



Dancing at the Rascal Fair

Ivan Doig

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The central volume in Ivan Doig's acclaimed Montana trilogy, *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* is an authentic saga of the American experience at the turn of this century and a passionate, portrayal of the immigrants who dared to try new lives in the imposing Rocky Mountains.

Ivan Doig's supple tale of landseekers unfolds into a fateful contest of the heart between Anna Ramsay and Angus McCaskill, walled apart by their obligations as they and their stormy kith and kin vie to tame the brutal, beautiful Two Medicine country.

Dancing at the Rascal Fair Details

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From Reader Review Dancing at the Rascal Fair for online ebook

Steven Walle says

In the book "Dancing at The Rascal Fair" Ivan Doig describes a wonderful story of perseverance, adventure, exploration and love. This story is about two Scottish friends who travel to America to give life over here a shot. It takes place in 1889, the year Montana became a state. They come over on a rough voyage on a ship and they become shepherds in a dry land farming section of Montana called Grovant.

I encourage all y'all to read this great book.

Enjoy and Be Blessed.

Diamond

Linda Hart says

Like Montana winters, this was way too long. I got bogged down a little halfway through, but I continued because the narrator, Robert Ian McKenzie was terrific. I kept thinking I'd never finish the book if I had to read it, and was almost gleeful when there were only 2 cds (of 17) left and the end was in sight! That ending is not only depressing, but there is no satisfying resolution. Whistling Season is much better, and you'll like the ending, but this not one. I read it first and consider it one of the best books I read this year, so I read this hoping for more of the same but was hugely disappointed. The story drags; I wanted to slap the 2 main characters upside the head; and there is precious little humor in it. I give the author, Doig, credit for ably conveying the homesteaders' exhaustion and defeat to the reader. I was exhausted and relieved when the narrative ended.

Dana says

Readers who love Norman MacLean (*A River Runs Through It*) and Wallace Stegner (*Angle of Repose*, *Crossing to Safety*) will appreciate Ivan Doig. In the voice of a young Scottish immigrant to Montana, he writes a novel about making a life. Acts of God and very human choices intersect against a backdrop of homesteading, sheepherding, the newly-created National Forest Service, World War I, influenza, and always the manic and skulking weather. Doig spins a tale that is not easy or light but very beautiful.

Marcia Rodney says

an audiobook for me, I've been inhaling the Doig books backwards in time, having found *The Whistling Season* in a shop in Red Cloud, MT. I finally found the McGaskill who emigrated! Not everyone will like this -- the language is very rich, and the themes of turn of the century Montana settlement near the Two Medicine may get a bit redundant as we wind through the final third of the book, but I loved it -- the struggles with family, with women, with sheep, with all that new coming over the horizon, and what is possibly my favorite term since finding it in a later Doig work, those first Park Arrangers. Well, somebody had to arrange the national forest, didn't they? The reader on this version was excellent, I could've listened to his accent and style for hours -- and I did.

Book Concierge says

3.5 stars

Rob Barclay and Angus McCaskill leave Scotland for Montana, where Rob's uncle Lucas is "a miner." But what they don't know is that Lucas's mine, aptly named the Great Maybe, is no more. In fact, Lucas lost his hands in the explosion and is now a saloonkeeper in a small town, Gros Ventre, with a Native American "housekeeper," Nancy.

Once they find him, though, nothing will keep the boys from trying to make their fortunes along with Lucas. And he helps stake them. They homestead and begin life as sheep ranchers.

Angus narrates the story, taking us from 1889 to 1919. His love for fellow schoolteacher Anna Ramsey is a central theme, although Anna breaks his heart and Angus eventually marries Rob's younger sister Adair. She is a good partner for him, if not the passionate love he's envisioned.

There is some absolutely beautiful writing, and Doig gives us all the emotions of life – laughter, love, grief, despair, anger, jealousy, and happiness.

One thing that did put me off a bit was Angus's pining over Anna for so long. It reminded me of Scarlett O'Hara mooning over Ashley Wilkes beyond all reason, and without any encouragement. I'd have given the book a full four stars but for that.

I think I'll read more of his work. I know that my husband would like this book. I think that my brother might appreciate it as well.

