

RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA  
By Ivan Doig

LOS ANGELES TIMES BOOK REVIEW	. . . .	Sept. 30, 1990
WASHINGTON POST BOOK REVIEW	. . . .	Sept. 30, 1990
SEATTLE WEEKLY	. . . .	Nov. 7, 1990
MONTANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM STORE CATALOG 1990-1991		
SEATTLE TIMES	. . . .	Oct. 21, 1990
ST. PAUL'S PIONEER PRESS	. . . .	Nov. 18, 1990
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR	. . . .	Nov. 20, 1990
SEATTLE TIMES	. . . .	Dec. 30, 1990

# Books



**DONN FRY**

Times book editor

**T**ime is a commodity in Ivan Doig's Montana, almost as tangible as a flock of sheep or a fresh-cut crop of hay.

Through his novels "English Creek" and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," and now "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" (Atheneum, \$18.95), the final volume in his trilogy about the state's Two Medicine country, time loops gracefully, almost casually. Yet it also has the steady, inexorable flow of history, as Doig peels away layer after layer of the lives that pass through Montana from the late 19th century through the state's centennial celebrations last year.

Memory is the force that energizes this commodity, time: "Memories are stories our lives tell us," Jick McCaskill declares near the end of the new novel, after he has taken a long look at his own 65 years. His final speech in the wintry dawn of Montana's 100th birthday, at a stirring flag-raising ceremony with family and friends in the town of Gros Ventre, provides a moving and eloquent coda to a remarkable trio of novels.

Like "English Creek," "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" is filtered through Jick's cantankerous personality. But while his memories in the earlier novel were corralled into the wide-eyed, golly-gee world view of a naive 14-year-old, "Ride With Me" gives full rein to an adult sensibility that manages to be loon curmudgeonly and humane, that is guided by the wisdom and self-deprecating humor that come only with age.

**Doig has seen** to it that memory and history ride together, 1989-style, in this new novel. It takes the form of a picaresque ramble around Montana after Jick reluctantly agrees to use his Winnebago RV to ferry



Harper & Row

## MONTANA AND MEMORY

Finale of Doig's trilogy takes us back to Two Medicine country



**Ivan Doig has seen to it that memory and history ride together.**

on that land."

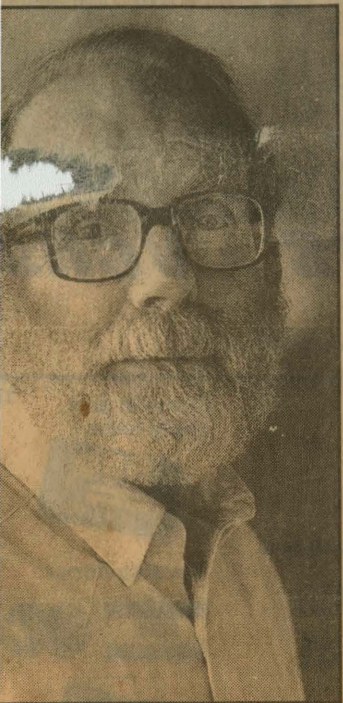
The independent Mariah, who always "seemed to be the only author of herself," wheedles Jick into joining their four-month journey, and although he professes to loath his former son-in-law, the trio is soon plying the interstates and back roads in search of stories and photos that burrow beneath the skin of centennial hoopla. Complementary as journalists in a way they never were as spouses, Mariah and Riley are soon producing compelling features, angering Montana chauvinists and, to Jick's consternation, warming up to each other again.

**This is no mere Montana travelogue**, and unlike "English Creek," whose lively prose was saddled with a glacial narrative pace, "Ride With Me" accelerates to a comfortable rhythm and seems to move along on cruise control. With Jick at the wheel, the "Bago" transports them from a buffalo preserve to the mine-cratered devastation of Butte, from the ghost of Shelby's boxing-match fame to the ghosts of Jick's own ancestors — the "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" generation — at the historical society in Helena.

They steer through Montana's romanticized past and the rocky economics of its present, always guided by Jick's crusty humor and Doig's deft touch with the landscape: "We might as well have been a carload of Swiss trying to sightsee Mongolia," says Jick, when they reach southeastern Montana, a bleak nowhere-land new to them all. "Grassland with

sage low and thin on it ran to all the horizons... a surprising number of attempts had been made to scratch some farming into this barebone plain, but what grew here mostly was distance."

**But this is** a journey through memory as much as landscape, and Doig pulls off a daring but gloriously successful gamble. Midway through, the trio grows to four with the addition of a woman from Jick's past who is as unexpected as she is welcome. She puts time in perspective for him; however, allowing Jick to finally admit that "a person tends to think that the past has happened



A.E. Aralza, The Arizona Daily Star  
an Doig is in Tucson

*Arizona Daily Star  
Feb. 16, '91*

# Western author's next book to include Arizona

By J.C. Martin  
The Arizona Daily Star

Author Ivan Doig's Arizona fans who read his Montana sagas with unflinching pleasure will like this news: He is about to turn his attention to Arizona.

Doig, born in White Sulphur Springs, Mont., 51 years ago, began his published literary career in 1978 with a Montana memoir, "This House of Sky." He used family recollections to paint the harsh, rewarding life of early Montana pioneers. The book was nominated for a National Book Award.

His next effort, "Berneta's Book," — at the moment just a working title, — will be a continuation of "This House of Sky," Doig says. It will be partly factual.

Berneta was Doig's mother and she died in 1945 when he was barely 6. The family — Doig, his mother and father — spent the winter preceding her death in Phoenix and Wickenburg. There Berneta Doig, who had asthma, tried to regain her health.

In telling his mother's story, basically that of a girl and a woman who grew up in Montana in the early 20th century, the Arizona sojourn will come into the picture through her letters. They were sent faithfully every two weeks to her brother serving in the South Pacific during World War II.

"She was a clear, vivid writer," Doig says. One of her accounts, he remembers, concerned a Montana Club get-together in Mesa.

In spite of Berneta's improving health, Arizona could not keep the Doigs. "Home-sickness, family considerations," Doig says, drew them back to Montana. So Ivan Doig did not grow up in Wickenburg, after all, where he might have devoted his talents to presenting Central Arizona with the same chiseled precision he uses on Montana.

On the other hand, although Doig has spent most of his literary career portraying Montana life, he hasn't lived there since 1957 when he left home to attend Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

For the past 26 years he has lived in Seattle with his wife, Carol, a former journalist who now teaches at Shoreline Community College.

He returns to Montana regularly, however, as he did earlier this month to receive a Governor's Arts Award. He won similar awards in Washington in 1979, '81, '85 and '88.

Despite ties to his home state, Doig insists he could never live there. "You have to wear too many hats in a small city."

He cites the case of writer friends whose "good citizen consciences" keep them on civic committees and boards. "That and listening in on the downtown geezer table," Doig shakes his head in cheerful dismay. "They just won't let you alone."

He prefers what he calls the "aloneness" of his Seattle suburb.

Doig traces his decision to be a writer back to junior high school and the encouragement of a sympathetic teacher.

"I dropped out of Future Farmers and

signed up to take a course in typing. You talk about a career decision."

Graduating from Northwestern in 1961, Doig spent a few years at various journalistic jobs (a newspaper and a magazine) before getting a Ph.D. in Western history at the University of Washington.

Beginning in 1970, Doig spent the next 10 years, "twice the length for human sanity," as a full-time free-lance writer. He was turning out a couple dozen articles a year when "This House of Sky" started making the rounds of New York publishers.

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, which bought it, was the 13th publisher to read it.

But when the rejection slips started coming back with comments such as, "This is really well-written but we don't see any commercial prospects," Doig says, he knew he was getting close.

"It's hard to say enough good things about what happens when Ivan Doig sets words

See DOIG, Page 7B

## Doig

Continued from Page 6B

down on a page," a critic wrote.

"He has that magical quality," one fan put it, "of being able to make you see, taste, feel and smell what he is writing about."

It is not something he achieves casually. Most Doig books have gone through at least three and often as many as seven rewrites. Doig, who still relies mainly on a manual typewriter, says, "It's the first writing that's tough. Getting the words out of my head and onto anything. By the third draft, it starts to sing."

Using a Roget's Thesaurus that he acquired in college, Doig works at what he describes as "sorting words." (For the Montana trilogy "English Creek," "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," and "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," he also used a songwriter's rhyming dictionary.)

Sometimes, Doig says, he will look over a manuscript "just for verbs." Sometimes, "to see how every paragraph begins and ends. I like to read

things out loud to hear their rhythm, the turns of phrase." He has been known to sit at his desk reading silently, tapping the eraser end of a pencil in cadence as his lips move.

"I try to work two stubborn substances, research and craft," Doig told an interviewer for the "Contemporary Authors" series, "into becoming the hardest alloy of all — a good story."

Doig will be at The Haunted Bookshop, 7211 N. Northern Ave., 2-4 p.m. tomorrow to sign books and greet readers.

## 'The Last Best Place' in America

### RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA

By Ivan Doig  
(Atheneum: \$18.95;  
384 pp.; 0-689-12019-2)

Reviewed by Judith Freeman

When does a farmer or rancher finally give up on making a living from his land and sell out to some distant corporation or resign himself to foreclosure? When does the small-town grocer, undercut by malls, do the same? And what about the young people in rural America, whose best prospects lie in the big cities? What happens to our collective spirit when we pull up roots and dissolve communities, when families find themselves separated?

"How and when should we leave our own roots?" each of the main characters in Ivan Doig's new novel asks. In doing so, they voice an issue on the minds of many Americans.

"Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" is the last volume of Doig's Montana trilogy, which covers 100 years of Montana history as viewed through the eyes of the fictional McCaskills, a Scottish immigrant

ranching family. The first volume, "English Creek" (1984), was set in the 1880s when the first McCaskills arrived in Montana. The second volume, "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987), took place during the Depression years. Last year, Montana celebrated its centennial, an event that provided the perfect theme and setting for the concluding story about the McCaskills, in which a father and daughter set out in a Winnebago during the centennial summer in order to "get the true story" of the state.

Jick McCaskill, a recently widowed rancher, is talked into making this journey by his daughter Mariah, a photographer for a newspaper that has assigned her to do a series on the centennial. Joining them is Mariah's ex-husband, Riley Wright, a wise-cracking reporter who is to provide the text for Mariah's pictures. Jick, Mariah and Riley—a reconstituted family largely at odds with each other—set out in the mobile home, crisscrossing the state in search of stories.

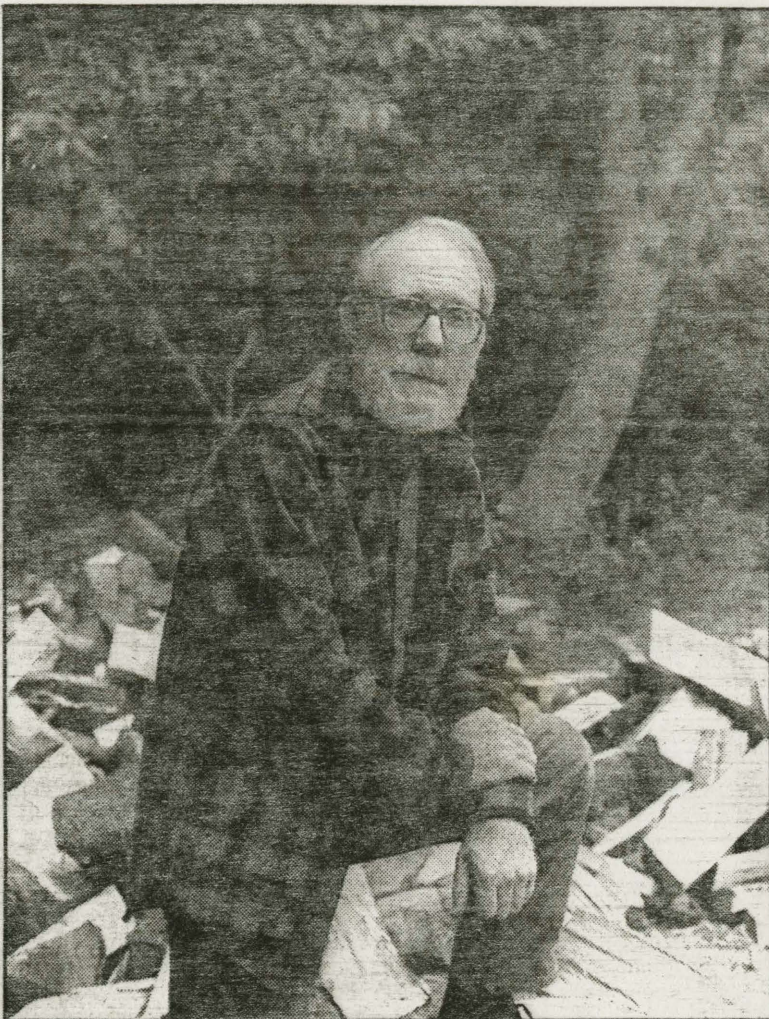
The novel has a lively tone and a quick pace. Doig has a perfect ear for colloquial speech, and he is both eloquent (in passages where he simulates Riley's journalism) and

funny (when he sets the trio to verbal sparring). They encounter old-timers as well as new immigrants such as the Vietnamese waiter enthusiastically struggling with the new language. The trio visits historical monuments, battlefields and preserves where they gaze wistfully at the remaining buffalo—once so thick "the country was one robe." Inevitably their own personal histories unfold. The trip jars memories, of Riley and Mariah's acrimonious divorce, of Jick's own unhappy first marriage and his deeply satisfying second one.

Doig uncovers both the beautiful and the tattered sides of Montana: the dump heaps and earth poisons left by strip mining; the mobile missiles—"blue taxis to Armageddon" (there are 200 Minuteman missile silos across Montana). He writes of the defeated lives on Indian reservations, and the "bottom-wage way of life" that drives young people elsewhere.

Please Turn to Page 7

Freeman is the author of "The Chinchilla Farm," a novel, and a collection of stories, "Family Attractions."



MIRIAM BERKLEY

Ivan Doig

## More WASPs in the Ivy

### THE LADY OF SITUATIONS

By Louis Auchincloss  
(Houghton Mifflin: \$20.95;  
275 pp.; 0-395-54411-4)

happens is a bit of polite adultery rocking the walls of the "monastery," plus some milder breaches of honor.

