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**Review of *Not Just Any Land: A Personal and Literary Journey into the American Grasslands* By John Price**

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*Not Just Any Land: A Personal and Literary Journey into the American Grasslands.* By John Price. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. xi + 225 pp. Notes, bibliography. \$20.00.

John Price reads and travels his way into the grasslands, the prairies, in his fine new book. He reads four landscape writers—Dan O'Brien, Linda Hasselstrom, William Least Heat-Moon, and Mary Swander—who “commit to a place in such social and ecological peril” as the grasslands. Price also travels to each writer’s “place” to talk and try to get a better sense of the ways each has “become native” to a particular geography. Those journeys are also Price’s own immersion in the grasslands in hopes of discovering how he himself can be native.

In South Dakota, he reads Dan O'Brien’s *Equinox* (1997) and *Rites of Autumn* (1988) and Linda Hasselstrom’s *Windbreak* (1987) and *Land Circle* (1991) and interviews each writer—O'Brien about his life on his ranch with his falcons and Hasselstrom about her lifetime on her ranch and her eventually having to give it up. For Price and these writers the question is commitment: what does it mean, what are the gains and losses? For O'Brien and Hasselstrom their place and their

self are one; Price hopes to find that union for himself in his own part of the prairie.

With Heat-Moon and Swander, the locations are different, as are the reasons for attaching themselves to the land. Heat-Moon's *PrairieErth* (1991) is a very long exploration of Chase County, Kansas—a "deep map" as Heat-Moon terms it. Heat-Moon does not live in Chase County, has no personal connection to it, but for Price he represents the ways in which one can learn a place—any place—through its history, geography, ecology. Heat-Moon's book is the story of generations in a landscape. Reading and talking with Heat-Moon leads John Price into exploring his own family history in places, giving him another dimension to his developing sense of commitment. Mary Swander's life on her farm in an Amish community in Iowa, described in *Out of This World* (1995), is the consequence of a serious illness and a conscious selection of a place for

recovery, for healing. The effects of this choice for Swander enhance Price's sense of the potential value of commitment and place.

*Not Just Any Place* opens with John Price finding a campsite on exposed prairie in South Dakota and closes with an experience on a wildlife refuge in Iowa. Between the two we have followed him through encounters with books and their authors, with specific ranches and communities and geographies—"out of literature and into the landscape." He ends feeling that "I've been led back to my own home." His book offers valuable ecocriticism, vivid portraits of writers, and a compelling account of Price's learning what it means for him to be "native to a place."

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