West Side Stories

Readers rank the 20th century's best nonfiction this side of the Rockies

David Kipen

Books

List wound up looking more like America, too — if only America ran westward from New York to the Rockies and then stopped, like a frisky dog at the end of its leash.

The Chronicle Western 100 lists 20th-century English-language nonfiction off the leash. It was devised on the nervy assumption that an unscientistic, self-selected sampling of interested Western readers could pick just as viable a list as the editorial board of a venerable Manhattan publisher. That faith has since been amply repaid, with Chronicle readers coming out of the woodwork to write, e-mail and buttonhole their smart, opinionated nominations.

The top vote-getter on the Chronicle Western 100 is Mary Austin's "Land of Little Rain," her classic 1903 account of the terrain between Death Valley and the High Sierra — a book Edward Abbey called "a small, tender, old-fashioned and engaging book, a part of the basic literature of American nature writing."

Hard on its heels were Wallace Stegner's "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," Abbey's "Desert Solitaire" and Ivan Doig's "This House of Sky."

Let no one blame himself for not having read all, or many, or perhaps even any of these books. Blame instead an East Coast literary establishment that tends to get the West wrong only when it isn't ignoring it completely. Look at the top 10 magnificent writers and reflect that none of them, not one, made New York's nonfiction list. Not Austin, who blazed the trail for a century of writing about the wild. Not Stegner, whose Stanford writing program has nurtured generations of distinguished writers in the West. Not Abbey, whose comic novel "The Monkey Wrench Gang" helped radicalize environmental thinking in America. Not Doig, the Montana-born, Seattle-based master whose impatiently awaited new novel, "Mountain Time," hits bookstores this summer. And not Evan S. Connell either, the San Francisco mailman-turned-novelist whose landmark examination of the West but published here as well by the late, much-lamented Northpoint Press.

Connell's "Son of the Morning Star" also has the distinction of getting a vote from the man to whom it's dedicated, the gifted San Francisco writer Curt Gentry. "Heller Skelter," Gentry and Vincent Bugliosi's harrowing book about the Charles Manson murders, missed joining "Son of the Morning Star" on the list by the narrowest of margins.

So did books by Mary McCarthy and Susan Sontag, whose origins in Seattle and the San Fernando Valley, respectively.

KIPEN: Page B5 Col. 1

Mary Austin

Wallace Stegner

Edward Abbey

The Top 10

1. "Land of Little Rain" Mary Austin

2. "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian" Wallace Stegner

3. "Desert Solitaire" Edward Abbey

4. "This House of Sky" Ivan Doig

5. "Son of the Morning Star" Evan S. Connell

6. Western Trilogy Bernard DeVoto

7. "Assembling California" John McPhee

8. "My First Summer In the Sierra" John Muir

9. "The White Album" Joan Didion

10. "City of Quartz" Mike Davis
Readers Rank Doig, Didion Works Among Best Nonfiction

World just a few slots below "Ishi in Two Worlds," the story of the last Yahi Indian as written by Le Guin's mother, the Berkeley anthropologist Theodora Kroeber. Or the ghastly trial of seeing Joan Didion's "The White Album" on the list cheek by jowl with George Stewar t's "Onong: By Hunger," his super- reconstruction of what befell the Donner Party, which included some of Didion's forebears. Didion owes her high place on the list in part to the incisive analysis of Cyra McFadden — herself no mean writer of nonfiction, as anyone who's read her memoir "Rain or Shine" can attest. McFadden took time to drop a postcard on behalf of Didion's "White Album" ("still her best book"), Herbert Gold's "Father" (not nonfiction and therefore ineligible but "a modern American masterpiece" just the same) and Norman MacLean's "A River Runs Through It" ("outstanding by his more frankly nonfictional "Young Men and Fire").

Both MacLean books had votes enough to make the list, as did multiple books by other writers, but a decision was made early on to adopt a one-book-per-author proviso. One hundred sounds like a lot, but it's not, and too many worthy writers came up short as it is, even without having to compete for a spot against five different John Muir titles.

Ties were broken, rules bent and the continent Solomonicly divided at the Rockies.

The breaker discretion also allowed for the placement of Joseph Henry Jackson's "Anybody's Gold" — daily nominated by the readership, the not editor, in the inevitably conspicuous 100 slot. The Chronicle's book editor from the 1960s through the 1990s, Jackson championed John Steinbeck and other Western writers when the East Coast wouldn't give them the time of day. He enabled an essay book every morning in these pages for almost 20 years and, like his opposite number at the Los Angeles Times, Robert Kirsch, read himself into an early grave. To them for their service to Western literature, and to the era-dite readers who made this list possible, The Chronicle Weekend 100 is gratefully dedicated. To those readers who missed their chance to vote, be patient: Nonfiction is only half the story.

David Kipen is The Chronicle's book editor. He can be reached at kippen@sgate.com.