Characters speak operatically. Aunt Ruth,

the struggle to hold a moral standard against the pressures of modernity holds up as a contemporary morality play. Indeed, he pretty much managed this Jamesian feat



cuts a swath of destruction around itself and leaves a trail of battered psyches in its wake. Out of this wasteland of a 1950s dream family gone bad steps a narrator, the daughter, Maureen Emery Lannier:

"By the time I went to college I hated my name so much I dropped it altogether. Emery, my grandmother's maiden name, felt right. I liked the idea of grinding and polishing, a hard abrasive substance. I grew to see myself like that; grinding and polishing myself to remove the traces of Frank and Nina from my life."

However, Emery can neither scrape away her parents, Frank and Nina, nor get them to call her anything but Maura.

The narrative begins when the 40-ish Emery goes to her parents' house hoping to find the home she has never had. After spending the last 25 years trying to run away from her parents and her past, Emery is looking to make peace with them (her mother has written that Emery's father is about to die) as well as with herself. Soon after

Emery. "We all grow up differently, learn different lessons. Tattoos. Scars. Scars don't tan. Scars don't heal. Scars don't. Scars are."

Regardless of how much Emery would like to turn her back on the past and its scars, she can not. On one level, the narrative deals with Emery's attempts to deal with present-day life, the effort to find her parents new housing and the like. In a subtext, driven by her frequent flashbacks as she metonymically skips between past and present, she attempts to deal with the past. She knows, however, that "reinventing the past is as impossible as skating on hot water."

The Lanniers resemble the self-contained, eccentric, virtually friendless families that Anne Tyler creates. However, with the Lanniers, eccentricities shade into pathologies. "My family must be terminally marginal," Emery thinks. "We were a normal, middle-class family. On the right track in a wrecked car."

The parents, Frank and Nina, drink themselves into stupors nearly every night. Nina, who

ry of bear children. They take refuge in each other. "There always been you and I," Drew said. "We've never gotten close to any one else." There also is a thin child, Julia, long dead, present in the book only through her absence.

Absences affect this book like black holes, always tugging at characters. Throughout her work Vogan deals with loss, whether it be the loss of a limb—a particular fascination of hers—or of a lover. Emery's sometime lover, Paris, and her younger sister, Julia, hover in the penumbra of "Blueprints," although Paris does make a few appearances. According to Emery, "We all live with ghosts. Paris is my ghost, Julia is my mother's." Emery can say goodbye to Paris, if only for a while, but her mother cannot say goodbye to Julia.

In "Blueprints" as well as in her other books ("In Shelly's Leg," "Loss of Flight," "Scenes From the Homefront"), Vogan knits facts, concrete knowledge, into the fabric

## 'Ride With Me'

*Continued From Second Page*

But he also celebrates the beauty of the land and the tenacity of spirit found in Montanans "who've been perpetually game to outwork the levels of pay here because they can love a mountain with their eyes while doing it," people who see life as "an up-and-down proposition." In the great expanse of Montana, man is given "much room and inclination to do both our worst and our best."

The question of how and when to leave one's roots becomes more pressing as the journey progresses. Jick, who has left his sheep ranch in the hands of caretakers, must decide what to do with an operation he can no longer manage alone and which neither of his children wants to take over. Riley and Mariah, who have effected a tumultuous reconciliation, begin planning to move to the West Coast once the centennial is over. The future hangs in the balance: Will the last McCaskills leave the land or find a way to remain rooted in what has become known as "the last best place"?

In certain ways, Montana has come to embody what's left of the "West" as it once was known. But the history of the American West was written as a romance, and the romance has run its course. A more shameful picture has emerged, a story of despoliation and genocide, of exploitation, corruption and

greed. As America enters the 21st Century, the West looks more and more like a big theme park. The outdoors has become little more than a backdrop for commercial, recreational activity.

Doig understands these issues better than most. He has steeped himself in Western history and written the sorts of books that don't romanticize the experience as much as present it in small-scale, human terms. He has written beautifully and with tenderness and humor of simple people who love the soil.

In the long run, all the "sad behavior" of man over the last hundred years can't erase hope for the future. Jick McCaskill doesn't sell out but manages to find a way to ensure that his ranch will pass to future generations in an unspoiled condition. Even Mariah recants on California and makes a continuing commitment to her roots, thus giving the McCaskills' attachment to the soil.

It seemed right that "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" should have ended on such a hopeful note. After all, Ivan Doig is the most hopeful of writers—not blindly optimistic but deeply humanistic. "He who owns the soil," he has written, "owns up to the sky."

In Montana, that's a big piece of heaven, something worth hanging on to.

**"He was like a  
that it burns  
but not before  
everything ar**

No one alive knew Elvis better than Doig. He shared his life, and who now writes with more wit, candor, and affection. Even his critics called the Presleys white trash. Doig mourned and worshipped still. He considered Elvis's better half; he wrote of his record and fecklessness; his mother's smothering love and alcoholism. From these seeds sprang Elvis Presley, American legend—musical superstar, devoted son, self-destructive pop icon.

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# The Big Sky's the Limit

## RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA

By Ivan Doig  
Atheneum. 324 pp. \$18.95

By Susan Dodd

**I**VAN DOIG is a writer whose work makes readers recall why they love to read, reminds writers why they ever wanted to write in the first place. Doig's characters befriend you. His landscapes bowl you over. His novels lay whole worlds at your feet and invite you to make them your own.

*Ride With Me, Mariah Montana* is the final (alas) installment of a trilogy begun with *English Creek* (1984) and followed by *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* (1987). Readers of the first two volumes will likely find this ride worth the wait, but those who missed the earlier books shouldn't have any trouble keeping up with *Mariah*, either. This novel stands on its own.

And it stands, as well, apart. *Ride With Me, Mariah Montana* continues Jick McCaskill's account of his Scottish family, of their fruitful and spirited inhabitation of Montana's Two Medicine country. But it is 1989 now. McCaskills have lived within sight of Phantom Woman Mountain for about a century, Jick for 65 years, and the state of Montana is getting ready to make the most of its 100th birthday. English Creek, lined with willows, still curves down out of the mountains, but it lingers on the edges of a changed world, a world afflicted by "the longest epidemic of all, loss." You can still

Susan Dodd's most recent book is *Hell-Bent Men and Their Cities*.

watch buffalo roam in Montana, provided you're willing to track them "from a motorhome the size of a small boxcar." You can still spot a bull elk, but it's mounted over a pasty-faced city editor's desk. Grizzly bears die of relocation. Entertainment is provided by "Montana's homegrown C-and-W group, The Roadkill Angels," and by the latest in t-shirt slogans—"Keep Montana Green, Shoot a Developer."

No wonder, then, Jick McCaskill has grown a little irritable, loss around him everywhere he looks: His beloved wife has recently died, and Jick is starting to suspect the hard business of ranching is getting to be too much for him. A nearby corporate ranch is licking its chops over the McCaskill land. Jick's hopes of keeping the ranch in the family were shot down three years ago with the divorce of his daughter Mariah and her husband, Riley Wright.

Feeling the reins of present and future slip from his hands, Jick is, more than ever, haunted by the past. ("Doesn't time know any statute of limitations, for Christ's sake?") And he is still trying to reassemble a rather crochety family history:

"Every family is a riddle . . . People on the outside can only glimpse enough to make them wonder what in the name of Jesus H. Christ is going on in there . . . while those inside the family have times, sometimes lifetimes, of being baffled with one another . . . parent and child . . . eyeing each other like foreign species. Knots in the bloodline. The oldest story there is, and ever the freshest."

Preoccupied, perhaps, with a lifetime of bafflement, Jick gets himself into a real predicament: Before we quite know what's got into him, he has signed on for a crisscross centennial tour of the sorry state of Mon-



Ivan Doig

BY WAYNE ARNST

*"Before we quite know what's got into him, he has signed on for a crisscross centennial tour of the sorry state of Montana."*

tana with his daughter and her ex-husband. Riley and Mariah, still more than half in love with each other, work for a Missoula newspaper, he as a columnist ("Wright Angles"), she as a photographer. Their assignment, hard-won and loosely defined, is to piece together a portrait of Montana in all the rich contrariness of its hundredth year.

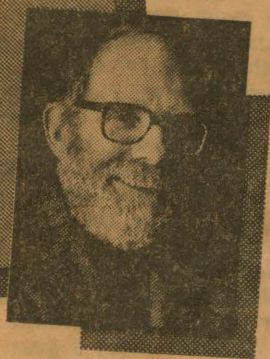
Jick's Winnebago makes for mighty close quarters, as Riley and Mariah follow their noses. Such bickering, such chemistry . . . it's a scenario for Tracy and Hepburn. And there is Jick—"letting myself get just exactly where I knew not to get, between the pair of them"—digressing a blue streak and sputtering like Walter Brennan.

It is the sputter of Jick McCaskill's voice—cranky, confused, honest, stubborn and lovelorn—that orchestrates the journey, reconciles past and present and makes the whole novel sing. *Ride With Me, Mariah Montana* is, like its narrator, not without flaws. Old men tend to ramble, and this particular would-be codger has a weakness for one-liners that occasionally gets the better of him. Jick is so opinionated, especially where his daughter and her ex-husband are concerned, that Mariah and Riley remain a bit dim for a reader, overshadowed by the narrator's anxiety, aggravation and love. And these poetic columns of Riley's in a small-town paper? Such gloriously overshoot writing hasn't been seen since James Agee left *Fortune* magazine.

But Ivan Doig is a writer committed to plenty, and maybe plenitude always involves a touch of excess. *Ride With Me, Mariah Montana* is an extravagant celebration and, above all else, a love story. It is filled with devotion and passion for its locale, its people and their history, and smitten with the very language from which it is fashioned. It is, as journeys tend to be, a little episodic. But some of its turns and destinations are wonderfully surprising. And what a ride. I wouldn't have missed it for the world. ■

Ride  
with Me,  
Mariah  
Montana  
IVAN DOIG

A NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF ENGLISH CREEK  
AND DANCING AT THE RASCAL FAIR



## Meet Ivan Doig tomorrow on the Ave.

Meet this bestselling Northwest author at a book signing from 3 to 4:30 PM Friday, October 5, at our Main Store on the Ave.

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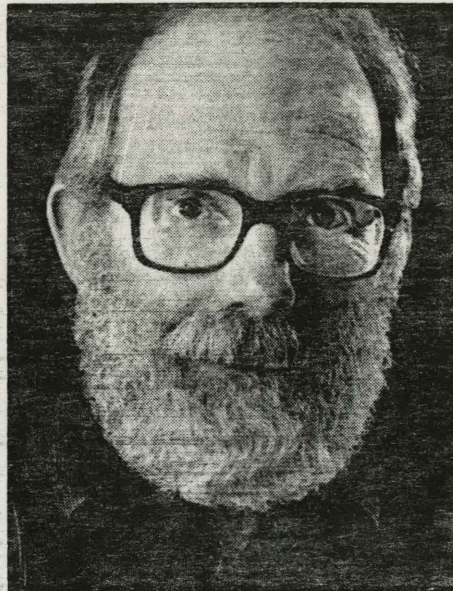
FICTION / Victoria Jenkins

# Ridin' in the 'bago with Jick

**Ride with Me, Mariah Montana**  
by Ivan Doig  
(Atheneum, \$18.95)

IT'S 1989, MONTANA'S CENTENNIAL SUMMER, and Jick McCaskill, familiar in a younger incarnation to readers of Ivan Doig's *English Creek*, is on the cusp of senior citizenship. A recent widower, he's reflecting on his past and trying to make peace with his loss and muster heart for whatever future he's got left. Jick reluctantly allows his photographer daughter, Mariah, to persuade him to accompany her and her former husband, Riley Wright, a newspaper columnist, on a monthlong odyssey criss-crossing the state in a Winnebago to collect material for a series of centennial articles. The journey is a contrivance designed to bring the reader and the characters into contact with the paradoxes of Montana's past and present, and to function as a springboard for Jick's "memory storms," as he calls his reminiscences. As such, we get a lot of McCaskill family history, and a Charles Kuralt-like sampling of vignettes from the road as the mismatched trio makes its sojourn.

*Ride with Me, Mariah Montana*—the final volume of Doig's Montana trilogy, following *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* and *English Creek*—chronicles the McCaskill family



Doig does Kuralt all across Montana.

history from 1889, the year the territory became a state, to the present. Doig's romantic and sentimental affection for Montana is tempered with a wry acceptance of change: memories of haying with horse-drawn equipment play counterpoint to the present, where Jick "nukes" his dinner in the microwave oven in the Winnebago "camped" in an RV park. Riley jogs at dawn in a Lycra suit while Jick mourns that "maybe people from now on are going to exist on bean sprouts and wear polyester all over themselves, and lamb and wool belong behind glass in a museum. Maybe what I have known how to do in life, which is ranching, simply does not register any more."

Jick's narrative is occasionally interrupted by snatches of Riley's journalism, pieces the reader infers to be Doig's own voice. On the subject of Jick's Centennial Day speech, Riley writes, "His words climbed as he threw his head back to outspoke a gust. . . . Up through the black canyons of space, the sparks we utter; motes of word-fire that we glimpse leaving on their constellation flight, and call history."

The three principals are sometimes hard company to keep; they bicker incessantly in a sideshow of put-downs and wisecracks, pretending to disown vulnerability and tender feelings for each other—sentiments barely discernible behind their wordplay. Riley and Mariah have declared an uneasy truce as an expedient to a choice assignment, but as the miles roll by they argue themselves back into love. Jick worries about the wisdom of this re-alliance, and broods about the uncertain future of his ranch. The Winnebago is already crammed with conflict when Leona, Riley's widowed mother, joins the party and puts a new spin on Jick's reflections.

Still, Doig is so affectionate and good-natured, so patently fond of his characters, and is having such a field day with the language—turning nouns and adjectives into verbs (to travel in a motor home is to "bago"; writing for a newspaper is "piecing")—that the reader succumbs and goes along for the ride. The essential optimism that the book is imbued with leaves us hopeful that Jick, and Montana, will successfully adjust to the exigencies of change and loss. ■

Victoria Jenkins is a Seattle writer and screenwriter. Her book *Relative Distances* was published in August by Peregrine Smith.

