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Review of *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature* By Sharon Butala

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature. By Sharon Butala. Toronto: HarperCollins, 1994. xiv + 194 pp. Sources. \$24.00 cloth. \$16.00 paper.

"One would hardly have sufficient motive to write an autobiography had not some radical change occurred in his life—conversion, entry into a new life, the operation of Grace," writes theorist Jean Starobinski in his 1980 essay, "Style of Autobiography." The radical change that led to Sharon Butala's transformation occurred in 1976 when, at the age of thirty-six, she left the "urban, academic, feminist world" she had known in Saskatoon to marry Peter Butala, a forty-one-year-old bachelor who lived and worked on his family's ranch in extreme southwestern Saskatchewan. Employing the language of conversion, Butala says that her "fateful decision to throw up my former life in favor of a brand-new one" was "my only act of real daring."

While Butala expected her daily activities on the ranch to differ from those of her former life, she had not expected changes in her life's mental and emotional texture. But she quickly discovered that "things worked differently in the country." As part of a ranch husband-and-wife-team, Butala not only had to learn to ride a horse, drive cattle, assist at calving, and keep warm at forty or fifty below zero, but to pour coffee for her husband's male friends and find a sense of belonging among the tight-knit com-

munity of farm wives who would always view her as an outsider.

Butala's new life also demanded a new way of apprehending nature. In "Knowing," she details the process of learning to "throw" her consciousness—a state of awareness that the most successful Aboriginal hunters experience during the hunt. This involves stopping one's conscious mind for brief periods of time so that one's awareness can go out and "mingle with Nature." Butala argues that this is not a useless or archaic skill. Who knows what urban practitioners of such an art might learn about the world and themselves?

Through her apprenticeship in nature, Butala moves from her initial feeling of having entered a void to a deeper sense of a oneness with the fragile, semiarid landscape of the Great Plains: "It was as if places where I'd lived, the forests of my birthplace in the north, those of Nova Scotia, and the mountains and oceans of lower mainland British Columbia, were all merely mistakes of Nature. It seemed to me that I had at last found the one true landscape, the place where sun, moon and stars could shine free, lending their light to the pale grasses, painting them gleaming apricot, gold, mauve, or rose. I had never seen such a beauty." At last, says Butala, her soul had found its home.

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