The Chronicle's Weekend 100

1. "Land of Little Rain," Mary Austin
2. "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," Walter M. Blakeslee
3. "Desert Solitaire," Edward Abbey
5. "Son of the Morning Star," Evan S. Gann
11. "City of Quartz," Mike Davis
12. "Drood by Hunger," George Rippey
14. "Americans and the California Dream," the voluminous, Kent Stann
15. "The California, Miss Martinez," Mari Riker
16. "A Son County Almanac," Rod Leopold
17. "California The Great Exception," Gary C. Williams
18. "Arctic Dreams," Barry Lopez
20. "A Very County Almanac," Rod Leopold
22. "Land of the Motion Pictures," Pauline Kael
24. "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," Hunter S. Thompson
25. "Buy My Heart at Wounded Knee," Dee Brown
29. "And the Band Played On," Randy Shilts
30. "Big Foot," Oscar Lewis
32. "In the Spirit of Crazy Horse," Peter Matthiessen
33. "Great Plains," Jan Fairchild
36. "Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas," Men Sanchez
37. "City of Honor," Otto Frankson
38. "Religion: A Universal History of Family and Place," Tony Tyeski Williams
40. "High Tide In Tuscan," Barbara Kingsolver
41. "Woman," Bob Ross
42. "Unfounded Courage," Stephen Douglas
43. "The Woman Warrior," Maxine Hong Kingston
44. "The Electric Koala Acid Test," Tom Wolfe
45. "Land of the Motion Pictures," Pauline Kael
47. "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," Hunter S. Thompson
49. "The Hunger of Memory," Richard Rodriguez
50. "Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the California Coast," Donn Duane
51. "This Boy's Life," Tobias Wolff
52. "Books in My Baggage," Lawrence Clark Powell
54. "Some Men to Match My Mountains," Living Stones
55. "Love and War," Robert May
58. "T. Rex and the Constant Deceiver," Walter Benjamin
60. "Strangers From a Different Shore, A History of Asian Americans," Ronald Takaki
64. "Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollcisions," Gary Soto
67. "Lowdown True donde," Jim Keene
68. "The Onions Way," Malcolm Margolin
73. "The Sensual Outlaw: A Documentary," John Reich
75. "Final Cut," Steven Sabat
77. "My Year Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American Woman," Richard Allen
78. "Communals: Kennedy Rewind," Lee Miller
79. "A Candidate for Governor And I Get Locked," Lindy Sadler
80. "Road to Sing Will," John Steinbeck
81. "Miles from Nowhere: In Search of the American Frontier," Dayton Duncan
82. "Winter in Tawn," Medeola Lusher
85. "Traveling Light," Bill Birchen
86. "The Foray of Romanz, Farms and Its History," Lee Braudy
87. "Stepping Westward," Dale Torode
88. "Money and Class in America: Notes and Observations on Our Civil Religion," Lewis Lapham
89. "Coming of Age in California: Personal Essays," Gerald Nachman
90. "Broken Lewis," Max Ehren
91. "Darkroom Moments: A Life," Claire Johnson
92. "The Town That Forgot the Rain," Orwell Schaub
93. "The Walls and the Sea," Joseph West
95. "All's Well and Never," Joseph West
Montanans of the Century

Ivan Doig

Author earns national praise, drawing on Montana past

By Dan Hollow

Tribune city editor

His wife has called him "the fastest pen in the West" for his work at book-signing events, but don't look for gun-slingin' outlaws in the novels of Ivan Doig.

One of Montana's most highly acclaimed writers, Doig builds his stories around men and women fighting to make a living and to hold on to a family-farming community in a harsh terrain, often the wind-swept reaches of the Rocky Mountain Front.

"I see it as terribly harmful, the Louis L'Amour/John Wayne myth, going with the strength of your arm or the quickness of your gun," Doig told an interviewer a few years back. "There were a helluva lot more homesteaders than gunfighters."

Doig was only 6 when his mother died. He moved at a young age to Dupuyer, 84 miles northwest of Great Falls, where he was raised by his father and grandmother.

During the summers, Doig got some first-hand experience that would provide gritty color for his future novels. Jobs ranged from herding sheep and bucking hay bales to trucking grain and driving a Cat in farm fields.

Armed with bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Northwestern, he got a job as a journalist and married his wife, Carol.

In 1966, the Doigs moved to Seattle, where he worked as a free-lance writer and pursued a doctorate in history at the University of Washington. After earning his Ph.D. in 1969, Doig embarked on a career as a full-time writer.

In his debut novel in 1978, "This House of Sky: Landscapes of a Western Mind," Doig recalls growing up in a sheep ranching family with his father and grandmother. The memoir opens with the death of his mother, Berneta, on the morning of his sixth birthday and ends with the slow suffocation of his father in 1971 from emphysema.