TRAVEL / Jean Lenihan

# Prisoners of politesse

**The Early Arrival of Dreams: A Year in China**  
by Rosemary Mahoney  
Fawcett Columbine, \$18.95

SINCE CHINA "OPENED ITS DOORS to the West" in 1979, we've had a lot catch up on. It's natural, then, that the kind of travel writing that's come out of China in the past decade has been a blending of history writing and personal reflection, with as much sociological, anthropological, and ethnological data as could be squeezed between the covers. But after the mass arrests of student demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in June 1989, publishers were suddenly clamoring to bring us faces and stories.

*The Early Arrival of Dreams*, Rosemary Mahoney's account of her year as an English-language teacher at Hangzhou University in 1987-1988, is being advertised as "China—the year before death," but it's neither an I-saw-it-coming flashback nor a sentimental portrait of China's student population.

*Early Arrival* is travel writing in the tradition of the novel. Mahoney, an award-winning short-story writer, shapes her experience into the tale of one hard year in Hangzhou, with short side trips to Shanghai and Tokyo. As difficult as things g

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DeWayne Williams  
**MONTANA TRIBUTE**

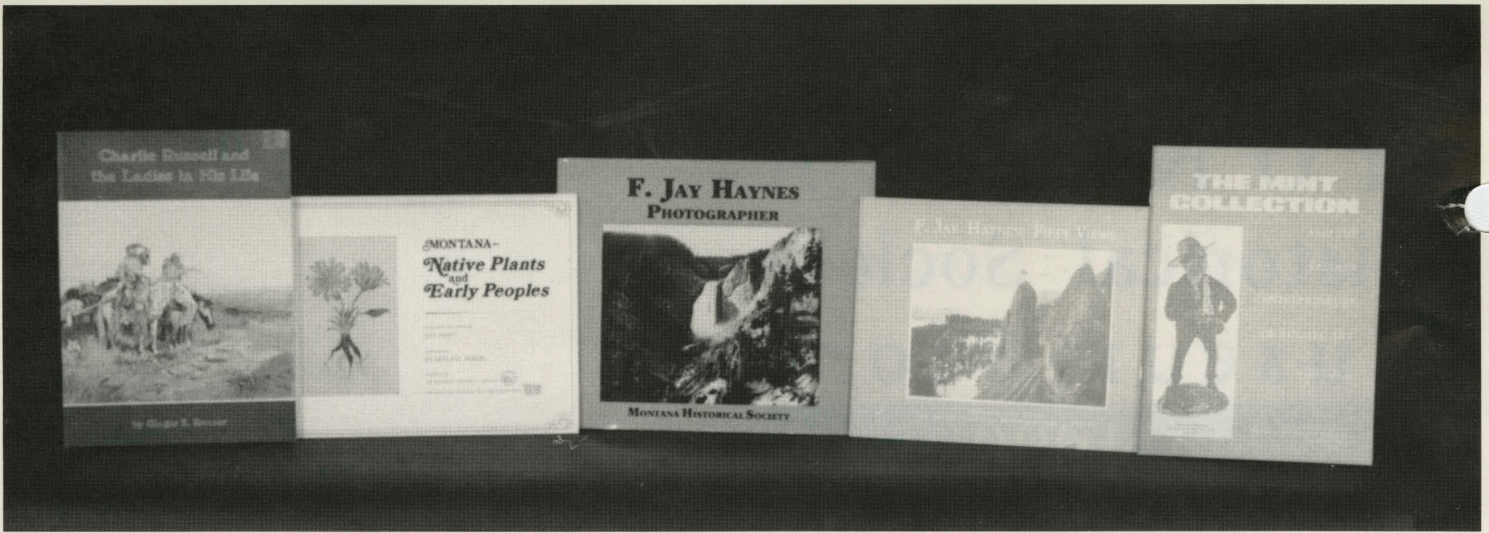


Quotations by A.B. Guthrie Jr.



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To order Montana Tribute, a photographic celebration of the state's centennial, see page four.



