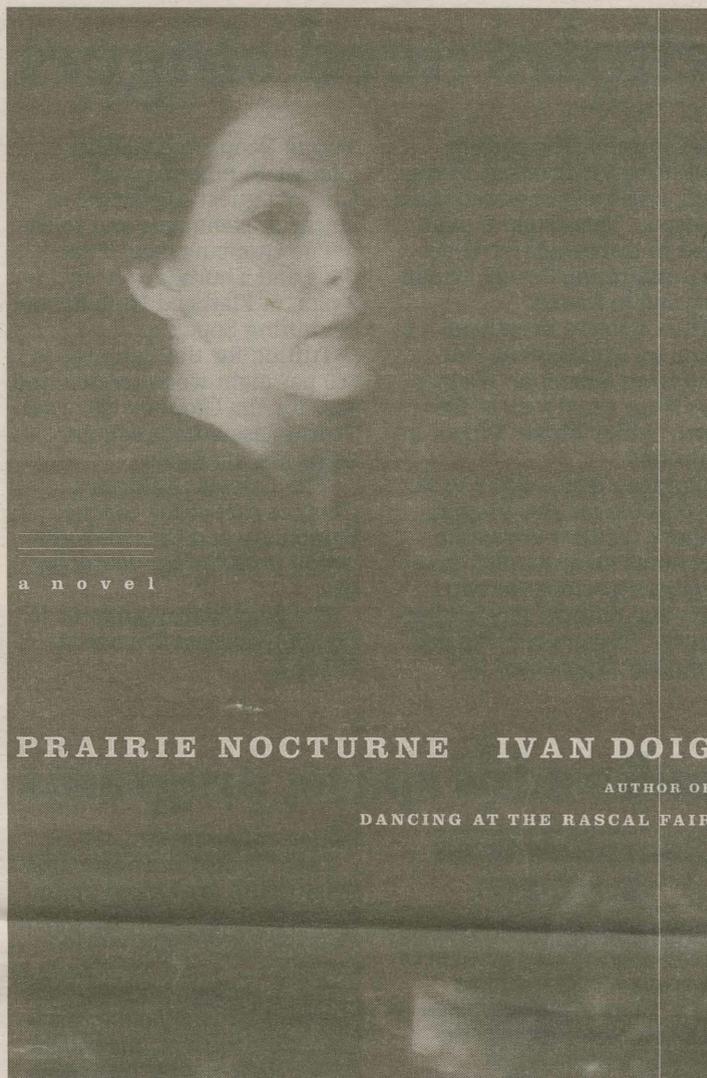
Recognizing a need to write about the African-American experience in the West, Doig introduces the character of Monty Rathbun, a black ranch hand and chauffeur to a cattle baron. Rathbun leaves Montana to seek fame in Harlem in the '20s

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 Sulphur Springs, and then in the

Dupuyer and Valier areas. His life was formed among the shepherders 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 buck-rake during haying time, a D-8 Cat pulling a harrow during summer fallowing, and a grain truck at harvest. He'd herded and trailed



### Ivan Doig signing 'Prairie Nocturne'

BOOKS WEST  
WEDNESDAY  
11 A.M. TO 1 P.M.

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 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.

*'Prairie Nocturne' is another stunning work from Doig, who writes with absolute, pitch-perfect authority.'*

— Washington Post

ue 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 (St. 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 one summer 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, 0385500696) "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 an unusually rich, dense, compelling whirlwind of a book, a story 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, 0739306464)

**FOUR SPIRITS**, by Sena Jeter Naslund (Morrow, \$26.95, 0066212383) "With this powerful new novel of the civil rights struggle, Sena Jeter Naslund has topped the literary magic she created in *Ahab's Wife*. *Four Spirits* will move you."—Jake Reiss, The Alabama Booksmith, Birmingham, AL Also a HarperAudio (Unabridged cassette, 0060569425)

**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 compassion and intelligence. 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, awakes with a bout 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 Booksellers, Memphis, TN Also a Highbridge Audio (Unabridged Cassette, 1565117905)

**ISLE OF PALMS: A Lowcountry Tale**, by Dorothea Benton Frank (Berkley, \$22.95, 0425191362) "*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's a signature of the author. I love it."—Christine Stanley, Bay Street Trading Co., Beaufort, SC