"This House of Sky"

Born: June 27, 1939, in White Sulphur Springs; he lives in Seattle with his wife, Carol.

was nominated for the National Book Award and won the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award and the Governor's Writers Day Award.

In literary circles, he is equally admired for his trilogy of Montana novels about Scottish immigrants: "English Creek" in 1984, "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" in 1987 and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana" in 1990.

His most recent work, 1999's "Mountain Time," is set in the modern-day West. The characters encounter such events as the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska, the eruption of Mount St. Helens and oil and gas drilling on the Rocky Mountain Front.

What's next?

"I'm heading back to when the 1900s got under way for Montana women," Doig said recently. "I'm circling back to catch up with a character who was a schoolgirl in 'Dancing at the Rascal Fair' — Susan Duff, Scotland born, gifted with a silver voice."

He'll bring Duff to womanhood in Helena through World War I and the suffrage movement "to a turning point in her life as the jazz age comes along."

Doig said he plans some research trips to Montana for the novel, which will take a couple years to complete.

Sources: Interview with Doig; Tribune files at Brown and Schuster publishing; Tribune file photo.
THE TRIBUNE'S

Montanans of the 20th Century
Ivan Doig

Claim to fame: A novelist whose fiction and autobiographical writing tell the story of Montana better than most history books.

Notable works: The memoir "This House of Sky" (1978) and the fiction trilogy that consists of "English Creek" (1984), "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987) and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana" (1990)

Northwest connection: Doig earned a doctorate in history from the University of Washington in 1969 and has lived in Seattle ever since.

Personal bio: Doig, born in 1939 to a sheepherding family who lived on the Montana range, grew up determined to work with his head, not his hands. He earned a full scholarship to Northwestern University, worked on a newspaper in Illinois and for a magazine in Chicago, then headed for Seattle. After earning his Ph.D., he worked as a free-lance magazine writer while his wife, Carol, taught at a community college. Doig soon decided journalism was too limiting a form for the stories he wanted to tell.

Literary notes: Doig's writing combines his meticulous historical research with fictional characters whose lives are emblematic of the periods about which he writes. He has brought his personal heritage to bear in his most powerful works by creating fictional characters who emigrated from Scotland to Montana, much as his own family did — and, in his bid for historical accuracy, he has been particularly attentive to the sound of language, re-creating the burr his ancestors brought across the Atlantic. He has received repeated awards from the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association and a distinguished achievement award from the Western Literary Association.

More recommended reads: "Bucking the Sun" (1996)
features

100 ALUMNI OF THE CENTURY page 16
Our List of the 100 Most Fascinating, Famous and Influential UW Graduates of the 20th Century.

TRUE WEST page 24
Most of Us Don't Have a Clue about the African-American Experience in the West. Quintard Taylor's Goal Is to Set Us Straight.

MAGNETIC RELIEF page 28
Depression's Victims Sometimes Find That Drugs and Therapy Can't Help. Soon There May Be a New Solution—the Power of Magnetism.

on the cover

This collection of UW alumni photos includes digital images and archival material.
Photo by Kathy Sauber.
Doig, Ivan, '69
His memoir on growing up in Montana, *This House of Sky*, was nominated for a National Book Award. His other works include *Winter Brothers*, *The Sea Runners*, *English Creek*, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* and his 1999 novel, *Mountain Time*.

Donaldson, Lauren, '31
Fisheries biologist remembered for revolutionary study of salmon and his hatchery-raised fish, including the "Donaldson trout." He also did landmark research on the effects of radiation on aquatic organisms at post-war atomic bomb sites in the Pacific.

The University of Washington currently has more alumni quarterbacks playing in the National Football League than any other U.S. college. The six Huskies are Mark Brunell, Jacksonville; Chris Chandler, Atlanta; Billy Joe Hobert, New Orleans; Brock Huard, Seattle; Damon Huard, Miami; and Warren Moon, Kansas City.

Duffy, Patrick, '71
One of TV's most successful actors and producers, he starred for 12 years as Bobby Ewing on the long-running series *Dallas*, then was actor, producer and director of the sitcom *Step by Step*. In 22 years in show business, he's been out of work three weeks.

Dunbar, Bonnie, '71, '75
One of a handful of astronauts to have made five space flights, Dunbar's missions include the 1995 docking of the space shuttle Atlantis to the Russian space station Mir, the first U.S.-Russian meeting in space in 20 years.

Dwyer, William, '51
This federal judge's 1991 decision to halt logging on Forest Service land to save the spotted owl changed forever the landscape of the Pacific Northwest, and the economies of timber towns. "He told the truth that few in this region want to hear," said a *Seattle Times* editorial.

Egvedt, Clairmont, '17
President and chairman of the board of Boeing, Egvedt guided the company to build larger and more complex airplanes, including the "Clipper," the "Stratoliner" and the famous B-17 bomber, the "Flying Fortress."