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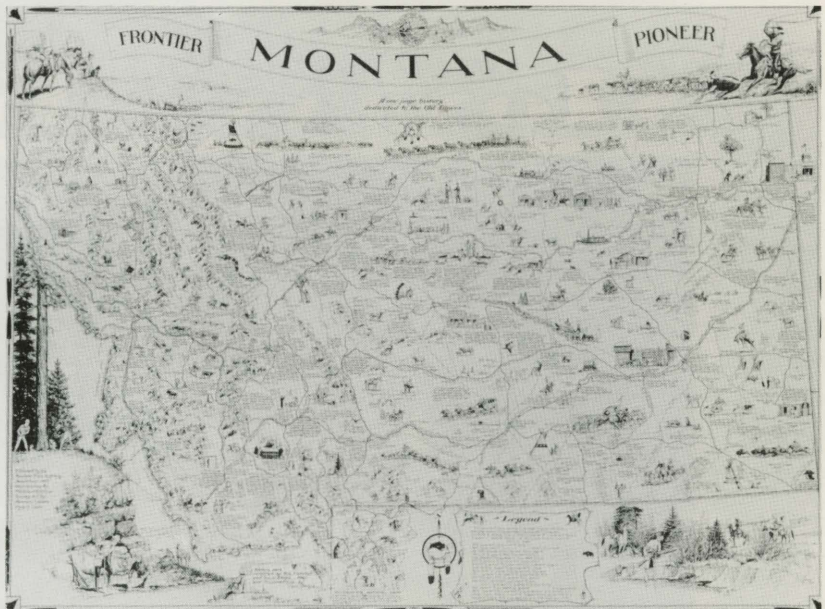
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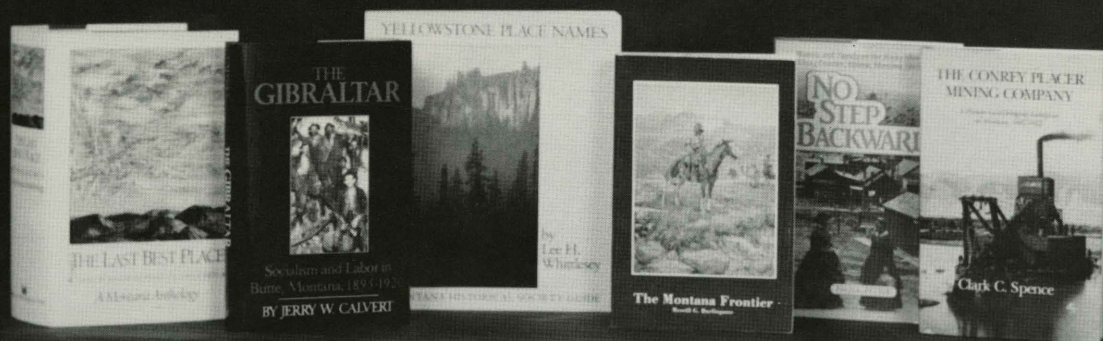
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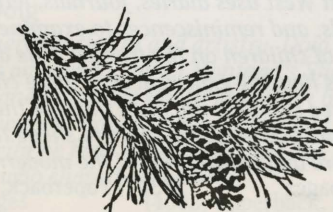
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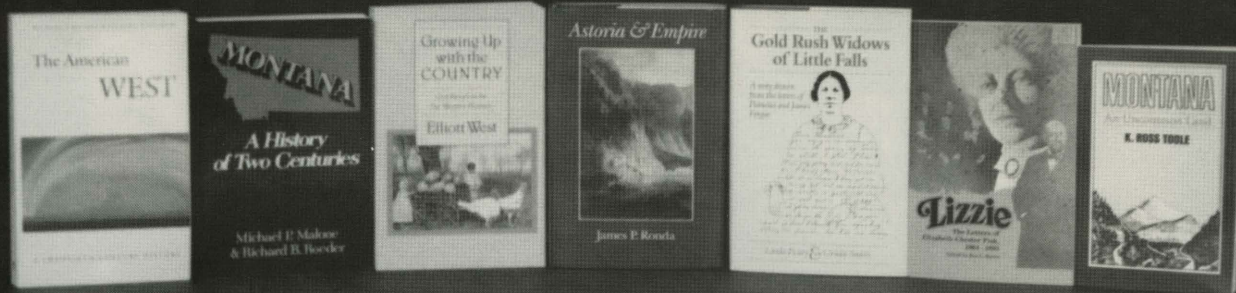
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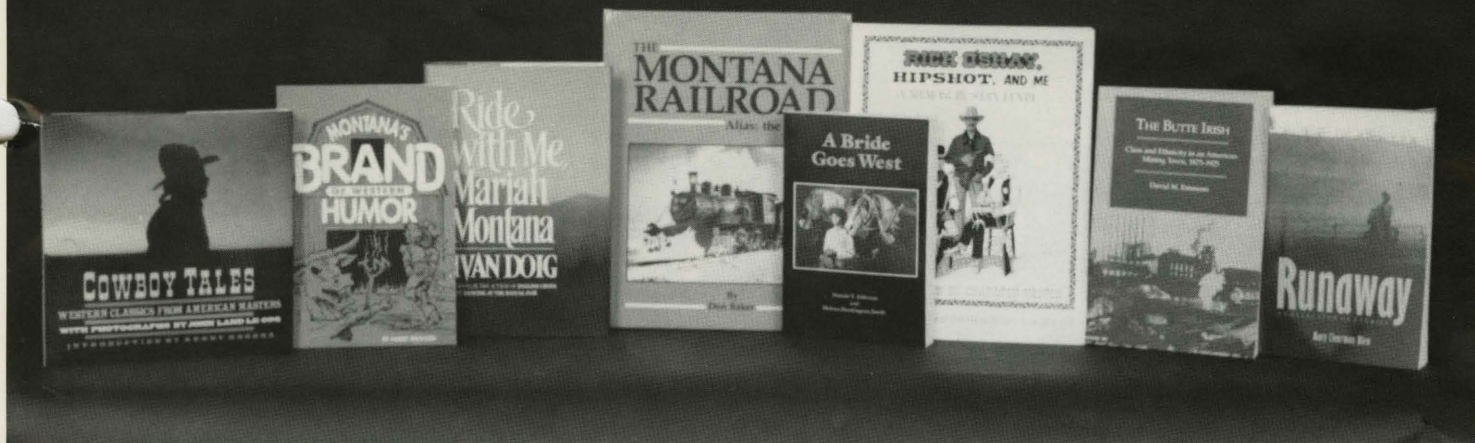
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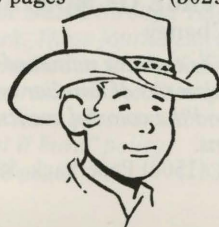
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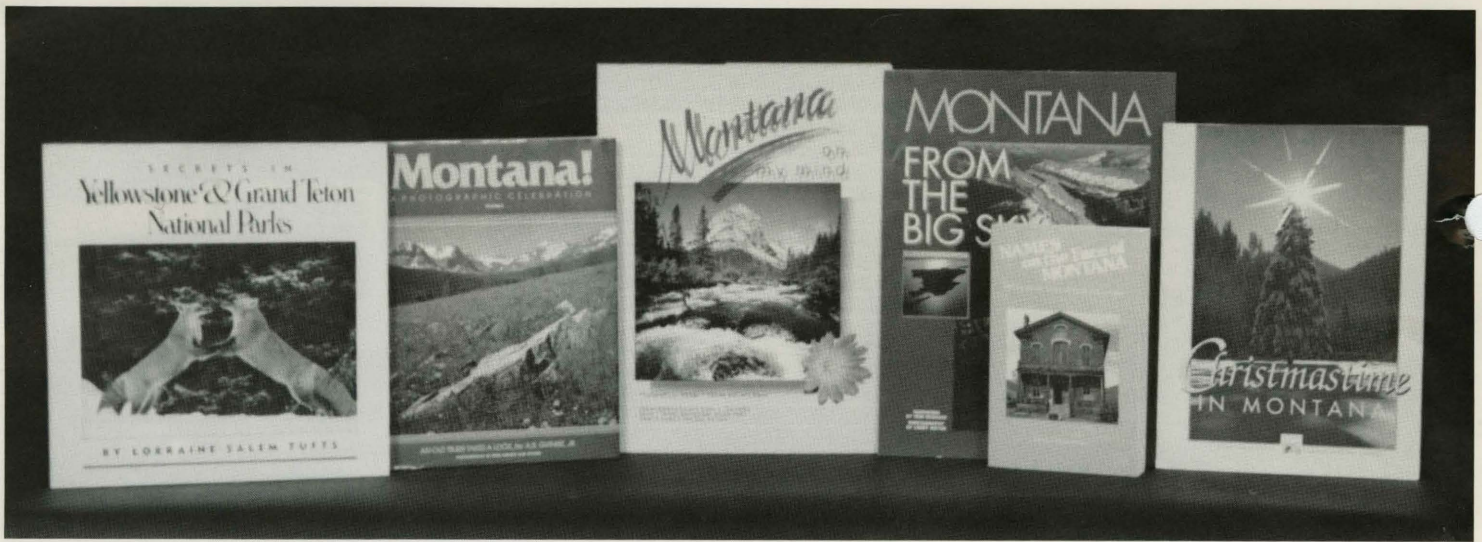
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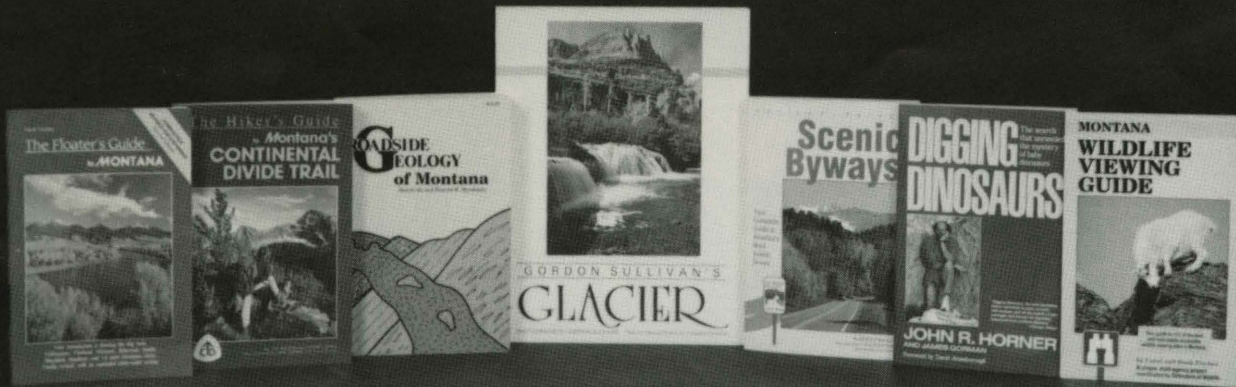
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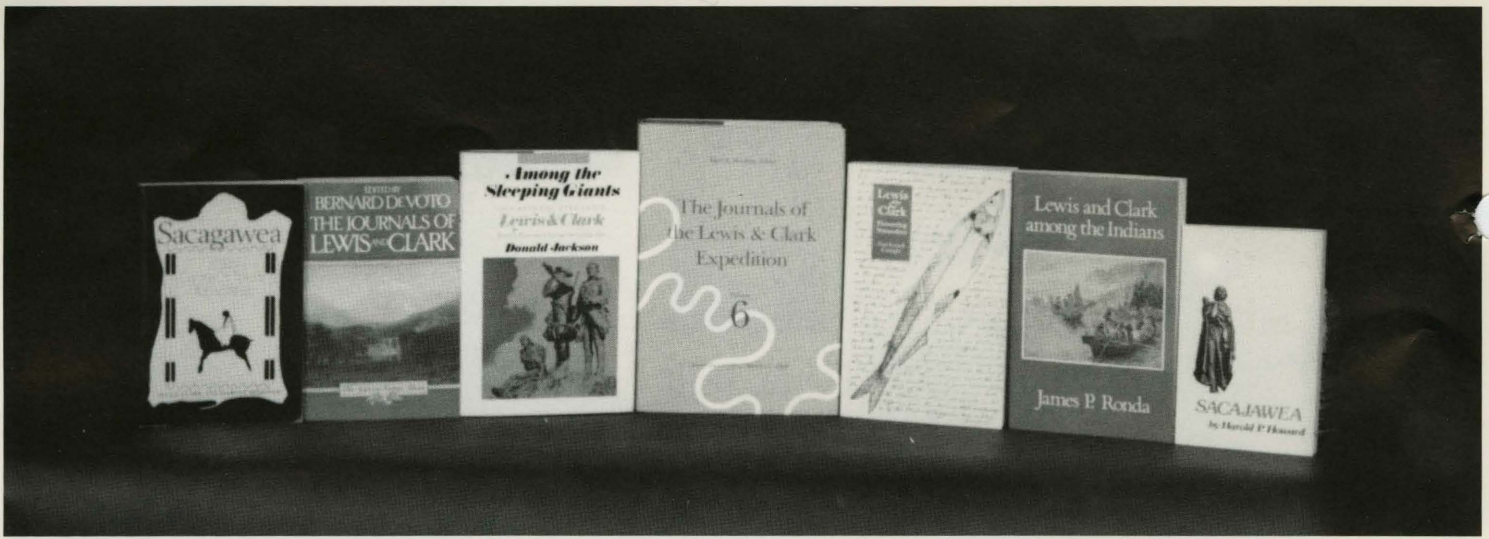
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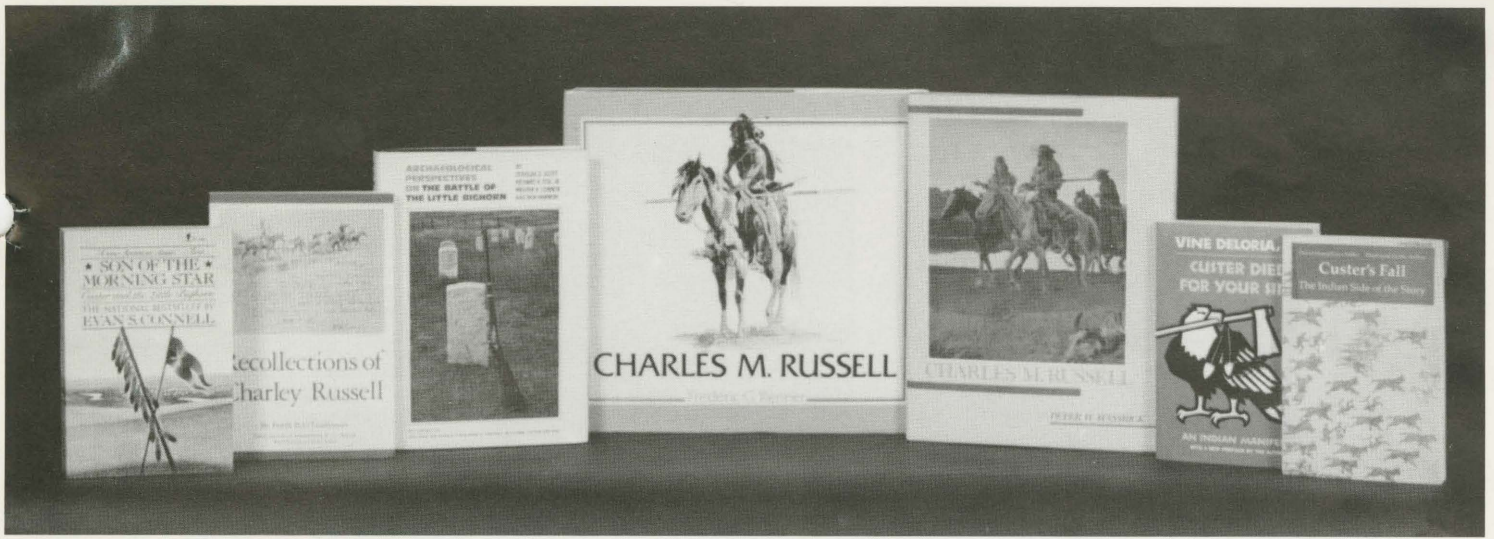
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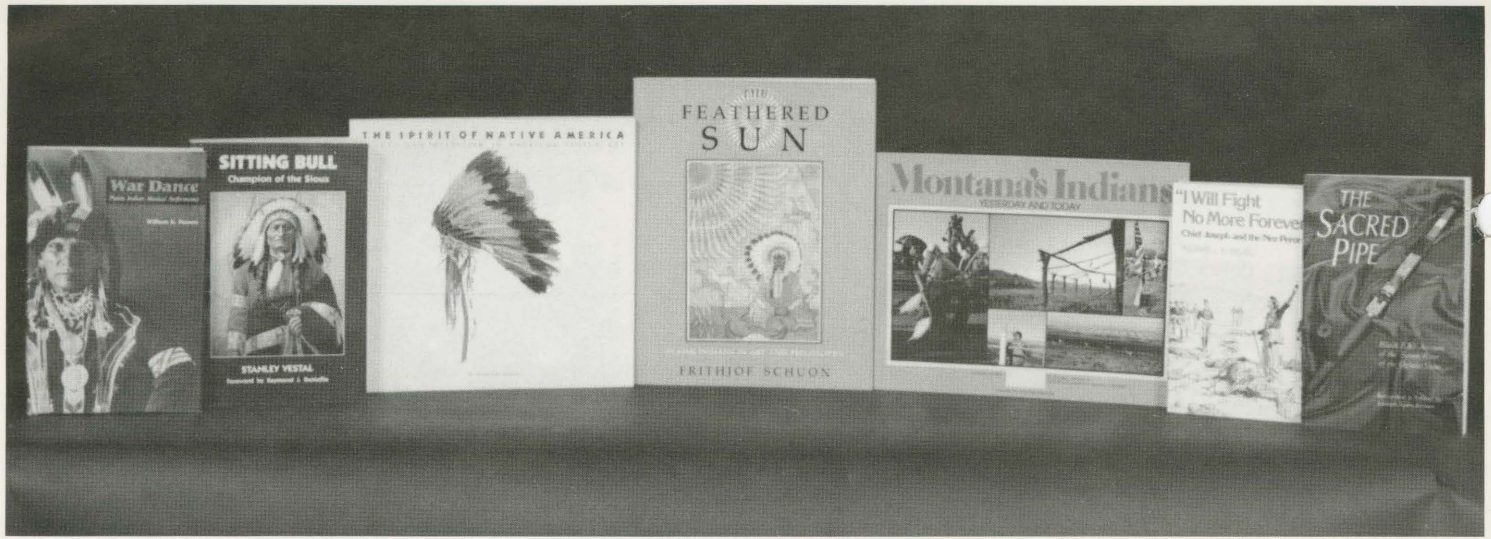
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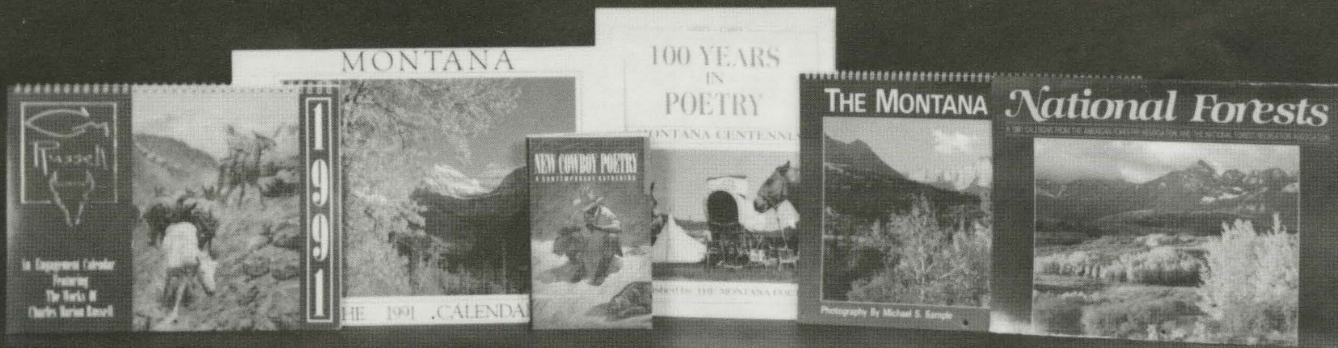
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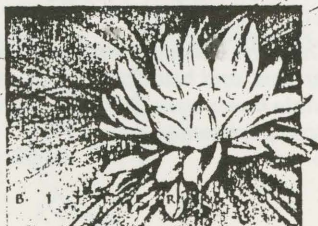
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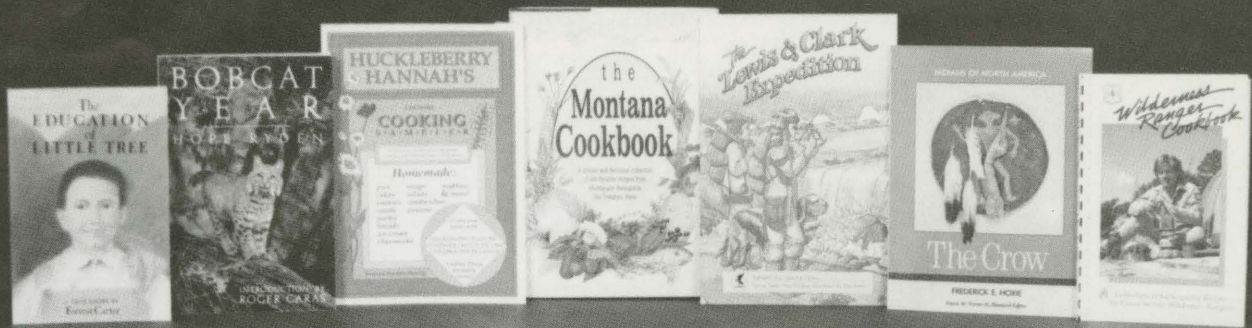
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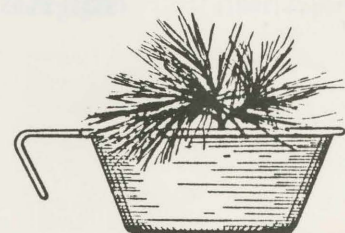
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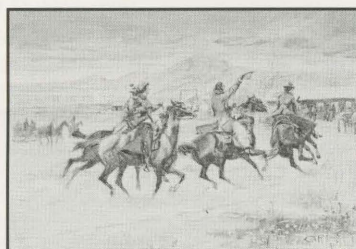
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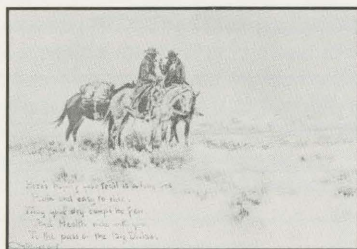
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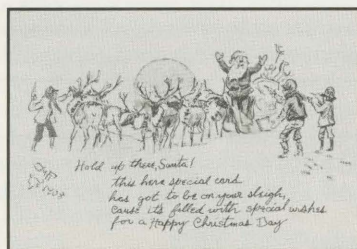
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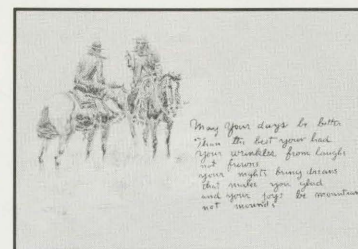
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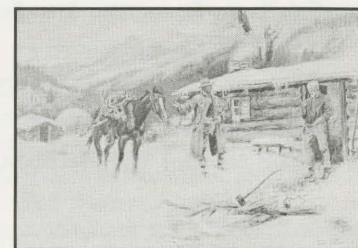
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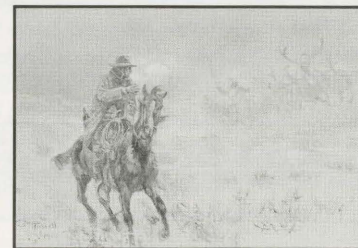
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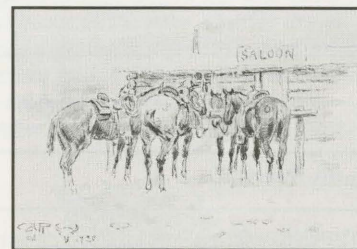
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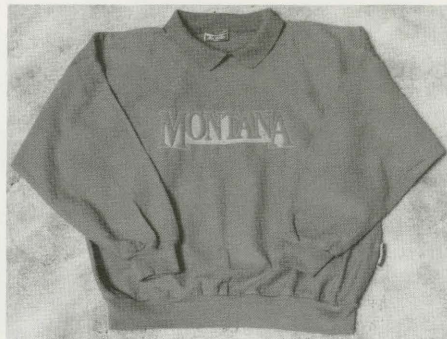
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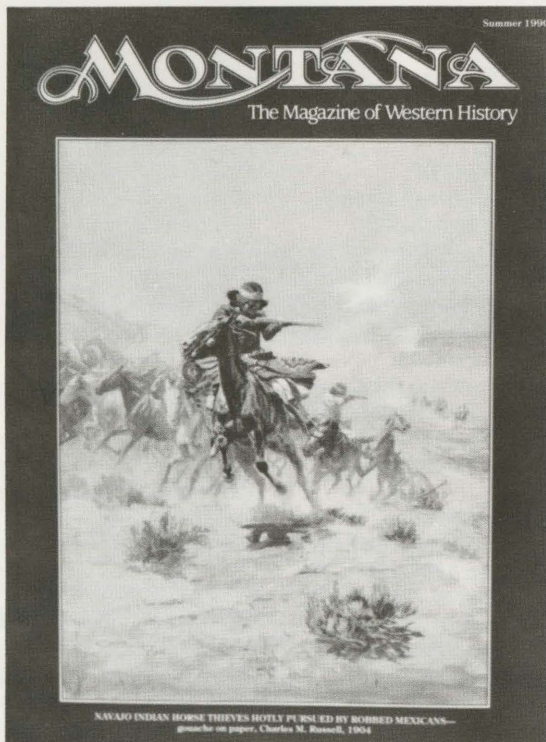
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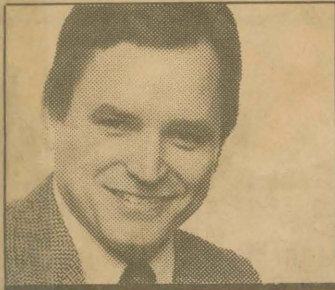
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**T**ime is a commodity in Ivan Doig's Montana, almost as tangible as a flock of sheep or a fresh-cut crop of hay.

