

Proulx's novel runs wild as it captures a region's history

BY SAMANTHA GROSS
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

THAT OLD ACE IN THE HOLE

by Annie Proulx (Scribner, \$24)
pages, 526

Either Annie Proulx is a crafty writer indeed, or her new novel simply got away from her. In *That Old Ace in the Hole*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Shipping News* (1994) trails the insatiable Bob Dollar as he infiltrates Woollybuckett, a small town on the Texas Panhandle.

Or at least she tries to. But Proulx's tale keeps veering off course and into the lives and secrets of several generations of Woollybuckett residents. A stubborn but they are, too. "They include hapless pious and heartbroken cowboys, a reserved bride with a lusty, wandering eye, a compulsive Dutchman who strikes it rich, a conniving saleswoman, an incestuous sheriff, a gregarious genealogist who loves deadly spiders, and a bison-herding monk with a masterful command of the lasso."

In Proulx's novel, they run wild across the history of the Panhandle, and amid all the confusion, it seems unlikely that she'll be able to rein them into one tidy package.

Her main plot follows Dollar, a young man sent to Woollybuckett as an undercover land scout for industrial hog farms.

The nuisance farms, where employees are allowed to refer to the livestock only as "pork units," are universally hated in Proulx's Panhandle, where they are seen as an environmental menace and a perversion.

Such terms are not too severe for Woollybuckett, where a chow can become a deadly storm in minutes and disgruntled wives carry shotguns.

Woollybuckett is steeped in history. LaVon, Bob's gritty landlady, has assigned herself

the unenviable task of gathering all the region's yarns, which have left her house overflowing with "boxes of photographs and diaries, faded envelopes" and other "genealogical reminiscence."

Here are winsome tales, filled with enterprising cowboys and robust farm girls who, by the time of the telling, have mostly grown old.

The novel is overrun with these accounts, all of them weighted by a slight nostalgia for lives gone by and a time before forked wire, when herds of cows ran free.

Nostalgia afflicts many Woollybuckett residents, who seem driven to keep things as they were, and Bob comes up against harsh resistance in his quest to acquire land for his employer, Global Pork Inc.

At times it seems Proulx is overreaching. The quick switches between time periods and the extensive cast of characters can be confusing without offering a "cure-all" payoff like those in similar stories.

Proulx never does draw her many tales into a cohesive and streamlined ending. The novel has the flavor of LaVon's files: Family histories, legends and love letters mixed together and spilling out of their boxes.

But the mess Proulx has created is a charming one, and ultimately the chaotic structure of the novel proves to be the one that best fits its story.

Old Ace Crouch, the wizened windmill man who fights Bob's efforts to buy his land, tells Bob: "You think (the Panhandle is) just a place. It's more than that. It's people's lives, it's the history of the country."

Although Proulx gets the right attention, the real protagonists of the novel are the Panhandle's untamed landscape and people.

Both have withstood industry and age, and they are not yet ready to give in to change.

Avon Players

Auditions for *I Hate Hamlet* 6 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 12, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 15, at the theater, 1055 Washington Road, one mile east of the intersection of Tienken and Rochester roads, Rochester Hills. Show dates are Feb. 28 to March 15. (248) 608-9077 or visit the Web site at www.avonplayers.org

Clarkston Village Players

Auditions for its roles for men and two roles for women for *Run for Your Wife*, a comedy by Ray Cooney, 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 12, and 7:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 13, readings will be from the script, at the Depot Theatre, (248) 625-8311

Deborah's Stage Door

Auditions for senior show choir (people ages 13 and older), junior acting conservatory (ages 7-10), advanced acting conservatory (ages 12 and older), children, junior and senior ballet classes, and competition dance lines (ages 5 and older), at the studio in Rochester Hills, (248) 852-8133

Farmington Community Chorus

Chorus will hold new member auditions for its spring session, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 14, at the William Costick Activities Center on II Mile just east of Middlebelt, Farmington Hills. Accepting members from age 19 and older. For information, call (248) 471-4516

Farmington Players

Auditions for *Nunsense* 1 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 18, auditions will receive and be taught music at auditions, and will sing solo and dance (possibly a simple tap dance), at the new Farmington Players