Ekwueme, Alex, '55, '57
Nigerian statesman who has worked tirelessly on behalf of peace and democracy in his native country. He served as vice president from 1979-1983, then was jailed for six years after a coup. Ran unsuccessfully for president in 1998.

Ellis, James, '48
The quintessential civic leader and a successful attorney, he fathered METRO, which saved Lake Washington and our mass transit system. Also spearheaded efforts that created the Seattle Aquarium, Freeway Park and other major projects. Currently presides over the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, an environmental corridor along I-90.

Ellis, John, '52, '53
Like his older brother, Jim, John is a successful attorney who became active in civic affairs. As chairman of the Baseball Club of Seattle, he helped negotiate the deal with baseball that kept the Mariners in Seattle. Also was board chairman of Puget Power.

Evans, Daniel, '48, '49
Nicknamed "Straight Arrow" for his integrity and independence, Evans was elected to the Legislature in 1956 and became governor at age 39, in 1964. Through his three terms, he championed environmental protection, human services, women's rights and education. Later president of Evergreen State College (1977-83) and a U.S. senator (1983-89), he is now a UW regent.

Farmer, Frances, '35
Starred in '30s and '40s films such as *Ebb Tide*, *Toast of New York* and *Rhythm on the Range*. Later committed to a mental institution, she is the subject of two biographies, a Hollywood film and even a song by the late Kurt Cobain.

Fleming, George, '64
First made news as a Husky running back, but both in the business and political worlds, he opened doors for other African Americans. He spent 22 years in the Legislature, where he battled for civil rights, housing and minority business opportunities. Remains involved in civic activities today.

Foote, William, '61
In 1966, as a medical missionary in Africa, he developed a new technique for vaccinating populations...
Montanans
Our pick of the most influential figures of the 20th century
Ivan Doig

"Soon after daybreak on my sixth birthday, my mother's breathing wheezed more raggedly than ever, then quieted. And then stopped. The remembering begins out of that new silence. Through the time since, I reach back along my father's tellings and around the urgings which would have me face about and forget, to feel into these oldest shadows for the first sudden edge of it all."

It starts, early in the mountain summer, far back among the high spilling slopes of the Bridger Range of southwestern Montana. The single sound is hidden water - the south fork of Sixteenmile Creek diving down its willow-masked gulch. The stream flees north through this secret and peopleless land until, under the fir-dark flanks of Harfield Mountain, a bow of meadow makes the riffled water curl wide to the west. At this interruption, a low rumple of the mountain knolls itself up watchfully, and atop it, like a sentry box over the frontier between the sky creek and the prodging meadow, perches our single-room herding cabin."

- From "This House of Sky"

By GINNY MERRIAM
of the Missoulian

Ivan Doig eschews the label "Montana writer." Though he writes mostly about life in Montana, he says his books are supposed to touch on much broader themes. Clearly, his audience around the world agrees.

Treasured moments passed from one
Doig

Continued from Page M45

others.

"He kind of reaffirmed what everybody had been hoping and thinking — that there would be a real Western literature, not just shoot-em-ups," Kittredge said recently. "And it happened."

In rural places, Kittredge said, we think the real world is somewhere else — in New York, in Los Angeles, on television. But the real world is here, he said, and it's not "Shane" or the Lone Ranger.

Doig, who has eight books to his credit now, resists the tag "Montana writer." He hopes he's writing into larger country, he said once in an interview, the country of life.

His readers clearly think so. They read about Montana around the world. "This House of Sky" alone, Doig tells us in his introduction to the 15th anniversary edition, has been used in college courses in autobiography, history, biography and literature, has been "anthologized to a fare-thee-well," translated into German, read on National Public Radio, distributed in audiocassette by the thousands and nominated for the National Book Award.

Doig has gone on to write historical novels based on that life on the Rocky Mountain Front, traveling "home" to Montana from his Seattle home to do his Montana research. His fictional McCaskill family has peopled the trilogy "English Creek," "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" and "Ride With Me, Mariah Montana." In his novel "Bucking the Sun," Doig takes on the building of the Fort Peck Dam.

Though mostly a novelist, Doig's meticulous research has added to Montana's historical record — and given him and his wife, Carol, a now-retired mass communications professor in Seattle, many an adventure in Montana. His training as a journalist is the muscle and sinew of how he works, he says. It taught him how to research and how to approach writing as a craft, like woodworking, he says, "right down to the consonants and vowels."

In September, Doig's most recent novel came out, and Missoula readers embraced him again, packing themselves into his reading and book-signing.