Through his novels "English Creek" and "Dancing at the Rascal Fair," and now "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" (Atheneum, \$18.95), the final volume in his trilogy about the state's Two Medicine country, time loops gracefully, almost casually. Yet it also has the steady, inexorable flow of history, as Doig peels away layer after layer of the lives that pass through Montana from the late 19th century through the state's centennial celebrations last year.

Memory is the force that energizes this commodity, time: "Memories are stories our lives tell us," Jick McCaskill declares near the end of the new novel, after he has taken a long look at his own 65 years. His final speech in the wintry dawn of Montana's 100th birthday, at a stirring flag-raising ceremony with family and friends in the town of Gros Ventre, provides a moving and eloquent coda to a remarkable trio of novels.

Like "English Creek," "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana" is filtered through Jick's cantankerous personality. But while his memories in the earlier novel were corralled into the wide-eyed, golly-gee world view of a naive 14-year-old, "Ride With Me" gives full rein to an adult sensibility that manages to be both curmudgeonly and humane, that is guided by the wisdom and self-deprecating humor that come only with age.

**Doig has seen** to it that memory and history ride together, 1989-style, in this new novel. It takes the form of a picaresque ramble around Montana after Jick reluctantly agrees to use his Winnebago RV to ferry his older daughter and her former husband — Mariah is a photographer and Riley a columnist for the same Missoula newspaper



Harper & Row

## MONTANA AND MEMORY

Finale of Doig's trilogy takes us back to Two Medicine country



**Ivan Doig has seen to it that memory and history ride together.**

he is emotionally. His sheep ranch along Noon Creek, under the shadow of the

on that land."

The independent Mariah, who always "seemed to be the only author of herself," wheedles Jick into joining their four-month journey, and although he professes to loath his former son-in-law, the trio is soon plying the interstates and back roads in search of stories and photos that burrow beneath the skin of centennial hoopla. Complementary as journalists in a way they never were as spouses, Mariah and Riley are soon producing compelling features, angering Montana chauvinists and, to Jick's consternation, warming up to each other again.

**This is no** mere Montana travelogue, and unlike "English Creek," whose lively prose was saddled with a glacial narrative pace, "Ride With Me" accelerates to a comfortable rhythm and seems to move along on cruise control. With Jick at the wheel, the "Bago" transports them from a buffalo preserve to the mine-cratered devastation of Butte, from the ghost of Shelby's boxing-match fame to the ghosts of Jick's own ancestors — the "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" generation — at the historical society in Helena.

They steer through Montana's romanticized past and the rocky economics of its present, always guided by Jick's crusty humor and Doig's deft touch with the landscape: "We might as well have been a carload of Swiss trying to sightsee Mongolia," says Jick, when they reach southeastern Montana, a bleak nowhere-land new to them all. "Grassland with

sage low and thin on it ran to all the horizons... a surprising number of attempts had been made to scratch some farming into this barebone plain, but what grew here mostly was distance."

**But this is** a journey through memory as much as landscape, and Doig pulls off a daring but gloriously successful gamble. Midway through, the trio grows to four with the addition of a woman from Jick's past who is as unexpected as she is welcome. She puts time in perspective for him, however, allowing Jick to finally admit that "a person tends to think that the past has happened only to himself."

Much earlier on, Mariah explains her photographic ambitions as the hope that in

## FICTION

# Montana frontiers fall in novels of past and present

St Paul's Pioneer Press 11/18/90

MARY ANN GROSSMANN STAFF WRITER

**C**ontemporary Montana, rich in scenery but troubled by economic woes and racism, is the setting for highly praised new novels by award-winning authors who visited the Twin Cities recently.

In "The Indian Lawyer," American Indian author James Welch explores the ways a reservation-born lawyer responds to living as a success in the white world and the loyalty that draws him back to the tribe.

Ivan Doig gives his readers a state that is losing its heritage through urbanization in his novel, "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana."

"I miss the wonderful landscape of Montana, the arc of the big sky. But I don't miss the economic climate," says 51-year-old Doig, who lives in Seattle. "The entire Rockies are the poorest region in the United States today."

In "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," the last of a trilogy, 65-year-old Jick McCaskill reluctantly agrees to drive his daughter Mariah (a photographer) and her former husband (a columnist) around Montana in a recreational vehicle as the journalists cover the state's centennial for a newspaper. From the "radical" college town of Missoula to the capital of Helena, across the Chief Joseph battlefield and over to Ekalaka on the eastern border, the unlikely threesome explores the state, meeting an assortment of humans and one mighty mean buffalo. Underlying the often-funny story is Jick's realization that his family ranch probably will be sold to non-ranchers.

"Jick sees a Montana that is losing a lot of its old underpinnings on the land. He says we have to figure out how to turn loss into change," says Doig, a native Montanan who started working on ranches as a teen-ager.

"Some of this loss is due to severe weather and some to changes in the economy. Jick sees the kind of standardization and 'chain malling' that has been coursing through America. Certainly, a lot of the old way of life is going, especially life on the really small spreads on which a couple or a small family ran about 100 head of cattle. Those are boutique ranches now and they have to have inherited money behind them."

■ "RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA"

■ By Ivan Doig

■ Atheneum

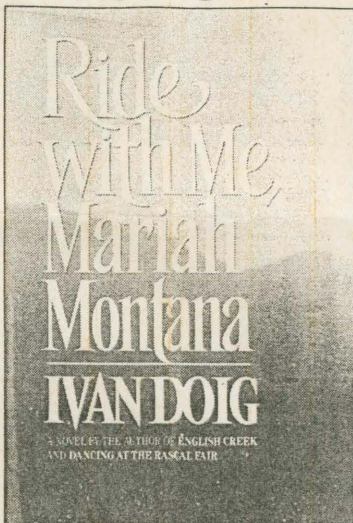
■ \$18.95

■ "THE INDIAN LAWYER"

■ By James Welch

■ Norton

■ \$19.95



In "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," Ivan Doig examines the fading life and values of old Montana and engages in a little myth bashing along the way.



Yet Doig, who is praised for the beauty of his language, says he tried "not to have moonie nostalgia creep in" because not everything is worse than it used to be.

One myth he does lay to rest, via a hilarious mock cattle drive, is the widespread myth of Montana as historically populated by "Lonesome Dove"-style cowboys driving cattle north.

"I've always tried to write as though (Western history) is a great deal more complicated than slapping a hat on your head and strapping on a gun," he says. "More cattle came to Montana in boxcars on Jim Hill's railroad than from Texas."

Now that his trilogy is complete, Doig wants to write about his parents' move from Arizona back to Montana after World War II.

"I found a little cache of letters my mother wrote to my uncle during the last six months of World War II," he says. "My

mother was German, born in Wisconsin, but her family moved to Montana when she was a baby. Why did she and my father leave Arizona, where they didn't have diddly, and return to Montana where they had even less? Part of the book will be trying to figure out what was the pull back to Montana."

James Welch, who's Blackfeet and Gros Ventre, has different memories of growing up in Montana. Going to the movies in Browning, for instance, with other American Indian kids.

"We'd cheer the cavalry when it came around the mesa. At that time, even Indian people felt almost compelled to root against themselves," he recalls.

In "The Indian Lawyer," the 49-year-old Welch gives his readers a protagonist named Sylvester Yellow Calf, who has left the Blackfeet reservation to become an all-star basketball player and outstanding law school graduate. He's assimilated into white American life until, as a member of the state parole board, he denies release to a criminal. When Yellow Calf is the focus of a blackmail scheme planned from jail, and becomes emotionally entangled with the prisoner's wife, he finds he must confront his native legacy.

Welch, who lives in Missoula, served on the Montana parole board for 10 years and learned hard lessons about why American Indians, who make up about 12 percent of the state's population, are 22 percent of the prison population.

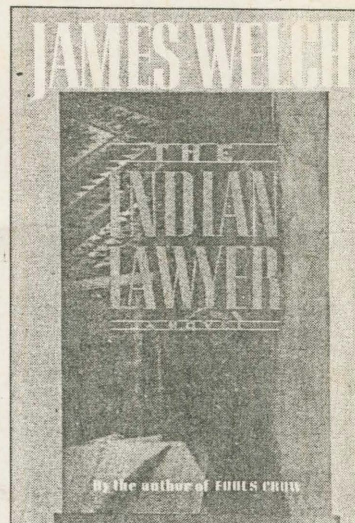
"Indians often can't afford counsel, and they're easier to railroad into cutting a plea bargain that will put them in prison," he says.

Like Yellow Calf and many other American Indians his age, Welch is the first generation in his family to go to college. He graduated from the University of Montana, where his teacher and mentor was poet Richard Hugo, and he's written three previous novels, including "Fools Crow," which won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction and an American Book award.

"That book got national attention because it was the first purely historical novel written by an Indian person," Welch says. "Its success was due to the fact that it told the story from the point of view of the Indian people and makes white people the invaders."

Although Welch is pleased that the dominant culture is finding values in the traditional American Indian belief system, he agrees with other American Indian authors such as Gerald Vizenor and Thomas King that American Indians are periodically re-romanticized.

"In the early '70s, there was a great



In "The Indian Lawyer," James Welch explores the balancing act between living as a success in the white world and the demands of loyalty to one's tribe.



deal of interest in Indian culture, but in the early to mid-'80s that fell away. I think people got tired of hearing about Indians and their problems," he says.

"People are coming back to an appreciation of the native belief system. But most people don't think of the reality of the Indian experience, except in broad terms of alcohol and drugs as being a problem. That's why it's important we have Indians writing drama, literature and poetry. By doing that, you open the way to younger writers who can learn to adopt this European way of writing to tell the story of Indian people as truly as they possible can, to show we can break out of stereotypes. All Indians are individuals, not these exotic creatures on reservations that government takes care of as though they were on a game preserve. We're more interested all the time in controlling our destiny."

# Big-Sky Country Ride

By Jon Remmerde

**J**OHAN ANGUS McCASKILL (Jick), his daughter, Mariah (Mariah Montana) and her ex-husband, Riley Wright, explore Montana in Jick's Winnebago, looking for stories to illustrate Montana's centennial, 1989, for *The Missoula Montanian* newspaper. Riley writes the stories. Camera-toting Mariah shoots them. Jick is chauffeur, chaperone, and narrator of the book, the third in a trilogy.

Jick is a Montana rancher trying to integrate his wife's recent death into the rest of his life. He is almost 65, and his past presents itself to him again and again, and he fights it. He hasn't come to terms with the people and events that led to his brother's death in World War II. Jick was wounded and immediately out of the war, and he hasn't understood how that experience fits into the totality of his life.

It is time to understand any pattern that knits together his life, because it's time to make decisions. Should he sell the ranch to the modern, full-speed-ahead enterprise that accumulates ranches and exploits their financial capability to bare, blowing-in-the-wind soil? He hates what they're doing, but they are offering him a lot of money. He doesn't want to run the ranch anymore, and neither does any family member to whom he might give it.

We see parts of Montana in images so well crafted that we might be looking at Mariah's photos, the countryside, the people, towns, mines, places, the very air of it, with some 1989 smog in the big sky.

Montana's assessment — how were the state's first 100 years, where is there to go in the next 100 years? — backdrops Jick's story the way the Montana scenery backdrops the highways they travel and the places they stop.

We travel with the Winnebagos to the edge of the Bearpaw Mountains, along Snake Creek, where, in 1877, the United States Army ended the attempt of the Nez Perce Indians to escape into Canada. In this story about the Chief Joseph battleground, Riley describes a rifle pit dug by one of the Nez Perce as "a pock in the earth." He goes on, "Combat pits nowadays are greatly deeper in the prairie south of the Bearpaws... Missile silos, we let the Department of Defense ... call these ... as if what they store is lifegiving. ... Enough gopherholed megatonnage to incinerate people by the million..."

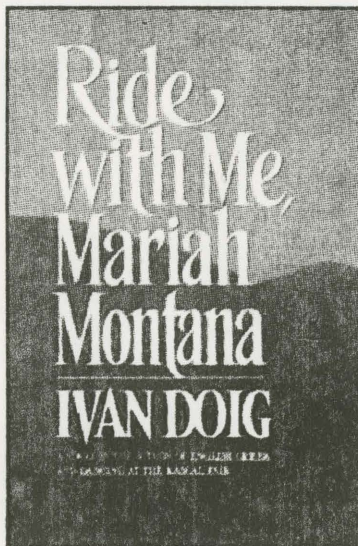
When Jick and the Baloney Express Riders talk to the young man in need at a highway rest

area, Jick thinks, "I now was furious. When I was not much younger than him, other pickups were on the road, passing through the Two Medicine Country from the droughted-out farms of the High Line with the bitter farewell GOODBYE OLD DRY painted across the boxboards... Two rages balanced in me; that here 50 years later there was still no goodbye to that grief of being driven from the land..."