Barn Theater, 32332 West 12 Mile, between Orchard Lake and Farmington roads, Farmington Hills. Call Emily McConney for scripts (248) 626-8167

Franklin Village Band

Adult musicians from southeastern Michigan may join the Franklin Village Band. All instruments welcome, but there is a special need for flutes and clarinets. The band rehearses Monday evenings in the Franklin Community Church social hall on Franklin Road. For more details, call Bill Prisk, (248) 474-8369, or Bob Zimmerman, (313) 535-4109

Livonia Civic Chorus

Looking for people who love to sing and dance for spring concert featuring the music of Andrew Lloyd Webber, basses, tenors, altos to take part in solos, ensembles, dance numbers, and the general chorus, auditions are 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 14, in the choral room at Frost Middle School, 14041 Stark, Call (734) 432-2589 for more information

Livonia Youth Choir

Rehearsals for girls and boys (ages 9-13 in grades 4-8) residing in Livonia and surrounding communities begin Monday, Jan. 13. Due to a major change in the structure of the choir, rehearsal groups will be divided along age lines. It will still be one choir that will present concerts together but rehearse separately. For more information, call (734) 425-1749

Noel Civic Center

Auditions for *Annie*, 4:30 p.m. Feb. 4 and 6. Check-in starts at 4 p.m. Actors, ages 7 through college age, may audition at 4575 W. 10 Mile. Audition packets available at Noel Parks and Recreation, (248) 347-5400

Auditions

Seeking proposals from Michigan artists for fine arts exhibition in the Oakland County Galleria, second floor of the executive building, 1200 N. Telegraph Road, (248) 858-0415

Performance Network

Seeks proposals for its 2003 Treetown Festival May 29 to Aug. 24. Features performing artists from southeast Michigan, looking for an eclectic mix of dance, theater, performance art, new work and the avant garde. Deadline for application is Feb. 7. Call (734) 663-0681 or send e-mail to performance@networkusa.net for a proposal packet. Applications will be available as a PDF file on the Web site www.performancenetwork.org

Plymouth Symphony

Auditions for *Treasures Beyond Measure* Youth Artist Competition, is Jan. 24. Applications available through the Plymouth Symphony. Call (734) 453-2112 for divisions and any additional information. Web site is www.plymouthsymphony.org

Rivendale Players

Auditions for the musical comedy *Do Black Patent Shoes Really Reflect Up?* 7:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 13, at the playhouse, 205 West Long Lake Road, between I-76 and Crooks. They (248) 398-2725

Southfield Presbyterian Church

The directors of *Peeking at the Blues* (A tribute to Bessie Smith) and Dance Theater of Michigan are auditioning for dancers, singers, musicians, actors and comedians. 3 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 18 and 25, 2003, 21575 W. 10 Mile, Southfield. Call (248) 552-5001 or (248) 942-3243 for audition appointments and directions

Spirit of Detroit Sweet Adelines

The chorus auditions women for four-part harmony from 1:10 p.m. every Tuesday at St. Paul Presbyterian Church, 21475 Five Mile, one block west of Inkster, Livonia, (248) 681-2578

Village Players

Auditions for *Cyrano de Bergerac* 1:30 p.m. Sunday-Monday, Jan. 19-20, at the playhouse, 34600 Woodward, Birmingham. For performances March 14-23. (248) 645-1874

The Vocal Arts Ensemble of Michigan

A working a cappella Renaissance group in its 10th year is holding auditions for alto, tenor and bass voices. The repertoire is both sacred and secular and interactive with audiences. Call Cindy Keleman (734) 941-5955 for audition dates

Whistle Stop Players

Auditions for children age 6 and up for spring touring production of *Famous Folk Tales from Around the World* 6:30-8 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 12, and Thursday, Jan. 16, at the Plymouth Community Arts Council 214 North Sheldon at Junction. For performances April 6-8 at arts council, April 7 in local schools. \$50 for arts council members, students membership available for \$30. (734) 416-4278

WHERE CAN I FIND?

Through reader feedback, this interactive feature is dedicated to helping readers locate retail merchandise that's difficult to find. If where a product is sold or service is available, call (248) 901-2555 and leave a message with your name and phone number. Please be patient about your requests and feedback; we receive an overwhelming number of phone calls. Also, please spell any uncommon items. If you don't see information about your request, we couldn't find it. Requests are published twice.