But they always come back to "This House of Sky," he says. No matter what novel he's signing, they stop by the stack of "This House of Sky," and ask him to sign another piece of Montana.
Acute ‘Angle’ Wins Reader Poll

Wallace Stegner’s novel earns top spot in list of 100 best Western works of fiction

David Kipen
Books

And people thought counting the Ammiamo ballots took forever. Polling began July 29 for The Chronicle Western 100, our list of the best 20th century fiction written in or about — or by an author from — the Western United States. Since then balloting has been declared officially over at least twice, each time followed by still more reader nominations just too shrewd to exclude.

About 600 people scribbled, typed or e-mailed their opinions on the literature of the West. Each author needed several votes just to make the list, and the top vote-getter had nearly 100 partisans.

That man, he had he never written so much as a short story, would still loom large in the annals of Western writing for his nonfiction. His book about the first Grand Canyon expedition, "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," came within a few votes of displacing Mary Austin’s "Land of Little Rain" atop the nonfiction Chronicle Western 100, published in May. (The lists will run side by side in this year’s Holiday Book Review issue on November 21.)

Although several Wallace Stegner novels and story collections received multiple votes, none drew such impassioned lobbying as his 1971 classic "Angle of Repose." Its twin-track construction, in which a modern historian’s research alternates with the frontier struggles of his grandparents a century before, has been much imitated but rarely, if ever, matched.

"Angle of Repose’s" lovely title refers to the position in which an object tumbling downward — whether through highland terrain or through history — comes to rest. Here is where the rest of the top 10 found their angles of repose:

Very nearly jumping in within the top 10 is Stegner’s claim was John Steinbeck’s "The Grapes of Wrath," which might have won Steinbeck’s other masterpieces notwithstanding. Seems all the better to see his better-known "One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest" to place third.

"The Call of the Wild," by Oakland’s own Jack London, and "The Big Sleep," another Philip Marlowe case, were tied for fourth.

Books Page 84 Col. 1
London, Chandler Make Top Five in Chronicle List

**THE CHRONICLE’S WESTERN 100 LIST OF 20TH CENTURY FICTION**

| 3. | "Sometimes a Great Notion," by Ken Kesey |
| 5. | "The Big Sleep," by Raymond Chandler |
| 7. | "Death Comes for the Archbishop," by Willa Cather |
| 8. | "The Day of the Locust," by Nathanael West |
| 11. | "The Ox-Bow Incident," by Walter Van Tilburg Clark |
| 12. | "English Creek," by Ivan Doig |
| 13. | "Even Cowgirls Get the Blues," by Tom Robbins |
| 14. | "Snow Falling on Cedars," by David Guterson |
| 15. | "On the Road," by Jack Kerouac |
| 17. | "Lonesome Dove," by Larry McMurtry |
| 18. | "McTeague," by Frank Norris |
| 22. | "Coyote Waits," by Tony Hillerman |
| 23. | "Play It As It Lays," by Joan Didion |
| 25. | "Vineyard," by Thomas Pynchon |
| 27. | "Crooked Little Heart," by Anne Lamott |
| 29. | "Where I'm Calling From," by Raymond Carver |
| 30. | "Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book," by Maxine Hong Kingston |
| 32. | "The House of the Spirits," by Isabel Allende |
| 33. | "Women in Their Beds," by Gini Bernet |
| 34. | "Rumors of Peace," by Ella Leffland |
| 36. | "Riders of the Purple Sage," by Zane Grey |
| 37. | "Shane," by Jack Schaefer |
| 38. | "Stone for Ibarra," by Harriet Doerr |
| 40. | "Trout Fishing in America," by Richard Brautigan |
| 43. | "The Last Tycoon," by F. Scott Fitzgerald |
| 44. | "O!" by Upton Sinclair |
| 45. | "Marieet in Ecstasy," by Ron Hansen |
| 46. | "The Virginian," by Owen Wister |
| 47. | "A Yellow Raft in Blue Water," by Michael Dorris |
| 49. | "Hawaii," by James Michener |
| 50. | "The Postman Always Rings Twice," by James M. Cain |
| 51. | "Mrs. Bridge," by Evan S. Connell |
| 52. | "The Golden Gate," by Vivian Jones |
| 53. | "Stone from the River," by Ursula Hegi |
| 54. | "Tell Me a Riddle," by Tillie Olsen |
| 55. | "Rabbit Boy," by Thomas Sanchez |
| 56. | "Bless Me, Ultima," by Rudolfo A. Anaya |
| 58. | "Laughing Boy," by Oliver LaRage |
| 60. | "Rose," by Marin Cruz Smith |
| 61. | "Fat City," by Leonard Gardner |
| 63. | "Yellow Bach Radio Broke-Down," by Ishmael Reed |
| 64. | "Tattoo the Wicked Cross," by Floyd Salas |
| 66. | "Lying Low," by Diane Johnson |
| 67. | "Tales of the City," by Armistead Maupin |
| 68. | "Superior Women," by Alice Adams |
| 69. | "Field of Vision," by Wright Morris |
| 70. | "Nobody's Angel," by Thomas McGuane |
| 71. | "Little Big Man," by Thomas Berger |
| 72. | "Budding Prospects," by T.C. Boyle |
| 73. | "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven," by Sherman Alexie |
| 74. | "Angel Fire," by Ron Fraschetti |
| 75. | "Cowboys Are My Weakness," by Pam Houston |
| 76. | "Love Medicine," by Louise Erdrich |
| 77. | "Hondo," by Louis L'Amour |