After one of two heart-stopping encounters between grizzly bears and humans, Riley writes, "... two tribes in what is no longer enough space for two." Jick wonders, "But I could not get over wondering how contagious the past is."

Ivan Doig doesn't push these themes too hard. They are just there, as they are in the modern

## BOOKS



### RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA

By Ivan Doig  
New York: Atheneum  
324 pp., \$18.95

world, background to a story of people who lead essentially joyfullives and come to acceptable terms with themselves, each other, their past, the environment.

This is a very readable book. The only problem is the same problem Tonsil Vapor encounters when he tries to interview Good Help Hebner for a centennial story for television. It's an interesting story the man has to tell, but his language is such that you can't put it on the airwaves.

Many Montanians do talk the way Doig quotes them, so it may be legitimate characterization, but I haven't been comfortable with saying yes when my daughters ask if they can read the book. I think I'll decide they know people talk like that; they've seen and heard the words; it's a good and pertinent enough story, so start it and see how it goes.

■ Jon Remmerde is a freelance writer who lives near Bailey, Colo.

## Calendar begins year with Johnson book signing

**T**hrowing out from the pre-holiday doldrums — and blizzard — Seattle's literary calendar warms up



**Naipaul**

who recently won the National Book Award for his novel, "Middle Passage." He will autograph copies on Saturday.

Two other big programs come courtesy of Seattle Arts & Lectures: Amy Tan, whose first novel was "The Joy Luck Club," will discuss her development as a writer on Jan. 9, and the great novelist and essayist V.S. Naipaul will discuss his new book about India on Jan. 29. Most tickets are gone for both events, but some may be available at the door.

Here's a selected list of January's book-and-author events:

■ **Jan. 2:** Translator David Jenkins reads from his book of 12th-century Japanese poetry, "The Dance of the Dust on the Rafters," 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (\$3.50).

■ **Jan. 2:** Society of Children's Book Writers: Ted and Gloria Rand, 6:30 p.m., Demaray Hall, Seattle Pacific University (822-9710).

■ **Jan. 3:** National Writers Club: attorney Peter Camp discuss legal-literary issues, 7:30, University Christian Church, 4731 15th Ave. N.E. (\$3 for nonmembers; 783-3401).

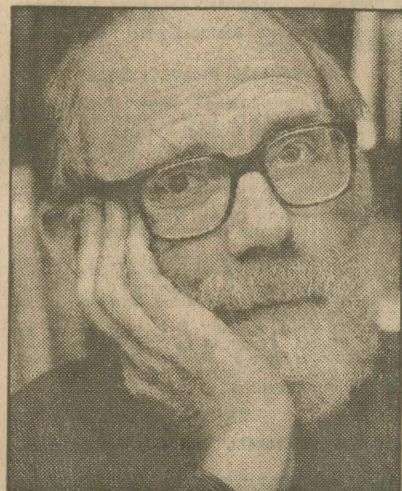
■ **Jan. 5:** Seattle writer Charles Johnson autographs his National Book Award-winning novel, "Middle Passage," 12:30 p.m., Brentano's, Westlake Center.

■ **Jan. 6, 13, 20, 27:** Red Sky Poetry Theatre: Jan. 6, open mike; Jan. 13, storyteller Robert Gordon; Jan. 20, open mike; Jan. 27, Paul Hunter; all at 7 p.m., Ditto, 2303 Fifth Ave.

■ **Jan. 8:** Eastside Writers: Steve Johannesen discusses freelancing, 7:30 p.m., Kirkland Congregational Church, 106 Fifth Ave., Kirkland (free; 746-9084)

■ **Jan. 8, 15, 17, 22, 28:** Linda Carlson discusses her book, "How to Find a Good Job in Seattle" at Seattle and King County library branches: Jan. 8, 7:30 p.m., Fairwood/Renton; Jan. 15, 7:30 p.m., Kent; Jan. 17, noon, Downtown; Jan. 22, 7 p.m. University; Jan. 28, 7:30 p.m., Columbia (all free).

again next month with a wide range of events, including a book signing by local author Charles Johnson,



**Ivan Doig**  
"Ride With Me, Mariah Montana"



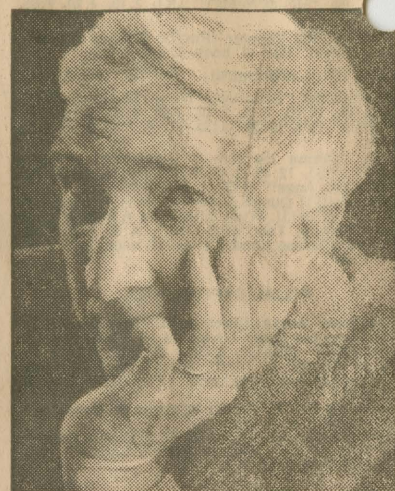
**Charles Johnson**  
"Middle Passage"



**Joyce Carol Oates**  
"Because It Is Bitter . . ."



**Timothy Egan**  
"The Good Rain"



**John Updike**  
"Rabbit at Rest"

# Books that mark 1990

A LOOK BACK AT



## SEATTLE AUTHORS RANK AMONG THE MEMORABLE

Seattle seemed to reign as the nation's most livable city throughout 1990, as survey after survey listed it at or near the top of choice places to live. If there is any truth

to that — and I believe there is — then it is partly due to the fact that we are a city of dedicated readers and talented writers.

The readership aspect is well-known: Our high ranking in terms of book sales, number of bookstores and library usage has been reported often and repeated endlessly, sometimes inaccurately. A few months ago in these pages, I made the case that Seattle ranks as the fifth best book city in the nation, based on statistics from the Department of Commerce.

But what shouldn't be overlooked is that 1990 amply demonstrated that Seattle also is home to a number of our nation's best authors.



**DONN FRY**  
Times book editor



"Age of Iron" by J.M. Coetzee is an exploration of apartheid as seen through the eyes of an elderly white woman.

ment policies by Pantheon's parent Random House, and many authors and readers interpreted the action — correctly, it seems

Many fine books from 1990 bear a second look. Instead of a traditional "best

Malan's pop-culture references have a through-the-looking-glass quality, as he conjures Baby Boom nostalgia (Motown tunes, psychedelia) and places it in a startling political context.

■ **Novels by South Africa's** two finest writers put a compelling fictional spin on many of the issues touched on by Rian Malan in "My Traitor's Heart." "Age of Iron" (Random House) is J.M. Coetzee's exploration of a national cancer — apartheid — as seen through the eyes of an elderly white woman who herself is dying of cancer. "Language and its role in politics have long fascinated Coetzee," said Times reviewer Sandra Chait, "and in 'Age of Iron' language itself almost becomes a character; the words swirl with such sure rhythmic energy that the novel seems like a dance, a symphony, a poem." In "My Son's Story" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), Nadine Gordimer sees the nation's contradictions through the eyes of a 13-year-old "colored" boy — a child of mixed race — whose political-activist father has an affair with a white woman who works for a human-rights organization. Said reviewer Michael Upchurch: "(Gordimer) creates divided personalities that live on the page, and in the process, she tellingly evokes a country 'where conflict breaks up all consistency of character.'"

■ **"Rabbit at Rest"** (Knopf) brings a close John Updike's four-novel series that began with "Rabbit, Run" in 1960 and which provides our best literary portrait of late 20th-century America. Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, contemplating his own mortality in his Florida condo, is "an inexcusable jerk," wrote Richard Wakefield in his review in The Times, "yet these four novels link seamlessly, unforgettably."

■ **"Van Gogh: His Life and His Art"** (Crown), by David Sweetman, was a British art historian's fine biography of the great

noon, Downtown; Jan. 22, 7 p.m., University; Jan. 28, 7:30 p.m., Columbia (all free).

■ **Jan. 9:** Seattle mystery writer K.K. Beck reads from work in progress, 7 p.m., Seattle Mystery Bookshop, 117 Cherry St. (363-2541).

■ **Jan. 9:** Seattle Arts & Lectures: Novelist Amy Tan, author of "The Joy Luck Club," speaks about "Finding a Voice," 7:30 p.m., First United Methodist Church, Fifth Ave. and Marion St. (\$12.50, \$15; 623-8655).

■ **Jan. 14:** Seattle mountaineer/writer Greg Child reads and shows slides from his book, "Thin Air: Encounters in the Himalayas," 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 15:** Newspaper humorist Dave Barry, 8 p.m., Shoreline Community College gymnasium, 16101 Greenwood Ave. N. (\$8; 546-4606).

■ **Jan. 15:** Psychologist/author Robert Moore reads from "King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine," 7:30, Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 16:** Novelist Michael Cunningham reads from "At Home at the End of the World," 5 p.m., and social historian Christopher Lasch discusses his new book, "The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics," 7:30 p.m., both at Elliott Bay Books (both free).

■ **Jan. 17:** Walter Kirn reads from his story collection, "My Hard Bargain," 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 22:** Novelist Barbara Quick reads from "Northern Edge," 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 23:** Seattle's Martha Avery discusses her translation of "Getting Used to Dying," by Chinese novelist Zhang Xianliang, 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 24:** Bellingham writer Laura Kalpakian reads from "The Dark Continent and Other Stories," 7:30, Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 25:** Photographer Adam Kufeld shows slides and discusses his book, "El Salvador," 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (\$5).

■ **Jan. 25:** Poets Paula Jones-Gardiner and Gloria Yamato read, 7:30, North Seattle Community College dining room (\$3; pre-registration, 527-3705).

■ **Jan. 26:** Poets Gary Curtis, Ken Smith and David Shaddock read, 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (\$4).

■ **Jan. 28:** J. California Cooper reads from her first novel, "Family," 7:30 p.m., Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 29:** Seattle Arts & Lectures: Novelist/essayist V.S. Naipaul discusses his new book, "India: A Million Mutinies Now," 7:30 p.m., First United Methodist Church, 811 Fifth Ave. (\$10; 623-8655).

■ **Jan. 30:** Port Townsend poet and fiction writer Bill Ransom reads from his novel, "Jaguar," 7:30, Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 31:** Natalie Kusz reads from her Alaska memoir, "Road Song," 7:30, Elliott Bay Books (free).

■ **Jan. 31:** W.R. "Bill" Wilkins reads from "The Gandy Dancer's Son," 7:30 p.m., Open Books, 1716 N. 45th St. (free).

1990 amply demonstrated that Seattle also is home to a number of our nation's best authors.

That thought sank in forcefully when I was considering how to sum up the past year in books. I realized that three of the best books I read were written by Seattle authors — and they were good by any critical yardstick, not just the standard of hometown chauvinism.



"Middle Passage" Fiction award

Consider this trio: "Middle Passage," by Charles Johnson; "The Good Rain," by Timothy Egan; and "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," by Ivan Doig.

Just last month, Johnson's novel won the National Book Award, a prize that ranks with the Pulitzer as the nation's top literary award — and "Middle Passage" surely will be a contender for the Pulitzer, too, when it is announced in the spring.

Egan's lyrical work of nonfiction, subtitled "Across Time and Terrain in the Pacific Northwest," is just about the best portrait I can imagine of our corner of the country, while Doig's novel was a big-hearted finale to a trilogy that beautifully captured a century of life in Montana.

But 1990 also saw a number of other milestones: At the beginning of the year, "Vineland" marked the reappearance of Thomas Pynchon's byline on a novel after 17 years, since the monumental "Gravity's Rainbow" was published; "Vineland" disappointed most critics. And much later in the year, John Updike's "Rabbit at Rest" brought to a close one of the longest-running lives in American literature.

There was no story this year that rivaled the controversy sparked last year when the Ayatollah Khomeini leveled a death sentence on writer Salman Rushdie for allegedly defaming Islam in his novel, "The Satanic Verses." That tragedy continued to fester in 1990: although the Ayatollah died shortly after issuing the decree, his minions have said the sentence remains in effect, and Rushdie still has 'round-the-clock protection in England.

But he is trying to reconstruct his life. Rushdie was interviewed recently on "60 Minutes" and later showed up unannounced at three London bookstores to autograph copies of his new novel, "Haron and the Sea of Stories." With Muslim officials, Rushdie reportedly has begun a dialogue aimed at resolving the dispute, and just last week he announced he would not authorize a paperback edition of "The Satanic Verses" — adding that his views don't coincide with those of his characters.

**There were two** controversies this year that raised hackles largely within the New York-based publishing industry, but both issues have significance for the reading public as well.

In February, the forced resignation of André Schiffrin after 28 years as managing director of venerable Pantheon Books triggered mass resignations and protests in the streets by editors and writers. Since its founding in 1942, Pantheon had built an enviable reputation publishing works of history, social criticism and international literature with authors such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Willy Brandt, Albert Camus and Anita Brookner.

Schiffrin fell victim to new cost-contain-

ment policies by Pantheon's parent Random House, and many authors and readers interpreted the action — correctly, it seems — as emblematic of the ascendancy of accountants over book people within the major publishing houses.

**The other issue** arose late in the year, and promises to become even more divisive in 1991. That is the on-again, off-again, on-again publication of Bret Easton Ellis' novel, "American Psycho." Ellis, you may recall, is the young writer who achieved notoriety, if not literary respect, a few years ago with "Less Than Zero," a slight novel about disaffected, coke-snorting rich kids that was published while Ellis was still in college.

By all reports, he hasn't improved with age. His new novel, "American Psycho," recounts in vomitous detail the deaths and dismemberments of various women at the hands of a conspicuously consuming yuppie. Originally scheduled for publication by Simon & Schuster, it was dropped mere days before printing after the firm's chairman and his boss, the chairman of parent firm Paramount Communications, learned of the book through excerpts in *Spy* and *Time* magazines.

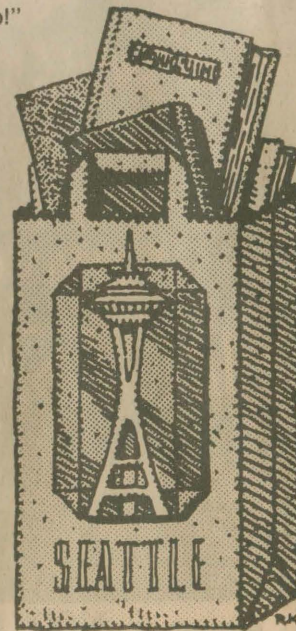
Never one to back away from controversy (or, it appears, marketing potential), Vintage Books jumped into the breach, bought Simon & Schuster's discard, and plans to release it as a paperback original. It is being "edited" now, whether rewritten or gutted is unclear.

