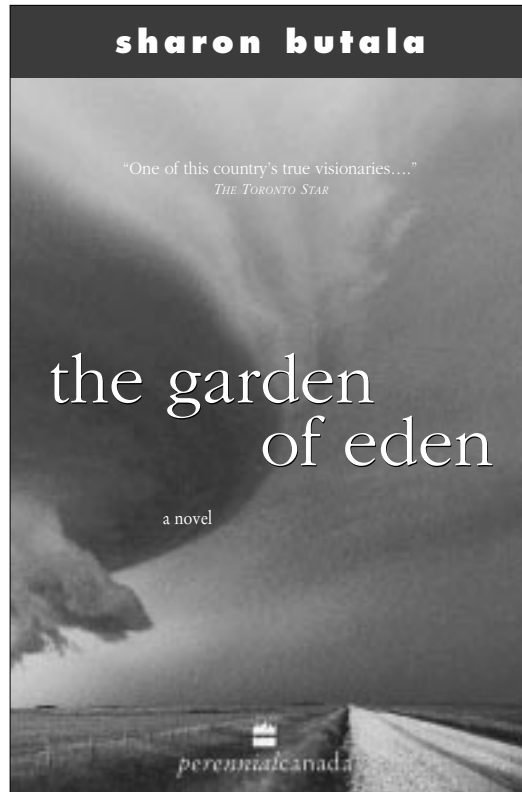


# THE GARDEN OF EDEN

BY SHARON BUTALA



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Butala was born in 1940 in the wilderness of northern Saskatchewan. She is one of five daughters born to an Anglican Irish-Scots, English-speaking mother and Catholic French-Canadian, French-speaking father—an unhappy intermarriage which, Butala feels, left her forever feeling an outsider to all traditions.



After the failure of her first fourteen-year marriage, and after beginning a career teaching at the University of Saskatchewan, she remarried and has lived for the past twenty-two years on a remote ranch near the Montana-Saskatchewan border. Here, using the vast, beautiful shortgrass prairie as her setting, and for her subject the lives of agricultural people—among whom she feels fated to live—she became a writer.

Her first short story collection, *Queen of the Headaches*, was shortlisted for a Governor General's Award in 1986. A loosely linked trilogy of novels, *The Gates of the Sun*, *Luna* and *The Fourth Archangel*, form an evocative and highly praised portrait of prairie life. Her most recent short story collection, *Fever*, won the 1992 Canadian Authors Award for Paperback Fiction.

Her non-fiction work, *The Perfection of the Morning*, is the story of her own personal odyssey, an account complete with dreams and visions. This work, published in 1994, reached #1 on Canadian bestseller lists and remained on lists for over a year.

It also won several awards, including a nomination for a Governor General's Award. It was followed by another bestseller, *Coyote's Morning Cry*. In 1998, Sharon Butala won the Marian Engel Award for a woman writer in mid-career.

In 1996, she and her husband turned their ranch over to The Nature Conservancy of Canada to become The Old Man On His Back Prairie and Heritage Preserve. She has one son and a grandson, and continues to pursue in both fiction and non-fiction the possibly unanswerable question: What is nature? She lives in Eastend, Saskatchewan, with her husband, Peter.

## PLOT SUMMARY

From the acclaimed author of the bestselling *The Perfection of the Morning*, comes an unforgettable, multi-layered novel of death and redemption, moving from the Saskatchewan prairie to famine-stricken Ethiopia. *The Garden of Eden* is the story of two women—Iris, a farm wife, whose husband's death shatters her complacent life, and Lannie, Iris's niece who has escaped to Ethiopia, running from her family and from herself. It is a beautifully rendered story of a family at the crossroads, struggling to reinvent itself. Written in Butala's clear-eyed but incredibly evocative style, it is at once a universal story interweaving history, myth, dream and vision, and offering an absorbing and passionate exploration of the sometimes scarred human landscape we all inhabit.

## ALSO BY SHARON BUTALA

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## FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

“I have always wanted to write a ‘big’ novel, by which I meant, a long novel, a full and complete one, with much detail, texture, and richness, and with characters whose lives are fully delineated. My other novels all contained the possibility, but none of them achieved it because I wasn’t yet experienced enough as a writer. *The Garden of Eden* is my sixth novel—and my tenth book—a sequel to my first, *Country of the Heart*, and the one that has so far come closest to this ideal novel I catch glimpses of in my mind’s eye.

It’s quite possible, of course, although I must never allow myself to believe this, that I’ll never achieve that elusive ideal, that perhaps it’s the same only with different details with every other novelist, and that this ‘ideal’ is the spur that keeps us churning out books despite the disappointments and the continuing, nagging sense of failure, no matter how successful the book might be in critical or commercial terms.