Susan says

What I liked about this novel:

- The sense of time and place: Montana homesteading in the late 1800's and early 1900's.
- The Scottish immigrant characters.
- And probably not unrelatedly, the way a glass of whiskey is frequently being hoisted.
- The homespun feel of homestead life.
- The descriptions of sheep-ranching.
- The historical information about World War I and the Influenza Epidemic.
- The bits of verse woven into the prose.

What I was less enthralled by:

- The central thesis (and plot driver), involving unfulfilled love pined after for decades, which seemed unrealistic to me.
- A contrived feel.
- A tendency toward melodrama.
- Plot points that were predictable or noticeably contrived.
- Overly wordy writing.
- The sense that it needed (at least) one more good editing.

In summary, although I have enjoyed some across-the-decades family sagas, this was not the one for me.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Ivan Doig belongs to that rare class of alchemists who can turn language into music.

Mitrik Spanner says

I loved this book! It's got so much going for it and it covers so much good ground.

The book begins with a pair of young Scots immigrating to Montana in the 1880s. Filled with the boundless energy of youth and full of possibility they arrived in a virtually unpopulated land of incredible beauty. It follows their lives as they claim prime homestead land and sees them through the hardships, of which there are many, and the triumphs of which there are also quite a few. Sheep ranchers are what they become. First as bachelors, then as men with wives and children, and then as men and women feeling the toll of years of hard work, but satisfied at what they've created and of having put the next generation into the world. They endure the vagaries of changing climate and uncertain economy, the influenza epidemic of 1918 and World War I. They live to see their beloved Montana filling up with a population and civilizing influences. By the end of the book some have suffered fatally bad luck. Some have given up and quit the country, others have just gotten by and others have done better than that.

Ivan Doig's research to prepare for this book was painstaking and extensive and it shows. As a person, myself, who spent a summer working and living with a Montana homesteader couple, I can say that this book is almost as good as the real thing.

Karen McKeown says

Possibly well written, but I'm afraid I was so distracted by the self-involved narrator ("protagonist") and the object of his unrequited love. I have no patience for people/characters whose self-absorption & selfishness causes real unhappiness in those around them. I was utterly disgusted with the main character by the end of the book.

So, to be fair, I honestly couldn't tell you if the book itself was good or not. :-)) I know others who really loved this book. But I also know of three other close friends who hated the book for the same reason I did.

Chrissie says

I give up. I have written two reviews for this and both I have trashed. I cannot do the book justice. The lines are wonderful. The writing is not brash, but subtle. The relationships are beautifully portrayed. The book is about friendship and love. Love isn't always returned. How do you live with that? Does love then die? Can you love another? And what happens every time you meet up with that person who does not return your love?

Excellent historical fiction. A time and a place become real - something you live, not just something you

read about.

Nancy says

Four and a half stars for a Montana homesteading saga that takes us through three generations of two intertwined families in beautiful Two Medicine country. It 's a long and sprawling story, written in Ivan Doig's rich, descriptively unique voice.

It's a slowly told tale--Doig takes his time, and repeats his themes and points. In order to enjoy the book, you have to decide, early on, that you want to hear every colorful detail, that you're in it for the long haul. If you can do that, it's a rewarding experience.

Della O'Shea says

When I was a child, I had a wooden puzzle map of the United States. I was especially drawn to the "Montana" piece and remember telling my older sister I wanted to live there when I was grown up. I am now 63 and had never been to Montana, until I went there with Ivan Doig in this novel, which opens in 1889. Doig's words paint a beautiful description of the prairies and mountains, so vivid that they easily matched the photos of the Badger-Two Medicine portion of the Lewis and Clark National Forest that I found on-line while immersed in the story. The central characters of Scottish immigrants, Angus and Rob, were well defined and their story of traversing the land and their decades-long brotherly friendship was continually captivating. Their connection to each other and to the women in their lives reflect the jagged highs and lows of the surrounding Rockies. Their courage, strength and determination is shared with their fellow homesteaders and I frequently found myself admiring the lives they built on the frontier, on "land available for the taking", while just over the horizon, I was painfully aware of the cost to Native American lives and culture. This book, however, barely touches on that historical conflict, and instead kept me focused on the characters; their struggles to live lives of value amid the harsh and unpredictable emotional territory and physical environment they encountered. I loved reading this book, so although I have 20+ books waiting on my "to read" shelf, I am currently at the library, checking out the second in Doig's Two-Medicine trilogy, "English Creek". This next book continues the story of Angus's son, Varick, beginning in 1939. That the author, born in that same year, is the grandson of Montana homesteaders clearly informs the narrative and the lines seeps authenticity.