**JAMESLAND**, by Michelle Huneven (Knopf, \$24, 0375413820) "In a riff on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Huneven follows a group of soul-searching folks, including William James' great-great granddaughter, her semi-senile aunt, 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 psychic, 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 Viscount of Adrilankha**, by Steven Brust (Tor Books, \$27.95, 0312855826) "Return to Brust's Dragearea, where the adventure continues! From the ashes of the fallen empire 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 courtly manners and intrigue). 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 Books, Salt Lake City, UT

**LUNCH AT THE PICCADILLY**, by Clyde Edgerton (Algonquin, \$22.95, 1565121953) "In our store we have a one-sentence 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 even funnier. 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, 0393057313) "The manic, hypnotic obsessiveness 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 Sindelar, Third Place Books, Lake Forest Park, WA

**MY COLD WAR**, by Tom Piazza (Regan Books, \$24.95, 0060533404) "The legacy of family, the inexorable grip of the past on the present, history itself and how we struggle to understand it—these are the themes that inform Piazza's compelling and memorable debut novel. His story resonates with emotional intelligence, humor, and insight."—Lily Bartels, The Open Door Bookstore, Schenectady, NY

**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 (Amistad Press, \$24.95, 0060555653) "Set on the island of Bimshire 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 colonial and post-colonial history of Bimshire, and, as I read this novel, I felt amazed wonder at the intricate, sustained power of this complex, tour de force."—Helen Sinoradzki, Annie Bloom's Books, Portland, OR

**PRAIRIE NOCTURNE**, by Ivan Doig (Scribner, \$26, 0743201353) "Tucked in chronologically between *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* and *English Creek* and featuring many familiar characters, Doig's newest effort moves from the Montana Rockies to 1920s Harlem, touching on themes of racism and the inescapable presence of the past in our lives. His characteristic handcrafting of each sentence remains, as always, a hallmark of his writing."—Russ Lawrence, Chapter One Book Store, Hamilton, MT

**PRESENT VALUE**, by Sabin Willett (Villard, \$24.95, 1400060869) "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."—Terry Whittaker, Viewpoint of Columbus, Columbus, IN

**THE RABBIT FACTORY**, by Larry Brown (Free Press, \$25, 0743245237) "Larry Brown's latest novel is a wild departure from his previous work. It begins in Memphis with a man rescuing a stud 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 savagely funny stories of the human comedy unfold."—Lyn Roberts, Square Books, Oxford, MS Also a Recorded Books Audio (Unabridged cassette, 140254653X)

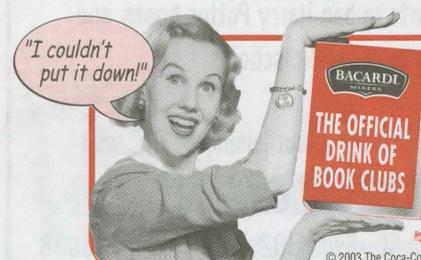
**SAUL AND PATSY**, by Charles Baxter (Pantheon, \$24, 0375410295) "Charles Baxter continues to cement his place in the upper echelon of current authors. *Saul and Patsy* is a brilliant novel of obsession and the toll it can take upon faith and belief."—Bill Cusumano, Nicola's Books, Ann Arbor, MI Also a New Millenium Entertainment Audio (Unabridged Cassette, 1590074726)

**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. Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church members are faced with an unexpected turn of events just as the church is preparing for its 100th Anniversary. The feuding 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, 0618152849) "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 Gleysteen, 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 Kehde, The Raven Bookstore, Lawrence, KS Also a Highbridge Audio (Abridged Cassette, 1565117816)

**THEATER OF THE STARS**, by N. M. Kelby (Hyperion, \$23.95, 0786868589) "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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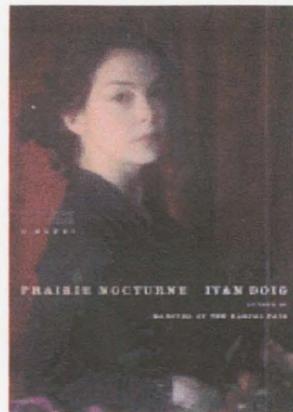
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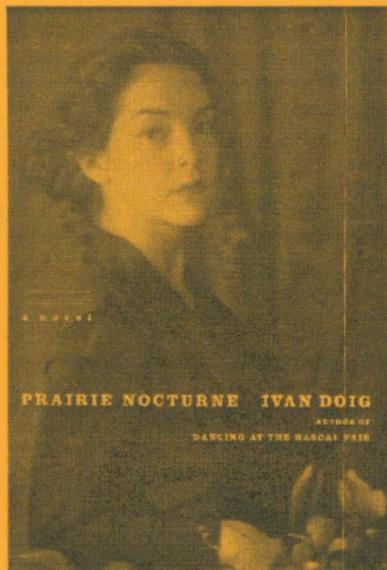
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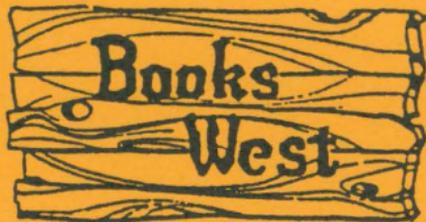


