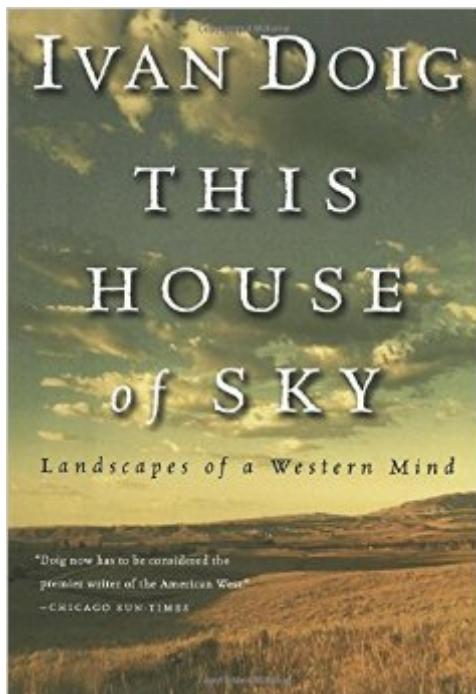


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This House Of Sky: Landscapes Of A Western Mind



Synopsis

A haunting, magnificently written memoir by Ivan Doig about growing up in the American West Ivan Doig grew up in the rugged wilderness of western Montana among the sheepherders and denizens of small-town saloons and valley ranches. What he deciphers from his past with piercing clarity is not only a raw sense of land and how it shapes us but also of the ties to our mothers and fathers, to those who love us, and our inextricable connection to those who shaped our values in our search for intimacy, independence, love, and family. A powerfully told story, This House of Sky is at once especially American and universal in its ability to awaken a longing for an explicable past.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a writer, Ivan Doig is something of a favorite son in Montana, and for good reason. His memoir is a rhapsody of affection for the land where he grew up -- the small towns, homesteads and ranches in the Smith River Valley, along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, extending north to the Blackfeet Reservation on the Canadian border. It's also a wonderful and often touching story of a father and son. Born in 1939, Doig begins his tale with the emigration of his forebears from Scotland to Montana. At the end, in the 1970s, he has emerged as a writer with a graduate degree, living in Seattle, with rich and deeply felt memories of the people and the land he has known -- the house of sky. An only child, his mother dying when he is six years old, Doig is raised by his father, Charlie, who works various jobs, sheepherding, haying, moving from place to place, and for a while leasing a small ranch of his own, his son in tow. Charlie is a hard-working man, with a big heart and tender

love for his son. Concerned by a turn of bad health, he is reconciled to his mother-in-law, who did not approve of her daughter's marriage to him, and the three of them become a family that remains together until Charlie's death at age 70. The book captures and preserves in detail a way of life that has almost vanished from America. Doig tells of growing up in wide open spaces among livestock and wildlife, learning from his father the skills of making a living off the land and surviving against the odds. He attends small town schools, spending the winters in rented rooms, seeing his father and grandmother only on weekends. Much of his time spent with adults or alone, he grows up more quickly than his peers and learns to love solitude. At 300+ pages, this is not a long book, but it's no page-turner.

Read this in the company of someone else. Every five minutes or so you'll call attention to something in the text -- a choice description, a picturesque flow of words, a bit of hilarity that will reduce you both to laughter. This is a book to be shared. Doig is a gifted writer with the facility of a James Agee in his choice of words and phrasing. On the page he presents a constant wild, vivid sensory impression, as if you were riding on horseback with him through his beloved Montana hills, sharing the terrain, people and history in ways you hadn't experienced before and couldn't experience anywhere else. His descriptions show keen insight and attention to detail through carefully chosen, apt simile and metaphor. "I had noticed at Jordan's," he writes about a situation he experienced as a child, "...the boarding child is something like a stranded visitor that people get accustomed to half-seeing at the edges of their vision -- and no one, least of all me, seemed to think there was much unusual about my alighting here and there casually as a roosting pullet." As a young boy, exploring: "For by greatest luck a silvered ship, high-hulled and pinging with emptiness, rode at the far end of the ranch buildings. A ship, at least to my imaginings. In the years when the machine chomped broadly through grainfields, it was called a combine. Now this dreadnaught stood, in its tones of dulling metal and cluster of idle gearwheels, for me to climb into..." Here's the epitome of fine writing. You won't find more vivid images anywhere and he doesn't stint at all with language.

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