- **Raymond Chandler and other L.A. writers were shown unexpectedly generous treatment by a predominantly Northern California electorate.**

- Like the "Grapes of Wrath" and "The Big Sleep," Nathanael West's "The Day of the Locust" (No. 8) dates from that annus mirabilis of Western writing, 1939. It paved the way for such subsequent Hollywood novels on the list as F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Last Tycoon" (No. 43) and Joan Didion's "Play It As It Lays" (No. 23) and will form the basis for "Storylines California's" next literary roundtable at 10 p.m. November 20 on KQED (89.5 FM).

- The ninth spot on the list almost set off a range war. As reader Jason Bennett of San Jose rightly asked, "By excluding Texas from the list of 'Western states'... are you seriously suggesting that any list of the best 20th century fiction from the western part of the United States would be complete without Cormac McCarthy's 'All the Pretty Horses' or 'Blood Meridian,' not to mention the best works of Larry McMurtry?"

- Ouch. On the contrary, we simply suggested that any definition of the West had better start somewhere. The Rockies seemed as good a place as any and a better one than most. But cartographic tradition stubbornly refuses to admit the Rockies south into Texas, preferring to call them the Guadalupe Mountains from the moment they cross the New Mexico-Texas border. Anyone looking at the earth instead of a map can see that the westernmost ear of Texas sits well west of the Rockies, thus allowing McMurtry ("Lonesome Dove," No. 17) and especially the East Texas-based McCarthy ("Blood Meridian," No. 9) into any sensible definition of the West.

- Right in our own backyard, Dashiell Hammett's "The Maltese Falcon" didn't need any gerrymandering to join Chandler, Tony Hillerman ("Coyote Waits," No. 22) and Ross Macdonald ("The Underground Man," No. 28) among the West's best mystery fiction. Other fiction expressly about San Francisco fared well on the list too, including Amy Tan's "The Joy Luck Club" (No. 16), Frank Norris' "McTeague: A Story of San Francisco" (No. 18) and Armistead Maupin's "Tales of the City" (No. 67).

- But does any of this mean anything, or is it just another list in a year far too full of them? For those of us engaged in the quixotic project of advocating for the literature of the Western United States, it means at least these few—blessedly unnumbered—things:
  - That some of us have a lot of reading to do before we can even begin to call ourselves well acquainted with the literature of the West.
  - That catching up on such reading will never be easy until more publishers such as UC Press (which has recently brought "R. D. Grant," No. 44; "Fat City," No. 61; and "The Vineyard," No. 79) keep in print as part of its California Fiction series) recognize Western writing's enduring value.
  - And that, wherever the West is, 600 readers have done its literature a large and richly deserved favor.

*Chronicle Book Editor David Kipen's column runs every Thursday in Datebook. He can be reached at kipend@sfgate.com*
ARCHIVAL

--checking materials

--interviews & reviews

--ms drafts
Writers of the century

Denise Levertov

Claim to fame: Prize-winning poet known for protesting U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War and for her commitment to other causes of social justice.


Personal bio: Levertov, born in England in 1923, was the daughter of a Russian Jew who had converted and become an Anglican priest. She was educated at home and as a girl aspired to be a dancer. But even in her teens she began to change course, and she had her first book of poetry published when she was in her early 20s. Marriage to an American writer brought her to this country in 1946, and she became a citizen in 1955. In the process, Levertov fell under the influence of the poet William Carlos Williams and became a poet with a thoroughly American sensibility. During a long career as a teacher, translator and editor, she earned her greatest distinction as a poet and writer, being a trailblazer for others by using her language for political protest — against the Vietnam War, the United States' support of rightwing military governments in Central America and the Gulf War, among other things. She died from lymphoma in Seattle in 1997.

Literary notes: Levertov's Catholicism and commitment to peace and social justice fueled much of her work, which is notable for its meditative quality and inquiry into the nature of spiritual insight. Some of her later poems reflect her time spent in the Pacific Northwest landscape.


H.L. Davis

Claim to fame: Oregon's only Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction.

Notable work: "Honey in the Horn" (1935)

Northwest connection: Born and raised in Oregon.