The controversy is interesting because the various partisans frequently speak with one voice on artistic matters: Many feminists are outraged at what they see as Ellis' grisly misogyny and the publishing industry's willingness to indulge it, while the Authors Guild and others are charging Simon & Schuster with censorship for dumping the book in the first place.

## BESTSELLERS OF 1990

### Hardback nonfiction

- "Oh, The Places You'll Go!" Dr. Seuss
- "The Good Rain," Timothy Egan
- "Homecoming," John Bradshaw
- "Iron John," Robert Bly
- "Dave Barry Turns 40," Dave Barry
- "Perfect Health," Deepak Chopra
- "You Just Don't Understand," Deborah Tannen
- "The Civil War," Geoffrey C. Ward with Ric Burns and Ken Burns
- "The Frugal Gourmet On Our Immigrant Heritage," Jeff Smith
- "Men At Work," George F. Will
- "Wealth Without Risk," Charles J. Givens
- "By Way of Deception," Victor Ostrovsky
- "Megatrends 2000," John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene
- "Get to the Heart," Barbara Mandrell
- "The Way Things Work," David Macaulay



■ These were the top-selling hardback books, fiction and nonfiction, in the Pacific Northwest during 1990, as reported by Pacific Pipeline Inc., a regional book distributor based in Kent.

### Hardback fiction

- "The Plains of Passage," Jean M. Auel
- "Skinny Legs And All," Tom Robbins
- "Crow and Weasel," Barry Lopez
- "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana," Ivan Doig
- "The Burden of Proof," Scott Turow
- "The Stand," Stephen King
- "Four Past Midnight," Stephen King
- "Coyote Waits," Tony Hillerman
- "The Witching Hour," Anne Rice
- "September," Rosamunde Pilcher
- "Jurassic Park," Michael Crichton
- "Message From Nam," Danielle Steel
- "Longshot," Dick Francis
- "The Ruby Knight," David Eddings
- "Memories of Midnight," Sydney Sheldon

Many fine books from 1990 bear a second look. Instead of a traditional "best books" or "Top 10," I've compiled a list of 15 memorable books from the past year — books which either I or reviewers for *The Seattle Times* found to possess uncommon merit.

■ **"Middle Passage"** (Atheneum) won the National Book Award for fiction for Seattle writer Charles Johnson, who is a longtime professor of creative writing at the University of Washington. Johnson's brief but idea-packed novel follows freed slave Rutherford Calhoun, who stows away aboard a slave clipper bound for Africa, to pick up a cargo of "black gold."

■ **"The Good Rain"** (Knopf), by Seattle journalist Timothy Egan, inspects our area with a lens provided by the 1853 journal of intrepid traveler Theodore Winthrop. Egan, who is Northwest correspondent for *The New York Times*, has a smooth and seductive prose style, and he does a marvelous job of playing off our vibrant, unspoiled past against the troubling environmental issues that haunt our region today.

■ **"Ride With Me, Mariah Montana"** (Atheneum), by Ivan Doig, brings to a close the trilogy that began with "English Creek" and continued with "Dancing at the Rascal Fair." Through the wonderful voice of cantankerous Jick McCaskill — introduced as a youth in "English Creek," but now widowed in his 60s — Doig gives us a rollicking, Winnebago's-eye view of some memorable characters in contemporary Montana as the state faces new challenges in its second hundred years.

■ **"My Traitor's Heart"** (Atlantic Monthly Press), by Rian Malan, is an impressive memoir by a young South African journalist who has a sharp eye for the incongruities of growing up white and liberal in a society riven by apartheid.

link seamlessly, unforgettable."

■ **"Van Gogh: His Life and His Art"** (Crown), by David Sweetman, was a British art historian's fine biography of the great Dutch painter, published on the 100th anniversary of the troubled artist's suicide. Sweetman, said *Times* reviewer Joseph F. Keppler, "clarifies van Gogh's life and times with expert devotion and lets the paintings speak for themselves."

■ **"London Fields"** (Harmony), by Martin Amis, is a phantasmagoric mystery that involves a sexy psychic, a low-life thief and a hapless yuppie. *Times* reviewer Adam Woog found it "sprawling,

brilliant and rambunctious"; he said Amis "throws off more provocative ideas and images in a single paragraph than most writers get into complete novels."

■ **"Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart"** (Dutton) is one of Joyce Carol Oates' finest novels, "as fearless a fictional treatment of American racism as any from a well-known white author in recent years," said *Times* reviewer Michael Upchurch. The novel, which was a National Book Award contender against Johnson's "Middle Passage," probes the strange bond linking a pair of teen-agers — a black boy and a white girl — brought together by an act of murder.

■ **"Men at Work: The Craft of Baseball"** (Macmillan) is journalist George F. Will's love song to the sport that is his passion as much as politics. Will, said *Times* reviewer Jim Byrne, "provides a lucid explanation of the nuances of the game, neither too technical for the novice fan nor too mundane for the folks who fancy themselves as experts."

■ **"The Things They Carried"** (Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence), by Tim O'Brien, is yet another look at the Vietnam War by the writer who won the National Book Award for "Going After Cacciato." *Times* reviewer Terry McDermott said the book, which follows a platoon through a year of battle, is like the war itself — "in turns brilliant, moving, odd, episodic and, at times, apparently pointless."

■ **"Friend of My Youth"** (Knopf), by Alice Munro, was the best book of short stories last year, a collection of 10 intricate tales involving the familiar themes of marriage, adultery and remarriage but cast with remarkable new insight. "Not pessimism but a mature realism informs such a vision," said Joyce Carol Oates in a review in *The Times*, "and it is one that Munro continues to fashion into art of a conscientious order."

■ **"The General in His Labyrinth"** (Knopf), the latest novel by Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia Márquez, is a compelling meditation on myth and history based on the final weeks in the life of South American hero Simón Bolívar. "García Márquez seems to be telling us," said *Times* reviewer Anthony L. Geist, "that history is never fully objective, while what seems purely personal also has historical and political dimensions."

■ **"Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness"** (Random House) was noted author William Styron's brief but haunting exploration of his own descent into suicidal depression — and his eventual recovery. In an exclusive interview with the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, *Times* reviewer Mitsu Akiyama Sundvall said, "Styron leads us in a descent into his own personal purgatory; he challenges us to imagine the unimaginable, to express the inexpressible, and he does so with remarkable eloquence."

Ride  
with Me,  
Mariah  
Montana  

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IVAN DOIG

A NOVEL BY THE AUTHOR OF **ENGLISH CREEK**  
AND **DANCING AT THE RASCAL FAIR**

*Ivan Doig*

*RIDE WITH ME,  
MARIAH MONTANA*

ON THE ROAD WITH IVAN DOIG

When Ivan Doig set out to put a century of the American West into his Montana trilogy which *RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA* (Atheneum/September 28, 1990/ \$18.95) now completes, the past was almost too cooperative. As he crisscrossed the state in ten years of research and writing, the cycle of drought and hard times that he was exploring in the homesteaders' era of Dancing at the Rascal Fair and the Depression years of English Creek struck Montana again. "People I talked to there in the 1980's echoed what their parents said about the hardships of the 1930's and their grandparents said after the terrible winter of 1919," Doig reflects. "The past has its own voice."

The rigors and splendors of travel competed during the writing of *RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA* as Doig traced out his characters' reportorial "circumnavigation" of Montana's landscape and history during the state's centennial year. At the National Bison Range at Moiese, a buffalo herd grazed past his car so close the swish of their tails could be heard. At the Chief Joseph Battlefield, while changing to a heavier coat as night and cold descended, Doig locked himself out of his rental car "fifteen miles from anywhere -- a bonehead maneuver I immediately foisted off onto one of my characters." Montana was being scorched by record heat in the summer of 1988 as Doig and his photographer wife, Carol, drove a newly rented motorhome out onto the prairie expanses. When the temperature hit 105, the motorhome conked out on a remote road. "Miraculously, with maybe a few cusswords thrown in," as Doig puts it, the vehicle was coaxed back to life, only to suffer system failures of one kind or another in each day's extreme heat until the ultimate meltdown, the air conditioner. The Doigs' final recourse: a bedtime visit to a swimming pool and then sleeping in wet bathing suits. "Clamminess never felt better," says Doig.

The grandson of Montana homesteaders and the son of Montana ranch workers, Ivan Doig lets his book have the last word on his belovedly difficult home country: "You look at the unbeatable way the land latches into the sky atop the Rocky Mountain Front or on the curve of the planet across the plains, and you end up calculating that our first hundred years here could have been spent worse."

*RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA*  
a novel by Ivan Doig  
Publication Date: September 28, 1990  
Price: \$18.95  
ISBN: 0-689-12019-2

May 1990

It confirms his reputation, as Winifred Blevins said in the Los Angeles Times, "as our foremost recorder and interpreter of life in the...American West." The novel is receiving advance praise:

"A paean to Montana and frontiersmanship--but also a casually artful, and triumphant, end to Doig's trilogy."

--Kirkus Reviews

"In this crowning volume of a trilogy, which includes English Creek and Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Doig again displays a masterly skill in depicting the American West which few writers match....This entertaining ramble adroitly blends travelogue, family drama, history and newspaper lore."

--Publishers Weekly

In 1984 English Creek, the first book in the trilogy, was published to wide acclaim. "Ivan Doig has a rare, uncanny skill for bringing history to life," wrote Carol Van Strum in USA Today, "He achieves a flawless weld of fact and fiction." It won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, the Governor's Writers Day Award and the Western Heritage Award for Best Novel from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. Dancing at the Rascal Fair (1987) was also honored with the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award for Literary Excellence. Doig's first book, This House of Sky, published in 1978, was nominated for the National Book Award in contemporary thought and received a Christopher Award, the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award. "The language begins in western territory and experience but in the hands of an artist it touches all landscape and all life," Robert Kirsch wrote in the Los Angeles Times. "Doig is such an artist."

Doig is also author of Winter Brothers (1980), which won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award, and was adapted for a public television documentary. His first novel The Sea Runners (1982) was hailed as one of the notable books of the year by The New York Times Book Review.

Ivan Doig lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol.

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NEWS OF  ATHENEUM PUBLISHERS

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*Ivan Doig*  
**RIDE WITH ME,  
MARIAH MONTANA**

EXTRAORDINARY PRAISE FOR IVAN DOIG'S PREVIOUS NOVELS

For "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987)

"Ivan Doig's magnificent new novel is an answer to the prayer of anyone who has loved a distant country or experienced the full-hearted enthusiasm of youth.... Part immigrant saga, part intelligent western, part sweeping romance, Dancing at the Rascal Fair further establishes its Seattle author in the front ranks of contemporary American writers....Doig writes with grace and eloquence....In this fine work of fiction, every word, every surprise, every resolution rings true."

--Michael Dorris,  
The Seattle Times

"Ivan Doig is a happy mixture of poet and historian. In just nine years he has produced five truly distinctive books set in Montana and the Pacific Northwest, three of them novels. All beautifully evoke the American westering experience and firmly establish Doig as one of our finest Western writers."

--Richard Critchfield,  
The Washington Post Book World

"Against a masterfully evoked backdrop, Mr. Doig addresses his real subject: love between friends, between the sexes, between the generations....Doig's prose is as tight as new thread and as special as hand-made candy...Dancing at the Rascal Fair races with real vigor and wit and passion."

--Lee. K. Abbott  
The New York Times Book Review

"I find myself filled with such high praise for this book that instead of relating paltry bits of it, I want to quote the whole glorious thing....It is dazzling to watch Doig depict generous, high-spirited characters."

--Pamela Gullard,  
San Francisco Chronicle

"In his impressive new novel, Dancing at the Rascal Fair, Ivan Doig stakes a claim to the mantle worn by Wallace Stegner for half a century, the reputation as our foremost recorder and interpreter of life in the historic high, dry American West. With This House of Sky, English Creek and especially this book, he has earned it....His greatest strength is exploring the coagulated feelings of human beings within the family. His characters are not the morality-play heroes of the genre Western, but real people, tangled in their feelings, handicapped by their deficiencies, deeply decent, yearning for closeness, finding it only intermittently. Their melancholy dance of life is rendered with exquisite nuance."

--Winifred Blevins,  
Los Angeles Times Book Review

"Ivan Doig's Dancing at the Rascal Fair is one of the rarest treats a reader may enjoy: a novel to be savored from word to word, page to page -- a realistic tale of pioneer Scottish ranchers battling for survival in the northernmost reaches of Montana, told in the lyrical prose and sly idiomatic wit that was their heritage from remote Gaelic ancestors."

--Noland Norgaard,  
The Denver Post

--more--

"Doig's ability to capture in print the many conflicting emotions, phobias and dreams of all human beings is so rare that he has to be a very special person himself....This is a beautiful piece of work."

--Jeff Guinn,  
Fort Worth Star-Telegram

For "English Creek" (1984)

"Doig seems to be one of those enviable writers whose every book is better than the previous one. The new novel is full of good writing and the sweat and tears and laughter of hardworking plain people...[Ivan Doig's writing] is more virile than [Paul] Horgan and less romantic than [Wallace] Stegner. A truer comparison might be with Robert Louis Stevenson because of Doig's magical welding of history with fiction, of adventure with everyday life, of legend with lore."

--Reid Beddow,  
The Washington Post Book World

"His prose is at once simple and direct, yet rich and fanciful....The voice of his narrator is so binding that the audience is propelled into the lives of the characters....This reader can't wait for the sequels."

--George Harmon,  
The Chicago Sun Times

"Doig combines all of what is best about America in his story: the humor, the landscape, the ancestry of characters...The only solace in finishing this wonderful novel is the anticipation of the two more to come."

--The Chicago Tribune

"Two things make this nostalgic western novel especially delightful: old Jick's idiosyncratic theories about everything from in-laws to General Custer; and young Jick's reluctance to come of age, coupled with his precocious understanding that that's exactly what he's doing. Readers will delight in Mr. Doig's evocation of the Montana landscape through language that is tender, lyrical and forceful."

--Janice Eidus,  
The New York Times Book Review

"English Creek is old fashioned in the best sense of the word: Doig is concerned with the telling of a story that entertains, and he is also concerned with the novel's moral and ethical implications....he deserves to be better known."