Long ago I chose the agricultural people of southwest Saskatchewan and this striking, if arid and barren, landscape for my writerly subject. I felt fortunate to live in a place about which no one had written much since Wallace Stegner’s 1962 non-fiction classic, *Wolf Willow*. This left me free to re-imagine it in my own terms, those of a woman, a feminist of sorts, a lover of beauty wherever it might be found, and also, the child of settlers on both sides of the family. I hoped to bring a new perspective to the story of this place which so far had been told only by men, about their activities and in an heroic vein, as if no one were cooking their meals, washing their clothes, providing comfort at night, and children, and vegetable gardens, and generally making it possible—while suffering and struggling themselves—for them to survive the difficult lives society had forced them into.

The day came, after nine books, when I wanted very much to have a character rather more like myself, not stoic and tough, not hard-nosed and combative, and with the perspective of someone with some education, and also a bit above the fray, in her case (but not in mine), because of family wealth. My greatest interest is character and character development and I wanted an innocent, as I once was, forced by circumstances to grow into a belated maturity.

More than this, I wanted to create someone born and brought up in the area, and still very unworldly, and to take her out into the wider world, so that I as novelist could put this area into perspective, into larger terms than ‘local’ people anywhere in the world are likely to do. Iris Christie fit the bill and I had already created her and her niece Lannie Stone in my first novel, *Country of the Heart*. This story begins ten years after *Country of the Heart*.

It’s worth stating emphatically that for me, despite my grave interest in the other themes—biodiversity, food security, the problem of evil in the world—this novel is about a woman’s spiritual and psychological journey to maturity. My original plan had been to take Iris to Europe where she would encounter history, and the great treasures of art and architecture, but before I was ready to begin the novel, I was invited to go to Ethiopia with the non-governmental agency USC Canada to get to know its major agricultural project, Seeds of Survival, which works with local farmers and indigenous seed. This was in order that I might become an ambassador for USC. As I began to study Ethiopia’s history, and to get to know the USC project, I realized that Ethiopia was a far better choice than Europe as the place where Iris would be shaken into maturity.

Of what does this belated maturity consist? Iris has persisted, as many of us do, in seeing the world through the proverbial ‘rose-coloured glasses.’ She’s protected from hard knocks and obstacles by her position, and has no

reason to grow emotionally and spiritually, or at least, can avoid the painful process. I realized that the chances of a woman like Iris abandoning her husband and going out into the world on her own were pretty small, so I had to devise a plot twist or twists that would make it possible. These were the death of her husband and the disappearance of her niece.

Of course, I also think about the themes I want to write about even before I get to character. Ecological concerns having to do with the North American grasslands are uppermost in my mind. Ethiopia was a better choice than Europe for my protagonist to see because the same concerns which are beginning to reach the consciousness of western Canadians are matters of life and death in Ethiopia. I wanted to talk about those concerns.

Iris’s “belated maturity” required that she see the world as it really is, and in someone like her, it takes a terrible and unrelenting shock to bring her to this. Iris had never experienced evil, or if she had, she’d refused to recognize it for what it was. She didn’t understand that people could really murder other people in cold blood, or starve them and their children to death for political reasons. She didn’t understand what a force evil is in the world, and when she comes face to face with it, she almost can’t endure the knowledge.

Lannie, of course, is a different character with almost the opposite background to Iris’s very privileged one. As a result, her problems are of a very different kind. I enjoyed writing Lannie, possibly because she was so different from me, and I felt free to invent. I can’t help but think that although Iris’s future is fairly clear, Lannie’s remains uncertain, and somewhere down the line there may be a third novel growing. In such a novel, the balance of (at least writerly) interest would shift, with Lannie becoming the major character and Iris moving more into the background. But with her family drama more or less brought into the open and clarified, Lannie is freed to grow, too.”

## PRAISE FOR *THE GARDEN OF EDEN*

“...brings the landscapes, people and issues—starvation, poverty—vividly home to us, while shaking us from our complacency in the face of tragic truths.”

—*The Globe and Mail*

“...a powerful book...beautifully cadenced prose...”

—*The Toronto Star*

“Award-winning author Sharon Butala has already proven that her name belongs beside those of Farley Mowat, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood and the like—as one who has helped create the Canadian literary landscape.”

—*The Lethbridge Herald*

“...reads like a literary thriller—missing persons; exotic locale, customs and people; a touch of mystery—distinguished throughout by threads of theme and metaphor that bind two seemingly disparate locations together in the sort of ‘Universal Oneness’ of which Butala writes.”

—*The Globe and Mail*

“For those of us who have considered the Prairies to be nothing more interesting than flat, boring wheat fields, Butala reveals something more. She maps out the intricacies of the land, using words to paint pictures of a subtle yet beautiful landscape.”

—*The Vancouver Sun*

“Butala’s flare for description lifts dusty Ethiopia off the page and into the mind; it fixes Saskatchewan’s grasslands firmly in the heart. Her love for the land sings from the pages of *The Garden of Eden*...”

—*Victoria Times Colonist*

The Garden of Eden was a place on Earth, created by God for the original humans. They resided in the garden before Lucifer corrupted their minds, and they were subsequently cast out. Castiel heavily implied that human beings were developed after billions of years of evolution. God gave them a spiritual essence, known as a soul. He created a paradise on Earth called the Garden of Eden. He placed the humans Adam, Lilith and Eve in the Garden, and declared them his favorite creations.