Personal bio: Davis was born in the Cascade foothills northeast of Roseburg in 1894 or '96 (reports vary). He spent his early years in the towns and settlements along the Umpqua River, then moved on to Antelope and The Dalles, where he graduated from high school. He lived there and worked at various jobs — as a cowboy, typesetter and surveyor, among other things — before receiving his first recognition as a writer for his poetry. Avoiding a role in the Northwest literary community, Davis was more influenced by Eastern writers of his day, including the critic H.L. Mencken, who may have encouraged him to switch to prose writing. In 1932 Davis left on a Guggenheim Fellowship for Mexico, never to return. There, he wrote "Honey in the Horn," his prize-winning novel of the West, which won a Pulitzer in 1936. He died in San Antonio in 1960.

Literary notes: "Honey in the Horn" could be called the "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" of the Northwest, a work of fiction about homesteading in Oregon in the early 20th century. It has a large cast of restless characters — a cast so large that some critics panned the book for lacking a clear plot when it was first published — and through them Davis showed what it was like to work at such traditional turn-of-the-century occupations as logging, farming and trading horses while yearning for a better life.

More recommended reads: Although he wrote several other novels, "Honey in the Horn" is the classic.
Ivan Doig

10

Claim to fame: A novelist whose fictional and autobiographical writing tell the story of Montana better than most history books.

Notable works: The memoir "This House of Sky" (1978) and the fiction trilogy that consists of "English Creek" (1984), "Dancing at the Rascal Fair" (1987) and "Ride with Me, Mariah Montana" (1990).

Northwest connection: Doig earned a doctorate in history from the University of Washington in 1969 and has lived in Seattle ever since.

Personal bio: Doig, born in 1939 to a shepherding family who lived on the Montana ranch, grew up determined to work with his head, not his hands. He earned a full scholarship to Northwestern University, worked on a newspaper in Illinois and for a magazine in Chicago, then headed for Seattle. After earning his Ph.D., he worked as a free-lance magazine writer while his wife, Carol, taught at a community college. Doig soon decided journalism was too limiting a form for the stories he wanted to tell.

Literary notes: Doig's writing merges his meticulous historical research with fictional characters whose lives are emblematic of the periods about which he writes. He has brought his personal heritage to bear in his most powerful works by creating fictional characters who emigrated from Scotland to Montana, much as his own family did — and, in his bid for historical accuracy, he has been particularly attentive to the sound of language, re-creating the burr of his ancestors brought across the Atlantic. He has received repeated awards from the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association and a distinguished achievement award from the Western Literary Association.

More recommended reads: "Bucking the Sun" (1996)

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OPENING NIGHT SWEET AND LOWDOWN DIRECTOR: WOODY ALLEN US 1999
Jazz has long been one of Woody Allen's obsessions, and it provides the basis for his witty new film that takes its title from Gershin's classic song. Combining feature film narrative with a Jazzy-like faux documentary style, the story traces the life of the fictional Emmett Ray (Seymour Penn), the world's second-greatest jazz guitarist, but probably first-place megalomaniac.

SPECIAL THANKS TO SONY PICTURES CLASSICS.

INSTRUMENT DIRECTOR: JIM COHEN US 1999
Far from a traditional documentary, this collaboration between filmmaker Jim Cohen and Fugazi is a musical scrapbook of the decade since the militant cult-guitar band's inception in 1986.

CO-SPOONDED BY KBOO COMMUNITY RADIO.

Best known for his music for THE WIZARD OF OZ, Arlen also composed such classics as "Blues in the Night," "Stormy Weather," "It's Only a Paper Moon," "One For My Baby," "That Old Black Magic," and dozens of other gems. Drawing on a wealth of home movies, interviews and vintage performances by Judy Garland, Lena Horne, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Barbara Streisand, Cab Calloway, Tony Bennett and Mel Torme, the range of Arlen's creative accomplishments is wonderfully to life.

VISITING ARTIST THE SILENCE OF THE ANGES DIRECTOR: OLIVER MILLE FRANCE 1999
With images and sounds of breathtaking clarity, Mike's film is a once-in-a-lifetime, architectural and spiritual expedition through the Byzantine world. From the mountains of the Balkans to the dark grottoes of Athens, from the high plains of Ethiopia to the solitude of the Egyptian desert, to the ice-locked churches of the far North of Russia, the chants of Orthodox Christians echo as if in call and response across continents, cultures and centuries.

VISITING ARTIST LOUIS PRIMA: THE WILDEST DIRECTOR: DON McGLYNN US 1999
If you need to recharge your batteries after New Year's, tune in to Don Mcglynn's exuberant new film on Louis Prima, Keely Smith and the lounge culture they ruled. A patron saint of the cocktail age, and of such recent films as BIG NIGHT and SWINGERS, Prima's trajectory from New Orleans trumpet/singer in the 30s, to 52nd Street and Hollywood hepcat in the 40s, to Rat Pack God in the 50s came via his wild fusion of Italian, novelty, jazz, swing, rock and pop sensibilities.