# MEET IVAN DOIG



“Ivan Doig never disappoints those who love good writing and *Prairie Nocturne* is Doig at his best.” — Tony Hillerman

Signing his new book  
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TRIBUNE PHOTO BY WAYNE ARNST

**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.

# ENTERTAINMENT

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## 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

### 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.

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.



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**

# Doig: One character inspired by man author interviewed as student

Continued from F3

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.

"And Susan tells him — this is one of my favorite lines from the book — 'If I'm going to be alone, I might as well be by myself,'" Doig says.

■ 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.

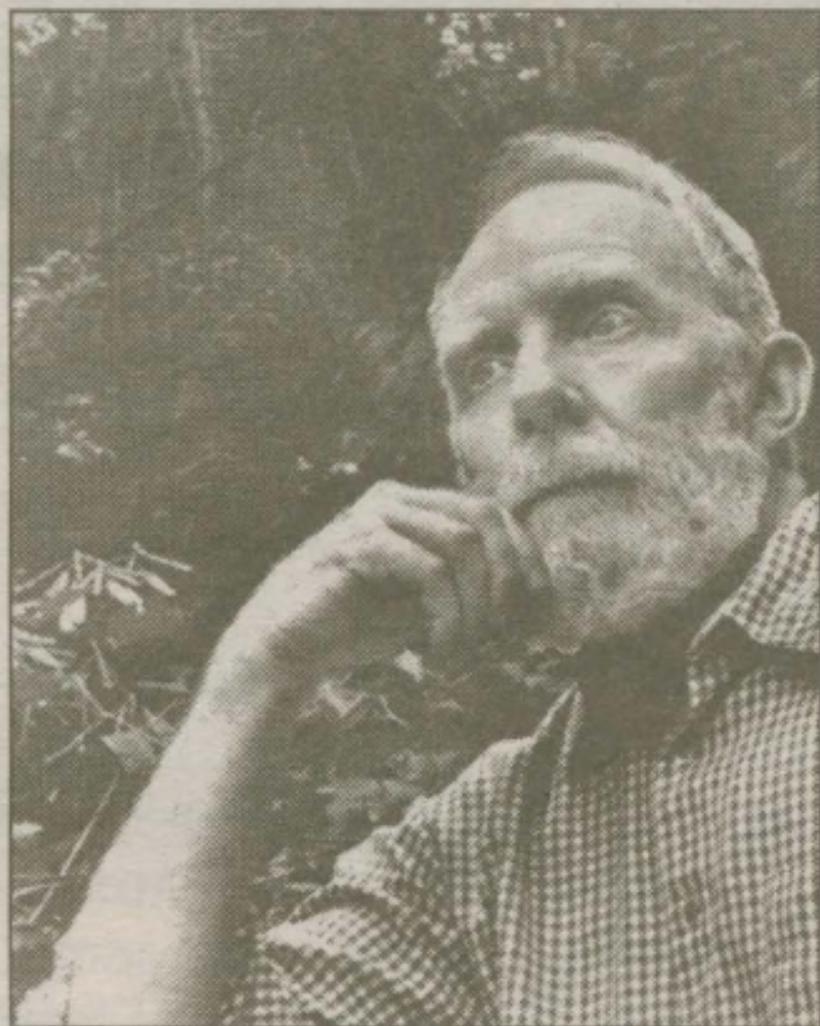
"The idea of the strength of a voice carrying a guy all the way to Carnegie Hall, from what I recognized was just a wide spot in the sagebrush, stayed with me," he says.

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."





MARION ETTLINGER

## **IVAN DOIG**

*The Seattle author will read from his new novel, "Prairie Nocturne," Saturday in Lake Forest Park.*

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