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BOOKMONGER

A salute to Brian Doyle

Brian Doyle's fertile creative spirit has not only produced a dazzling array of essays and novels, but also guided the editorial content of Portland Magazine for a quarter of a century.

With an abundant vocabulary, dashes of philosophizing and twinkles of humor, Doyle has spun prolific tales of boys, girls, women, men and wildlife endeavoring to live with dignity and purpose and even tenderness. His work often has a whimsical flavor, but it is never inconsequential. The author perceives a world utterly jam-packed with tidbits of beauty and wisdom and comfort — if only we will take notice of them.

His latest work, "The Adventures of John Carson in Several Quarters of the

World," is true to form. With this novel, Doyle ventures to get into the mind of 19th century Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson, who in 1880 had traveled to San Francisco to await his true love's divorce from her first husband. In a matter of months, Fanny Vandegrift Osbourne would become Stevenson's wife.

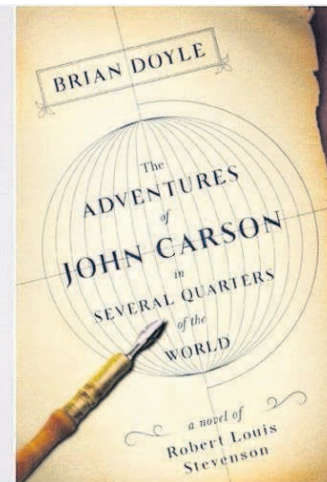
While he bided his time in a Bay Area boarding house — this is a true story — Stevenson became friendly with his landlady, Mrs. Carson, and her seaman husband John Carson, themselves recently married after living separate and remarkable lives that had ranged across continents and oceans.

Stevenson and Mr. Carson became especially close after spending many evenings together, smok-

ing and swapping tales in front of the parlor fireplace. Carson's globetrotting adventures were so splendid that Stevenson hoped to bind them together in a picaresque novel, but that never came to pass.

That's where Doyle has stepped in, deftly braiding together some of the strands of Carson's exceptional life — his work with British naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace in Borneo, his involvement in the Battle of Gettysburg, and so on — with Stevenson's own enthusiastic explorations of his temporary home in the city by the bay.

In 1880, Stevenson was also working feverishly to get his career as a writer off the ground in order to provide for his soon-to-be wife and her children. The tales he



The Adventures of John Carson in Several Quarters of the World – Brian Doyle
St. Martin's Press – 240 pp – \$36.99

ignored life's shadows. And here comes the bad news, for those who don't already know: Doyle is dealing with brain cancer and has entered hospice.

The impulse to mourn is instantaneous, but let's also remember to celebrate this last book — a gift from a generous writer who has always reveled in the "profligacy of creation."

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com

heard from Carson provided him with succor and inspiration, and also confirmed the vitality of story.

Granted, in our age of what another Northwest writer, Timothy Egan, calls "McNugget time," some readers may find that their attention spans are taxed by the languid unspooling of these tales. More's the pity.

No matter who else sits down with "The Adventures of John Carson," anyone who fancies himself or herself a writer will be incalculably enriched by the observations in this book on the craft and imperative of storytelling.

Throughout this and his other works, Doyle's writing has tended toward a sunny outlook, but he has never

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A Journey in Peace
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Benefit Concert – Donations Accepted



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with Seaside's artist:

Lisa Sofia Robinson
Friday, June 2nd • 5PM to 7PM

Visit Suzanne Elise Assisted Living at 101 Forest Drive in Seaside to see this beautiful artwork. Light refreshments will be served. If you have any questions please call Heather at 503-738-0307.



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