
Katherine R. Chandler and Melissa A. Goldthwaite, eds. *Surveying the Literary Landscapes of Terry Tempest Williams: New Critical Essays*. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2003. 265p.

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Katherine R. Chandler and Melissa A. Goldthwaite bring together a valuable collection of current criticism on the works of Terry Tempest Williams. This is the first anthology of critical essays on Williams, and the editors consider it to be only “a beginning” of the potential criticism that could be done. They write that “critics have yet to define all the relationships among the concepts of Williams’s vision” (ix). The text is divided into three sections, “Ecocriticism,” “Craft and Rhetoric,” and “Faith, Ethics, Politics,” with five essays included in each section (a total of fifteen in the entire text). There is also an introduction by Chandler and Goldthwaite, a select bibliography, and a useful index.

The essays are all well-written and the analyses represent a variety of disciplines and perspectives. They deal with such topics as Williams’ blatant concerns with nuclear testing, her connection and sense of responsibility to the environment, her struggles with Mormonism as well as its influence on her writing, the meshing of multiple genres and themes in her work, the autobiographical nature of her texts, and the poetic quality of her prose. Despite a certain diversity, there is also a sense of unity throughout the book. First, the writing styles of a variety of authors have been sufficiently edited to achieve a successful flow and uniformity as a person reads from essay to essay. Also, there is enough overlap in the passages cited and discussed of Williams’ work to help connect and dovetail the essays, without being redundant or overly repetitive. Furthermore, there is a sense of symmetry in the structure of the text as a whole with three main sections, each comprising five essays.

One topic addressed in many of the essays is Williams’ use of certain binaries. It is the current trend among some scholars to attempt to break up and/or upset traditional dichotomies. For example, the essay “Deconstructing the Language of Opposition: Locating Williams’s Erotics of Place,” by Jeannette E. Riley and Maureen K. Schirack, addresses this topic quite directly. The authors write that “to contextualize the nature-culture relationship, we use ecofeminist readings to underscore the importance of dismantling such oppositions” (59). Other essays also discuss binaries, such as Goldthwaite’s essay, “Rhetoric + Feminism = Williams’s Poetic Means: Transforming Triptychs of Body, Form, and Faith in *Leap*.” This chapter presents oppositions that are resolved through the metaphor

of the triptych, in a manner that seems somewhat Hegelian (in which a three-part dialectic comprises a thesis, antithesis, and resolution). Goldthwaite presents Williams' approach to the triptych, *El jardín de las delicias*, by Hieronymus Bosch, which avoids "traditional patterns of arrangement" (131). She cites Williams who writes: "I chose to read the triptych, left, right, and center: Paradise, Hell, and Earthly Delights. The center panel becomes a landscape of exploration, a place where the reconciliation of opposites is possible" (131).

It is interesting to note that a resolution of opposites does not necessarily require their dissolution. In fact, references to binaries abound throughout the collection of essays. A brief selection of such dichotomies includes: "natural... unnatural" (3), "near and far, dark and light, earth and air" (17), "mind, male, and human... body, female, and nature" (28), "the concrete and the imaginative—reality and metaphor" (48), "black and white" (72), "us and them" (92), "circular... linear" (96), "discursive or nondiscursive, conscious or unconscious, verbal or nonverbal" (110), "good and evil" (131), "comment and response, speaking and listening, giving and receiving" (149), "self-exposure and self-concealment ('Open and close')" (165), "personal... public" (191), "material and spiritual" (198), "natural world... civilized world" (215), "an interruption and a continuation" (221), "deconstruction... construction" (233), and "speech and action" (243). Williams incorporates many such dualities in her work and seems to be more concerned about facilitating their resolution rather than dissolving them altogether, as she did in rearranging the order in which she experienced the Bosch triptych.

Why does Williams incorporate so many dualities in her writing? Chandler, in her essay, "Potsherds and Petroglyphs: Unearthing Latter-day Saint Sources for Williams's Environmental Vision," writes that "details of Latter-day Saint (Mormon) practices and beliefs abound in Williams's prose" (195). She explains: "There is no question that Williams has drawn much from the Mormon beliefs with which she was raised" (195). Perhaps the use of binaries in her work is connected to the Mormon belief that certain dichotomies are necessary in life. For example, *The Book of Mormon*, which is a standard text in the canon of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, states, "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11). The passage continues, "And if ye say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness there be no happiness. And if there be no righteousness nor happiness there be no punishment nor misery" (2 Nephi 2:13). According to Mormonism, certain dichotomies are necessary because they help bring about the tensions that enable human beings to

make choices, exercise free will, and experience the consequences of their decisions. Goldthwaite writes that when Williams is asked which principle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ she most cherishes, the writer responds, “free agency” (128). This capacity to have choice in life is brought about, according to Mormon doctrine, through opposition.

Although Williams may have been influenced by the religion she was taught as a child, she does not hesitate to question and examine some of its rituals and precepts. She exercises agency to challenge some of the established hierarchies and to find ways to reconcile certain binaries. Goldthwaite writes: “Williams is able to question authority, revising the beliefs passed down to her” (130). She cites Williams who says, “I hear the voices of my Elders: *You can’t have it both ways*”—but she answers back: “must it really be all or nothing? Right wing or left wing? Paradise or hell?” (130). Goldthwaite explains: “Williams answers these rhetorical questions, in part, through the unorthodox arrangement of her text [*Leap*]” (130), which is influenced by her reading of Bosch’s painting.

In working with binaries comes the problem of creating a false tension. Richard Hunt, in his essay, “Integrating Science and Faith: Williams and the Erotics of Place,” writes: “So virulent a hostility between science and faith need not, and indeed *cannot*, exist” (178). He credits Williams for standing out among her colleagues in environmental concerns for “the unique way she brings science and faith together as she seeks to preserve the wildlands of southern Utah” (178). However, Williams herself sets up a false dichotomy in her writing when she expresses: “In this dualistic world, I have seen obedience on one hand, free agency on the other. How do I bring these two hands opposed together in a gesture of prayer?” (128). The true opposite of obedience is disobedience, not agency. Obedience is a choice as is disobedience, and a person who chooses to be obedient is as free in that choice as is the person who chooses disobedience. So while certain binaries, according to Mormonism, create necessary tensions, there is the risk of creating false or incorrect binaries that can be misleading.

This is an excellent collection of essays which would be of value to scholars interested in ecofeminist writing, nature writing, memoir and autobiography, cancer narratives, and creative writing. It could be used for personal edification as well as for pedagogical purposes, and can stand proudly as the first collection of critical essays on the *œuvre* of Terry Tempest Williams. ❀