Krisette Spangler says

This novel was so frustrating. I love Mr. Doig's style of writing and the first third of this novel was riveting. Then, Angus McCaskill doesn't get to marry the woman he loves. He spends the rest of the novel whining and pining for the woman he can't have rather than focusing on the wonderful wife he is married to. It's so irritating and completely ruined the rest of the novel. Skip this one and read 'The Whistling Season' instead.

Barbara LeMere says

This was a really good read and I recommend it to everyone. Ivan Doig has a wonderful writing style that

really involves you right from the get go. My only complaint about this book was the font was incredibly small. Doig's writing is very dense. He packs a lot in to a page but it was a bit of a slog because of the font.

The story revolves around two young Scotsman, Angus MCaskill and his childhood friend Rob Barclay who are about to embark on a voyage to from their town in Scotland to Montana in America. Robs family has a relative who went To Montana years ago and they get the occasional Christmas letter with a welcome \$100 enclosed. Lucas, the relative was a miner and Rob and Angus hope to make their fortunes there. Rob was a wheelright, and Angus worked with a teacher and was an accountant and also helped the teacher so they have skills and some money.

Doig's lyrical style is full of good humor, and wonderful description of the Ocean voyage the journey across country and their somewhat shocked and confused impressions when they finally get to the town where they find Lucas. It was a really enjoyable read. This book is part of the Montana trilogy but this is the second book and I am not sure if the other two have the same characters in them. Two thumbs up from me.

Kathy says

It took me more than 6 months to read this book. I could only read a couple pages at a time. It is so wordy and slow moving but I was determined to finish it and hopefully find out what my friend found so compelling about Ivan Doig's writing. She loves Montana. That wasn't enough for me. The relationships of families, friends, and neighbors were quite real--all except the pining of the main character for another man's wife. If that was supposed to give the book spice, it failed miserably.

Seth says

I was moved by the reflective voice of the narrative. There were many elements that make this a five star book for me. First, the writing is poetic and delicately stated.

Second, the history of the setting places the story in a very nostalgic period of American homesteading. I love the setting. For some reason I feel particularly connected to the late 1800's and early 1900's. The wild Montana frontier life during this period fascinates me and completely captured my imagination in this novel.

Next, the story of friendship and family connections was compelling and sober. While many may disagree that this is Doig's weakest part of the writing, I think that the relationships remind me faintly of the classical Don Quixote and Sancho Panza duo. I realize that I see Quixote and Sancho in literature like a Guadelupan sees the Virgin in fabric. However, Angus the romantic seem as impractical as Quixote. Further, I found beauty in the consequences of fanciful sentimentalism in a Montana homesteader. You simply can't afford wasting anything in Montana, most of all your heart. Its a truly frontier response to the Quixote question of whether its noble to be delusional.

Additionally, Rob's pragmatism parallels Sancho. Rob's pragmatism like Angus's romantacism, leads to disaster. His pragmatism leads him to believe too much in manifest destiny. He believed too strongly that the world was his to bend to his will. Montana proved too powerful for even someone as stubborn as a Barclay. Thus, Doig rewrites the pragmatist as every bit as delusional as a romantic. He made the classic Quixote

model his own and interpreted it beautifully and convincingly through the lens of a frontiersman. The novel is a masterpiece.

There are some obvious issues other reviewers address. Many complain that Angus couldn't have been so manly and mature in so many ways but remained emotionally immature with his lifelong infatuation of his first love. I agree that this is almost unbelievable. However, realistic characters can't be average and like everyone in every category, otherwise, they are simply characters compiled of statistics. A character written to statistical probabilities can be no more believable than one possessing abnormalities of the heart.

I find an additional concern more persuasive. Angus and Rob's eventual falling out led to a life ending in years of enmity towards one another. The book concluded beautifully as a result of this enmity. However, the premise that the enmity was naturally related to Angus's misplaced love might be too much for even me (a man always seeing Quixote in every novel). Thus, perhaps the enmity should have been more developed so not to strain the imagination as much as was required. Yet, I find myself inspired by the story driven by the enmity and resist dwelling upon the underdeveloped justification for it because in the end the enmity climaxed with beautiful symbolism. I was utterly moved when at the conclusion a Sancho (Rob) rides Quixote's heart (Angus's horse) into ice cold water, drowning both Sancho and the heart of Quixote. I can only feel grateful the enmity existed so I could witness the beautifully rendered conclusion to a thoroughly enjoyable novel.

