



## Badlands

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*Howard's End* meets *Dances With Wolves* in this overwrought first novel about an Englishwoman who tries to save a dysfunctional Native American family from the influence of Jesus and white America—all while rescuing her own relationship with an idealistic lawyer,

British writer Porter wears many hats (journalist, poet, painter, multimedia artist), and her intentions are undoubtedly good. But what a plot: Our unnamed heroine arrives at the Wounded Knee Sioux reservation in South Dakota with her lover, Adam, who's there to represent a hunky blond Indian named Blackfoot in a lawsuit against a German farmer family whose land harbors Indian graves. Adam is fighting to escape the weight of his father, Joseph, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist who has been instrumental in our heroine's career (she travels the world explaining his theories): saving the Indians is his way of breaking free, But Blackfoot, it turns out, has his own agenda. For the heroine, meanwhile, everything boils down to sex: The wide open spaces of the Badlands make her want to have a child with Blackfoot, with Joseph, with Adam; when she isn't making love to Adam, she's masturbating while dreaming of him, or coming on strong to a tribal policeman. There's a painfully earnest, Doris Lessing-like conviction to these scenes that lifts them above the meretricious, but in the end the reader feels underwhelmed by all the sound and fury, insufficiently captivated by these characters' dilemmas, and exhausted by their tendency to speak in pages' worth of fervent, Jungian-scented prose ("I am the land. I am the wound. I am the broken woman...").

Taking up an old subject with the breathless zeal of a newcomer, Porter mixes jejune, Oprah-esque confessionals and soulful stream-of-consciousness to produce a kind of hysterical whine. (Book-of-the-Month Club selection)

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