--James Kaufmann,  
The Christian Science Monitor

"Ivan Doig has a rare, uncanny skill for bringing history to life....In English Creek, his second novel, Doig again achieves a flawless weld of fact and fiction....[The characters] stay on long after the book is closed, more colorful and enduring than the history that inspired them. No more can be asked for the storyteller's art."

--Carol Van Strum,  
USA Today

"Despite its setting in the most mythic of all American landscapes, English Creek is neither nostalgic nor simple: It's too concrete and detailed in its evocation of the past....In supple, muscular prose as terse and yet redolent with meaning as the speech of Montana, Ivan Doig grapples with universal issues of character and morality."

--Wendy Smith,  
Newsday

"There is...a pervasive warmth, a gentleness, an affection for those long-distant Depression years and the toughness, the innocence, and the sense of community they shaped."

--The New Yorker

RIDE WITH ME, MARIAH MONTANA  
a novel by Ivan Doig  
Publication Date: September 28, 1990  
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August 1990

Ivan Doig  
RIDE WITH ME,  
MARIAH MONTANA

EXTRAORDINARY ADVANCE PRAISE

Spurred by the 1989 centennial of Montana's statehood, moody widower Jick McCaskill, turning 65, criss-crosses the state in a Winnebago with his photographer daughter, strong-willed, feisty Mariah, and her ex-husband, Riley, a reporter. In this crowning volume of a trilogy, which includes *English Creek* and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, Doig again displays a masterly skill in depicting the American West which few writers match. Instead of patriotic hoopla, the canvas is dotted with failing ranches, oil pumps clanking away in farmed fields, Montanans tensely poised between an uncertain future and a frontier past. Jick, who narrates this road story with brash humor, faces two emotional crises: Mariah precipitously announces plans to remarry Riley; and Leona, Riley's mother, who once had an ill-fated fling with Jick's dead brother, joins the caravan. This entertaining ramble adroitly blends travelogue, family drama, history and newspaper lore.

--Publishers Weekly

To conclude his Montana trilogy (see also *English Creek* [BKLO 15 84] and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* [BKL J1 87 84]), Ivan Doig moves forward in time—and then looks back. What narrator Jick McCaskill calls “memory storms,” unprovoked assaults from the past, drive the action in this ruminative look at growing up and growing old, western style. A teenager at the time of the events in *English Creek*, McCaskill is 65 in 1989, a recent widower, and struggling to hold on to his beloved ranch in the face of massive societal change (“Maybe what I have known how to do all my life, which is ranching, simply does not register any more”). Reluctantly, he agrees to accompany his daughter, Mariah, a photographer, and her ex-husband, Riley, a reporter, as they tour Montana in a Winnebago, on assignment for a newspaper, gathering human-interest stories relating to the state's centennial celebration. Personal history mixes with Montana history as the trio dodge buffaloes, visit the site of Chief Joseph's surrender, and deal with unresolved familiar and marital discord. Doig continues to excel at creating a sense of place, and, as before, the grandeur of the West is effectively set against the ineffable sadness of human lives—the misconstrued motives, the coming together and the breaking apart, the private sorrows and the unrealized hopes.

--Booklist

The conclusion to Doig's Montana trilogy centered on the McCaskill family: *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* was set in the homesteading era, *English Creek* during the Depression. Here, a contemporary picaresque odyssey through Montana's centennial moves mostly on father-daughter aggravation and expertly done (and well-researched) landscapes.

Jick McCaskill, at 65, has lost his wife Marcella to cancer. His daughter Mariah, a photographer with “a chance that'll never come again,” invites him to travel in a Winnebago with her and ex-husband Riley, an impulsive, eccentric journalist, as they explore Montana à la Charles Kuralt. In a sometimes shrill, sometimes nostalgic tone, Jick narrates the ensuing journey to publication and to love. Jick has been grieving, but in the Winnebago he witnesses daughter and son-in-law seemingly fall in love again as they endlessly argue over destination, story angle, and almost everything else. We get a lot of McCaskill family history, a *Blue Highways*-like sampling of Montana's old geezers, grizzlies, mining country, and “true grit”; and, as Mariah looks for the right pictures and Riley builds a following that is more than regional, Jick does in fact move forward again, with the help of a heart-to-heart with Leona, Riley's mother and a widow herself. Riley proposes again to Mariah and asks her to accompany him to California, where a big paper has made him an offer. Mariah wavers but finally realizes that “you and I love just some of each other.” So things go, in a book where the narrator wisely realizes that “Enumerating is one thing and making it all add up is another.”

A paean to Montana and frontiersmanship—but also a casually artful, and triumphant, end to Doig's trilogy.

--Kirkus Reviews

To explore the meaning of Montana's century of statehood, 65-year-old Jick McCaskill, his photographer daughter Mariah, and her newspaper columnist ex-husband Riley Wright tour the Treasure State in Jick's Winnebago. While Riley writes on-the-scene dispatches and Mariah takes photos of the places they visit, Jick, the narrator, recounts the state's—and his family's—good and bad times. A lengthy picaresque with innumerable well-crafted vignettes, this leisurely novel could easily serve as a tour guide of Montana's historic places. As the miles go by, Riley and Mariah again fall in and out of love, and Jick, a widower, unexpectedly finds a new mate. The culminating volume in the McCaskill trilogy, which includes *English Creek* (LJ 10/1/84) and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* (G.K. Hall, 1989), is highly recommended for its depiction of the past's impact on the present.

--Library Journal  
(starred review)

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EDITED BY SYBIL STEINBERG

# Ivan Doig

His novels of the American West benefit as much from his painstaking research as they do from his poetic imagination

BY WENDY SMITH

For just under a decade, in five books resonant with the echoing spaces of the American West, Ivan Doig has examined the ways in which history and geography interact to shape individual and national character, demonstrating our membership in a "community of time" that links Americans to those who preceded us in the landscape, as well as a community of place that knits us together in a complex weave of familial and social obligations.

In *This House of Sky*, his sensitive memoir of growing up in Montana in the 1940s and '50s, and in *Winter Brothers*, an exploration of the Pacific Northwest coastline through the diaries of a man who first ventured there in the 1850s, Doig mingled past and present in discontinuous narrative that skipped around in time yet presented coherent, moving visions of human possibilities against two very different backdrops. He turned to fiction—but not away from the past—in *The Sea Runners*, which chronicled the escape of four men from a Russian prison in 19th century Alaska and their daring canoe journey down the Pacific coast.

Doig is delving deeper into his Montana roots in the McCaskill family trilogy on which he has been at work for the past six years. *English Creek* took up the family's story in the middle with the tale of 15-year-old Jick McCaskill's coming of age in the summer of 1939. His newest nov-

Wendy Smith writes frequently for PW.

el, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* (Fiction Forecasts, July 31), which Atheneum is launching with a 50,000 first printing, goes back to the beginning: the arrival of young Scotsman Angus McCaskill in Montana's Two Medicine Country in 1889, the year the territory became a state. Doig expects to complete the third volume—and carry the McCaskills into the present—in time for the statehood centennial in 1989.

Why has the American past laid such a hold on this writer's imagination? "I think it helps us to know what we are and where we are by knowing where we came from," he says. "Also, I grew up with people in Montana who had a great link to the past. They weren't educated enough in classroom terms to know factual history, but they had a lot of lore in their heads. And it was in the language, too, the sayings that showed up in my father's and grandmother's talk. Going back to Scotland three summers ago to research *Rascal Fair*, I found some of the turns of phrase originated there."

Doig came to the Seattle area, where he has lived for 21 years, to get a Ph.D in history, and his training is evident in the way he works. An energetic, friendly man of 48 whose glasses and gray-red beard give him a vaguely professorial air, he shows *PW* the file-card boxes filled with research material. "I'm a pretty literal person; I tend to imagine from facts. For example, 'Dancing at the Rascal Fair' is a traditional Scots tune—which I wrote one sleepless night. It comes from this very staunch, Scots, quasi-Marxist sociological book, *Social Class in Scotland, Past and Present*, where I read mention of the fact that when farmers and laborers met to bargain out the summer's wages it was called 'the rascal fair.' I like that phrase. I went to bed one night, not having a title for the book, and the next morning told Carol [his wife], 'I think it's going to be called *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*.' Then I bought a rhyming dictionary and worked

hard on making up the song. Quite a lot of what I do comes that way, the imagination ramified by this kind of dry sociology."

Doig's uncommon ability to bring the past vividly to life stems in part from his attention to detail. "I would talk to people who had been homesteaders at the turn of the century and ask them, 'You were a school kid. How'd you get to school?' 'Well, we rode horses.' 'Okay, what'd you do with the horses?' Out of that would come bits of lore: in the sagebrush part of Montana, they'd probably hitch the horse to a bit of sagebrush; if they lived in the grassier part, the fathers would probably build a hitch rail for the school. The details of Angus's teaching came out of those sort of particulars." To help him visualize the towns he was writing about, Carol Doig took photographs of individual buildings all over Montana and Scotland. Doig arranged the slides on a light table, grouping the pictures together to get a sense of what a given street might have looked like in 1889 or 1919.

The language of Doig's books is also carefully researched. "Language led me to the McCaskill trilogy as much as anything else. I was interested in using the language of my Dad's generation in *English Creek*, which is narrated by a character roughly his age. Then it followed that Angus would narrate *Rascal Fair* in his Scottish-born voice. It was a big decision, because it takes a long time to accumulate the language for these three books. I have a file-card box called 'Montana Lingo,' and I'm working my way through *The Dictionary of American Regional English* to find out how language forms itself, how it comes out in everyday dance and prance—the poetry of the vernacular, because often people who don't have much else in life are very rich in language. I think what I'm up to is an attempt to write a trio of books in some of the West's own language."

The West itself—Montana in par-

ticular—is virtually another character in the McCaskill trilogy, and all of Doig's books display a deep attachment to the land and a profound sense of place. "Part of that was growing up in the 'great weathers' of Montana. The space is always around you in various configurations—whether it is the mountains or the plains or simply that almost endless sky—big, booming distances in the landscapes. . . . The echoes of those stay with a person. We moved to Seattle largely because of the geography: the mildness of the climate, the nearness of the water, the greenness. Place is important to me and I think to quite a number of Western writers. Richard Hugo, the great poet of Montana, has a line that always sounds to me like something he picked up in a Missoula bar: 'If you ain't noplacement, you can't go nowhere.' To have a base, a plot of existence on the earth, to be familiar with its changes of the seasons, there's a kind of propulsive rhythm to that."

But the West Doig knows so intimately and writes about with such eloquence is *not* the West of legend. "I'm writing deliberately about sheepherding, because we've had too damn much cowboy West. I don't think that's what the West has been about, although we've got a guy in the White House who thinks so: too many movie sets will give you that idea. The West has been about families, schoolteachers, miners, fur trappers, town-builders, all kinds of people coming out here to try and make a living. I'm trying to write against the grain of what I call 'Wisterns,' after Owen Wister, the author of *The Virginian*. He went off from Philadelphia and Harvard and got in with some of the rich cattlemen of Wyoming. So far as he could tell, no one in the West ever had to do any work. In 'Wisterns' it's all card games and saving schoolmarm's; nobody ever milks a cow or plants a spud. As best I can tell, there's got to be some kind of catering service out of Omaha that comes out and takes care of the whole damn West. It's nonsense, and I think it's harmful nonsense."

"So much of the West has been nurtured and can only be nurtured by Federal policy: the national forest, the Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management. It's an enormous, dry, fragile part of our country—what Wallace Stegner called 'a land of little rainfall and big consequences.' We've had a complex histo-



© Jim Bates

**‘It seems to me there’s a new kind of eloquence that is not just an eloquence of the West, but an eloquence of the edge of the world.’**

ry of coming to terms with that; there's an ecologically, socially and culturally complex quilt out here from the Ohio River westward. To think that fixing it is just a matter of strapping on your chaps and sixgun is infantile nonsense. This almost tidal swash back and forth between beneficial consequences and harmful consequences interests me."

Doig's characters are always aware that actions have consequences, and the plots of his novels are often driven by the conflict between people's desires and their strong sense of responsibility. "My characters accept that in their lives they do have second thoughts, that part of what we carry around in the attic of our heads are our thoughts about the past. You feel your way along and do as much as you can, yet trying at some point to lead your own life. You're forever feeling your way along this line of equilibrium. Part of the consequence of being alive is that it's not always comfortable."

But Doig also tries to imbue his work with a sense of how many things in life are not within people's control. "My interest in history showed me that both time and the times you live in are going to change you, and I'm trying to write about that. You see in *English Creek* and *Rascal Fair* how much the two

world wars dropped into people's lives out of nowhere. I was trying to use actual historical realities. First the twin calamities of World War I and the flu epidemic of 1919—one out of every 100 Montanans died. Then the fact that one year you were a kid on a ranch in Montana who'd never been further away than the 90 miles to Helena, the next year you're in the Aleutians or the South Pacific, and the year after that maybe you're dead. I'm trying to deal in fiction with the issue of history dropping on us. Of course, we hope it doesn't drop on us in the big way—in the great words of *Riddley Walker*, a book I greatly admire—'The One Big One.'"

Russell Hoban is only one of the many authors whose work Doig has warmly praised during the conversation; his strong sense of identity as a Western writer doesn't preclude a larger feeling of kinship with world literature. "I've been very much aware of being a Westerner all my life, partly because of memories of the landscape, partly because of the way I was brought up in the West through the accident of being motherless after I was six. I have in some ways the best of both worlds: I'm halfway regarded as a Montana writer, and yet I live outside. The Humanities Council in Billings asked me to talk about looking at Montana from the outside. They have finally said, 'Okay, you're an outsider at last.'"

"Montana has always had this big colonial question, part of the land question: Are we simply, can we ever be, more than an energy colony to be mined? So the West has a lot in common with writers from the old outposts of the British Empire, who are often very skeptical of government and very potent. Nadine Gordimer is one of the most potent writers extant in showing the awful naked skin under her society. Then there are books like *The Book of Ebenezer Le Page* and *Riddley Walker*, which push the language out into odd, eloquent corners of the world: the Isle of Guernsey, post-Holocaust England. I'm tending toward the idea, and I don't think it's at all original with me, that there are quite a bunch of us out here at our own centers of the universe, and they're not the metropolitan, polar centers. It seems to me that there's a new kind of eloquence that is not just an eloquence of the West, but an eloquence of the edge of the world." □