Diane says

I love Ivan Doig's books, his prose is so beautiful, and this book is no exception. It involves two young Scottish men who emigrate to Montana in the 1800s, and their lives thereafter, which are intertwined as business partners in shepherding, and the narrator's marriage to the man's sister. But it also is very sad, showing the hardships the pioneers had to endure in the terrible Montana winters, the loss of animals, the difficulties of shepherding, and an additional story of unrequited love. A very interesting book, but because of the sadness it is not really that enjoyable a story, but for lovers of Doig's books it is invaluable.

Judy says

The characters are vividly alive and the setting is realistic. Angus, however, is frustrating. Is his lifelong obsession realistic? This is the second in Doig's three-book series, Two Medicine Country, but I wish that I'd read it first (or at least soon after I'd read the first book).

In the middle of the book (p 241), the national forests are established, and the new ranger has to address the angry and frustrated ranchmen. The ranger explains,

"I used to ask people what they were going to do when the land wore out. And they always said that when they'd used the country up, they'd just move on. But I don't know of anything you can just keep on using up and using up and using up, and not run out of. And that's all the Forest Service is saying with this Two Medicine National Forest. You can use it, but not use it up."

Margie says

I liked this book so much that I had to ask myself what it was besides beautiful writing, compelling characters, riveting story lines and fascinating historical fiction that drew me in to life in northern Montana in the late 1800s and early 1900s. This is a dense book and one that should be savoured, but I devoured it page after page.

Comparing it to two other five star books that I have read in the last few years, *Cold Mountain* and *Brown Girl Dreaming*, I loved *Dancing at the Rascal Fair* for absorbing me completely into another world and connecting me with my ancestral past. I felt a "sense of place" in each of these books, a link to my southern ancestors in *Cold Mountain* and *Brown Girl Dreaming*, and a link to my Scottish-Canadian ancestors in *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*.

I can see why people are passionate about Ivan Doig, many declaring him their favorite writer. After I complete this trilogy, I plan to read Mr. Doig's memoir, *This House of Sky*, which was a National Book Award finalist.

Dancing at the Rascal Fair, by the way, even though #2 in Mr. Doig's Two Medicine trilogy, takes place before #1 in the series, *English Creek*. I would have preferred to have read them in chronological order, but this is just personal preference. I once again thank the L.A. Times for its enlightening obituary of Ivan Doig and introducing me to this skilled and passionate writer.

<http://edition2.latimes.com/Olive/OD...>

Tony says

Long historical novels about immigrant life in the US around the turn of the 20th century are very low on my list of must-reads, and so I would never have picked this up had it not been selected for my book club. I figured I'd dip into it dutifully, find it mind-numbing, and then sit respectfully by as the more dedicated members of our bookclub dissected it. What I did not expect is that the writing would suck me in from the earliest pages, and that the page-turner plotting would keep me interested until the end.

The trick is, that despite the incredible amount of archival research that must have gone into creating this tale of Scottish immigrants to the upper northwest of Montana in the 1890s, the book is really good ole' soap opera. It starts on the Glasgow docks with two teenage friends watching in horror as a horse slips into the water and drowns. They then embark on a fearsome trans-Atlantic crossing, and make their way to Montana, where one of them has a prosperous uncle who immigrated years before. What follows are the next 25-30 years of trials and tribulations as the two friends homestead and become sheep ranchers in the vicinity of what is now Glacier National Park. Key to the story are the romantic lives of the two men, and how various triumphs and disappointments feed and starve their own friendship.

I won't get into all the twists and turns of the plot, but there's plenty there to keep one reading on. Woven in are how the larger forces of the world (weather, war, viruses) kick aside the best-laid plans of even honest, hard-working people. Doig's dialogue is chock full of keen turns of phrase, and his descriptions of physical landscape are striking without feeling overwrought. Definitely recommended to anyone from Montana, and anyone who's at all interested in what the life of a homesteading American would have been at the time.