WHAT WE FOUND

Back shampoo can be purchased at area Meijer's, CVS and Spartan stores.
—Donn Kenney slacks in large sizes can be purchased at Re-Run Consignment store (734) 522-2868 and through the JC Penney catalog
—Polish beer Zagorka can be purchased at the beer and wine store next to Bob Evans on Middlebelt and near to Sherwood's on Live Oak and Meridian, (734) 427-0830

Someone who repairs snow globes for Jeanette of Redford.
—An automobile service garage that is open on weekends and until midnight during the week (location unknown maybe in the Livonia area) for Margaret of Westland.
—A store that sells an old-fashioned back scratchers for Leo of Redford Township.
—A store that sells Stewart Little stickers for Hala!
—The cookbook *Home Cooking from Women's Circle* magazine (broccoli soup on the cover) for Carmen.
—A store that sells Weight Watchers

butter spray for popcorn for Ann of Westland.
—A store that sells a Zynch silver belt (Service Merchandise used to sell them) inscribed with the year for Kenny of Redford

—Compiled by Sandi Jarasch

UPCOMING EVENTS

Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company
with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
featuring the Orion String Quartet
Sat 1/11 1 p.m.
Sun 1/12 4 p.m.
Power Center • Ann Arbor
If music and dance go hand in hand, then live music and dance share a more intimate embrace. Bill T. Jones, named an "Inflexible dance treasure" in 2000 by the Dance Heritage Coalition, joins forces with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and the Orion String Quartet for a visionary fusion of dance and chamber music.
Sponsored by the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra
Reservations and tickets available at www.billtjones.com
Box office: (734) 769-1234, ext. 100
Box office hours: Mon-Fri 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun 12 p.m.-4 p.m.
Box office location: 1000 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1000

blessing the boats
A solo performance written and conceived by Sekou Sundiata
Sat 1/17 8 p.m.
Sun 1/18 1 p.m.
Sun 1/19 1 p.m.
Bard College • Ann Arbor
Sekou Sundiata performs one-man shows, blessing the boats, a sequence of poems, prose and monologues derived from stories, legends, literary readings, and performance theater. Blessing the boats is a solo journey with music and a visual feast through three years of the poet's life, leaving witness to his highest and lowest moments. A solo journey through the achievements was not, he says, by a white man and a black man, but by a man who is ultimately and unapologetically a man of color.
Sponsored by the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra
Reservations and tickets available at www.blessingtheboats.com
Box office: (734) 769-1234, ext. 100
Box office hours: Mon-Fri 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun 12 p.m.-4 p.m.
Box office location: 1000 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1000

Sekou Sundiata and Band
with Khary Kinani Turner and Detroit's Black Bottom Collective
Mon 1/20 8 p.m.
Mon 1/21 8 p.m.
Mon 1/22 8 p.m.
Bard College • Ann Arbor
Following a 15-year career in the music industry, Sekou Sundiata has returned to his roots with a new band, the Black Bottom Collective. The band's sound is a fusion of traditional African rhythms and modern soul. Sundiata's music is a celebration of his heritage and a testament to his artistic journey.
Sponsored by the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra
Reservations and tickets available at www.sekoumusic.com
Box office: (734) 769-1234, ext. 100
Box office hours: Mon-Fri 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun 12 p.m.-4 p.m.
Box office location: 1000 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1000

ums 734.764.2538 www.ums.org
Box office: (734) 769-1234, ext. 100
Box office hours: Mon-Fri 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sat 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun 12 p.m.-4 p.m.
Box office location: 1000 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1000

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February 5 is Detroit Public TV Exclusive Premiere Night with Meet & Greet opportunities. All proceeds benefit Detroit Public TV children's programming. Call 313-878-8795 for more information or visit www.detroitpubliclive.com

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Stop by the Farmer Jack booth at the 2003 Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular from January 18-19. Guess the number of Hills Bros Coffee beans in the ice sculpture and win a \$25 gift certificate to Farmer Jack!

FARMER JACK
FOOD MARKET

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Home #: _____ Work #: _____
Age: _____
Number of Beans: _____

No purchase necessary. See posted rules for details.