Compared to everything from SPINAL TAP to THE KING OF COMEDY to DON QUIXOTE, DRIVER 23 is the hilarious profile of Dan Cleveland of Minneapolis—would-be heavy metal rocker by night and a delivery driver by day. Cleveland's film documents the hapless Cleveland's efforts to become a rock deity while his life is barely held together by Prozac and duct tape.

PRESENTED BY THE NORTHWEST FILM CENTER PORTLAND ART MUSEUM 503/221-1156 www.nwfilm.org
Readers Rank Doig, Didion Works Among Best Nonfiction

Both MacLean books had votes enough to make the list, as did multiple books by other writers, but a decision was made early on to adopt a one-book-per-author proviso. One hundred sounds like a lot, but it's not, and too many worthy writers came up short as is, even without having to compete for a spot against five different John Muir titles.

McFadden took time to drop a postcard on behalf of Didion's "White Album" ("still her best book"), Herbert Gold's "Pathers" (not nonfiction and therefore ineligible but "a modern American masterpiece" just the same) and Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It" (outpulled by hit more frankly nonfictional "Young Men and Fire").

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Didion's new high on the list in part to the intercession of Cyra McFadden -- herself no mean writer of nonfiction, as anyone who's read her memoir "Rain or Shine" can attest. McFadden took time to drop a postcard on behalf of Didion's "White Album" ("still her best book"), Herbert Gold's "Fathers" (not nonfiction and therefore ineligible but "a modern American masterpiece" just the same) and Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It" (outpulled by hit more frankly nonfictional "Young Men and Fire").

John McPhee
His "Assembling California" was No. 7

John Steinbeck
Co-wrote "Sea of Cortez," at No. 28

"And like his opposite number at the Los Angeles Times, Robert Kirsch, read himself into an early grave. To them for their service to Western literature, and to the erudite readers who made this list possible, The Chronicle Western 100 is gratefully dedicated. To those readers, we extend their chance to vote for patient. Nonfiction is only half the story.

David Kipen is The Chronicle's book editor. He can be reached at kipend@sfchronicle.com

The Chronicle's Western 100

1. "Land of Little Rain," Mary Austin
2. "Beyond the Hundredth Meridian," Wallace Stegner
3. "Desert Solitaire," Edward Abbey
4. "This House of Sky," Ivan Doig
5. "Son of the Morning Star," Evan S. Gernert
6. The Western Trilogy, Bernard DeVoto
8. "My First Summer in the Sierra," John Muir
10. "City of Quartz," Mike Davis
11. "Onedad by Hunger," George Rippey Stewart
12. "In Search of the White World," Theodore Kroeber
13. "Americans and the California Dream" (two volumes), Kevin Starr
15. "A Sand County Almanac," Aldo Leopold
17. "Arctic Dreams," Barry Lopez
18. "Farewell to Manzanar," Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, James D. Houston
20. "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee," Dee Brown
24. "And the Band Played On," Randy Shilts
25. "The Big Four," Oscar Lewis
27. "In the Spirit of Crazy Horse," Peter Matthiessen
34. "Land of Giants: The Drive to the Pacific Northwest, 1750-1950," David Steward Welty
35. "Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Ogallala," Max Sandoro
36. "City of Nets," Otto Friedrich
37. "Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place," Terry Tempest Williams
38. "The Content of Our Character," Sally Rawlings
40. "Winter," Rick Bass
42. "The Woman Warrior," Maxine Hong Kingston
43. "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test," Tom Wolfe
44. "I Lost It at the Movies," Pauline Kael
45. "The Devil's Dictionary," Ambrose Bierce
46. "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," Hunter S. Thompson
47. "The Book of the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are," Alan Watts
49. "Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the California Coast," Daniel Diane
50. "This Boy's Life," Tobias Wolff
51. "Books in My Baggage," Lawrence Clark Powell
53. "Men to Match My Mountains," Irving Stone
54. "Love and Will," Rolo May
56. "The All-Conditioned Nightmare," Harry Mort
57. "T. Rex and the Crater of Doom," Walter Alvarez
63. "The Executioner's Song," Norman Mailer
64. "The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West," Patricia Nelson Limerick
65. "Living Up the Street: Narrative Recollections," Gary Soto
67. "California Fault: Searching for the Spirit of a State along the San Andreas," Thurston Clarke
68. "Long Gone Traveler," Jack Kerouac
69. "The Ohmone Day," Malcolm Margolin
73. "Twentieth Century Pleasures: Prose on Reading," Robert Hass
74. "Skid Road: An Informal Portrait of Seattle," Murray Morgan
76. "The Klamath Knot," David Rams Wallace
77. "Sweet Promised Land," Robert Laxalt
78. "History of the Sierra Nevada," Francis P. Farquhar
81. "Final Cut," Steven Bach
83. "How We Saved Myself and None of My Own: A New History of the American West," Richard White
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