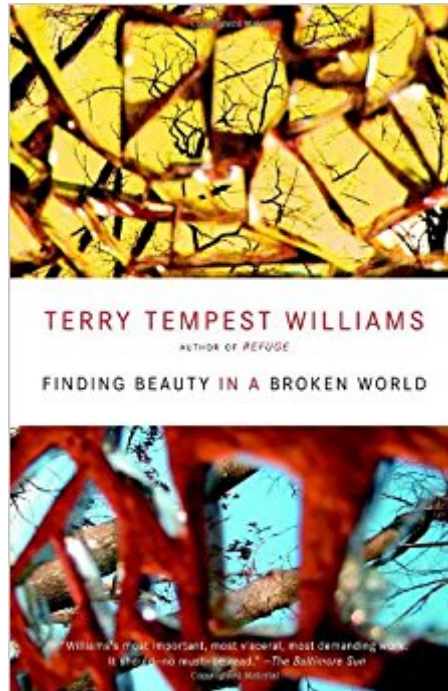




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Finding Beauty In A Broken World



Synopsis

"Shards of glass can cut and wound or magnify a vision," Terry Tempest Williams tells us. "Mosaic celebrates brokenness and the beauty of being brought together." Ranging from Ravenna, Italy, where she learns the ancient art of mosaic, to the American Southwest, where she observes prairie dogs on the brink of extinction, to a small village in Rwanda where she joins genocide survivors to build a memorial from the rubble of war, Williams searches for meaning and community in an era of physical and spiritual fragmentation. In her compassionate meditation on how nature and humans both collide and connect, Williams affirms a reverence for all life, and constructs a narrative of hopeful acts, taking that which is broken and creating something whole.

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Customer Reviews

Reading anything by Terry Tempest Williams, you know you're in the hands of a deeply moral writer. Her "Refuge" is one of my favorite books, linking the shrinking of the Great Salt Lake and its effects on its flora and fauna to the slow death of her mother from cancer induced by exposure to radiation. She attempts something similar here, using brutal and inhumane attempts to kill off the prairie dogs of the plains and high desert as a counterpoint to the heinous war between Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, which she visits after the media have moved on. The image she uses to portray life in the global 21st century is of mosaics, which she studied in Italy and takes with her to Africa. This work is less successful than *Refuge*, I think, because the magnitude of suffering she conveys after speaking with survivors of the Rwandan genocide is so overpowering. Another writer might

have limited a book to that single topic, but Williams, a trained naturalist, is more ambitious; she wants to draw us into the interdependent web of life that covers the planet. Cancer takes another of Williams' family members here, but the loss is balanced by a blessing that Williams and her husband, Brooke, thought they had foregone when they elected not to have children. (No, she didn't adopt a baby like some people with higher profiles.) Even if she goes on a bit too long about those cute prairie dogs (I skipped 20 pages), she makes the point eloquently that all life is fragile and that we must pay close attention to its value. You might get the impression from reviews that Williams is sentimental. Quite the opposite, her observations of science and of life's brutality lend her work the edge that must have frightened the superintendent of Bryce Canyon into saying she wasn't welcome there. She went anyway, and we should be glad she's about in the world.

This is a wonderful book - a deeply personal yet soulful, a poet's journey into the world. Only a writer like TTW could have written something so intuitively timed for this day and age because she is utterly tuned into the planet's pace (see her very important OPEN SPACE OF DEMOCRACY). It is the gift of this writer to force us to slow down, to absorb peace and the consequences of violence in equal measure and to take stock of our own values. It is impossible not to read her work without a soul's level. Read this and be transformed.

This is a magical book....from Italy to Bryce Canyon to Rwanda...all along the path Terry took following her own muse, the same that took her to Spain (LEAP) and to Great Salt Lake (Refuge). This time her path led her to Louis Gakumba, a young Rwandan man, now living in Utah thanks to this book and Terry's inquiry. This book is the real thing. I couldn't get enough of it.

Finding Beauty in a Broken World provides a wonderful snapshot of the best and worst of life on Earth. Like many of her books, Williams weaves the chapters of her book together with a common thread. In this case the book begins and ends with an analogy comparing the study of mosaic to an understanding of our fragile human and natural world. Williams builds her case using a series of stories from around the world including her experiences in Italy, Africa, and southern Utah. Although I enjoyed her overall approach, Williams is most at home when sharing her love of the natural world in southern Utah. I would have been happy if the book had simply focused on her experiences with the prairie dogs in Bryce Canyon. It reminded me of watching episodes of Meerkat Manor on Animal Planet. I wanted to keep reading about the prairie dog clans and her experiences as a volunteer. Her studies made me want to learn more about the hummingbirds that live in the Pinion Pines and

Utah Juniper outside my kitchen window. I can tell Terry Tempest Williams enjoys traveling the world, but I encourage her to focus on the needs and issues that impact the American southwest. Living in southern Utah myself, I feel connected to her descriptions and experiences. Although I enjoyed this book, I'm hoping that future works will revisit the place-based approach I loved in *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert*. I'd love a book that provides insights into the wide range of endangered plants and animals of our area. Prairie dogs are just the beginning.

Favorite Quotes"We have forgotten the virtue of sitting, watching, observing. Nothing much happens. This is the way of nature. We breathe together. Simply this. For long periods of time, the meadow is still. We watch. We wait. We wonder. Our eyes find a resting place. And then, the slightest of breezes moves the grass. It can be heard as a whispered prayer." (p. 196)"Much of our world now is a fabrication, a fiction, a manufactured and manipulated time-lapsed piece of filmmaking where a rose no longer unfolds but bursts. Speed is the buzz, the blur, the drug. Life out of focus becomes our way of seeing. We no longer expect clarity. The lenses of perception and perspective have been replaced by speed, motion. We don't know how to stop. The information we value is retrieved, never internalized." (p. 196)"There are long skeins of time when I feel so confused and lost in this broken world of our own making. I don't know who we have become or what to believe or whom to trust. In the presence of prairie dogs, I feel calm, safe, and reassured, sensing there is something more enduring than our own minds. I feel a peace that holds my heart, not because I believe this is better than the world we have created. I feel at peace because the memory of wild nature is held within the nucleus of each living cell. Our bodies remember wholeness in the midst of fragmentation." (p. 198)"Clay-colored monks dressed in discreet robes of fur stand as sentinels outside their burrows, watching, watching as their communities disappear, one by one, their hands raised up in prayer." (p. 205)

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