



Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert

Terry Tempest Williams

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The beloved author of *Refuge*, Terry Tempest Williams is one of the country's most eloquent and imaginative writers. The desert is her blood. In this potent collage of stories, essays, and testimony, *Red* makes a stirring case for the preservation of America's Redrock Wilderness in the canyon country of southern Utah.

As passionate as she is persuasive, Williams writes lyrically about the desert's power and vulnerability, describing wonders that range from an ancient Puebloan sash of macaw feathers found in Canyonlands National Park to the desert tortoise—an animal that can "teach us the slow art of revolutionary patience" as it extends our notion of kinship with all life. She examines the civil war being waged in the West today over public and private uses of land—an issue that divides even her own family. With grace, humor, and compassionate intelligence, Williams reminds us that the preservation of wildness is not simply a political process but a spiritual one.

"Lush elegies to the wilderness.... Earthy, spiritual, evocative." —*The Boston Globe*

"Erotic, scientific, literary.... Her intimacy with this landscape is complex and passionate." —*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"Her finest writing... Use[s] pure language in the face of laws that need to be changed and lawmakers and citizens who need to understand that there is another way to see." —*Portland Oregonian*

Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert Details

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From Reader Review Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert for online ebook

Feisty Harriet says

This collection of essays about red rock and canyon country was a little hit and miss. Some of them I *loved* and re-read as soon as I'd finished the first read-through. Others made me angry, "Dear Terry, you can't just go wandering off in the middle of the summer in the desert, barefoot without water. It's a Bad Idea. I don't care how much spirit you feel in the rocks and how much you identify with the landscape. Stop it!" That being said, in many ways, this book is a series of love letters to the country I call home, the high desert of south-central Utah.

Gail says

3.5*

I love TTW and am in the process of reading as many of her books as I can find at the library. This one, which was written in part to stimulate activist engagement in saving the canyonlands and red rock wilderness in Utah from exploitation, was not my favorite. TTW is deeply connected to the West and her family's roots there and like most of her books, that connection features prominently in this one.

This is a collection of essays, some published previously, that focuses on this desert landscape. While some see little here except resources to exploit or more land to settle, Terry paints a passionate picture of the importance of keeping this land as pristine as possible. She sees remnants of an ancient Anasazi culture in the petroglyphs that are scattered throughout the region. She relishes the emptiness, the vivid colors, the heat, and the wildlife that manages to survive here. An avid hiker, many of her most lyrical passages are written as homages to experiences she had while hiking in this challenging landscape.

She is clear-eyed in seeing the opposition to her activism and deep need to save this land. Her family has made its living tearing the land up and laying pipe to serve the oil and gas industry and most recently, the cable industry. They are not happy with her environmentalism nor her willingness to diminish her family's livelihood to protect an endangered species. The landscape she lives in isn't the only thing red ...for this is a deeply red state politically and she is among the opposition to most of what those politics stand for. She describes the tension between the U.S. East (where all those blue elites live) and the West. Westerners deeply resent the federal government and the elitist goal of public land ownership and preservation rather than allowing unfettered individualism that enables widespread exploitation to benefit a few. It seems that few whites who live in the West, treasure it enough to protect it. Rather it is viewed as a private cache of wealth that no broader community should control. Of course, Native peoples are left out of this conversation, those who were originally displaced and prefer to protect the land today as sacred.

Ms. Williams is a passionate voice for challenging our desire to spread as far as possible into the world. In one essay she describes her personal decision to move further into the desert near Moab and away from Salt Lake and its increasing urban sprawl. She and her husband sacrifice income, security, and closeness to family for the peace and uncertainty of life in the desert. I admire that about her. Her willingness to live her convictions makes her the exceptional writer that she is.

But "Red" was not as engaging as some of her other books, perhaps because it is so personal and poetic at

times, that it is difficult for me to relate to her feelings. I don't experience a connection to "the land" in the way that she does; I was born and raised in a city. So when she describes how the land provokes sexual stirrings, I can't connect. For me, the sections in which she describes her family tensions over the protection of land turtles, her alienation from her home as millionaires begin to build huge mansions nearby, and the inspiration she gets from another woman writer who fought for the land more than 100 years ago, are her most effective.

This would not be the first book I'd recommend reading of the many she has written. "Refuge" covers some of the same territory and is more effective. But this book does help people like me better understand the forces that oppose those of us who want to protect this part of our country from degradation from drilling and urban sprawl. The section in which she describes the need for migration corridors is especially well-done and presents a concept of preservation that is being increasingly discussed today by both climatologists and environmentalists. It is worth picking this up to understand this important concept.

Annette says

One of my favorite nature writers, Williams does an outstanding job describing her love of the red canyons of southern Utah. Through short stories and essays, you feel like you're sharing her experiences.

Yaaresse says

The first time I saw the red rock country of the Four Corners area, I was awed. It is awesome. Not in the way the word is currently over-used, as a verbal hiccup to overpraise the mundane and trivial, but the true definition of awesome: inspiring an overwhelming sensation of reverence, admiration, and fear.

To put that in some perspective, I am most definitely not an outdoor enthusiast. (People think I am joking when I say my idea of camping involves room service. I most definitely am not joking.) When Tempest Williams describes the sensual sensation of drinking from a desert stream, she thinks about the life-giving moisture, the sensual cool hand sustaining the fragile life of the region. Me? I'm thinking "No way would I do that. You don't know what kind of heavy metals from mining operations or fall-out from weapons testing, or just bacteria from toad skin and lizard shit is in that puddle!" Suffice it to say, I appreciate nature, but from a distance and with Britta filter in my water bottle.

Terry Tempest Williams wrote *Red* to call attention to the the fight to protect and preserve the fragile ecological balance of red rock country. The book was published shortly after 9/11. At the time, depending on where you were standing, the country was either desperate to break become energy self-sufficient and tap any resources to that end or corporations and politicians were only too happy to use feed fear in order to finally be able to turn a profit on what some saw as wasted land. The issue of land rights and state vs federal vs private use is a long, contentious one in the west. TTW manages to show how complicated and personal the fight is without coming off like an extremist or irrational.

The book is not only about environmental politics. TTW also writes about the land as a living entity, as inspiration for her poetry, and as a powerful soul-shredding/soul-healing experience. Some of her poetry is included, as in a transcript of her testimony before the Senate. Her writing is often lyrical, sensual, and tinted with the fine red dust of the desert southwest. This is the book I was hoping for when I read *Trespass* a few

weeks ago. It's still part memoir, part non-fiction, part pleas, but it has balance and a more self-aware tone. I can't help but compare this (favorably) to *The Anthropology of Turquoise* by Ellen Meloy, which was published maybe a year after this book.

Andrew says

This collection resonated with me as a fellow lover of the high Utah desert. Some of the essays are truly stunning: Ode to Silence, A Prayer for a Wild Millennium, and Wild Mercy in particular.

Leah (Books Speak Volumes) says

Red is a collection of stories and essays about the desert of southern Utah and the necessity of preserving it. None of the stories are more than a few pages long, and they serve to evoke a sense of place for the reader who has not been to these majestic lands. Although some of the stories felt a bit flat on their own, I think as a collection they fulfill their purpose. More compelling than the fictional creations are Williams' personal recollections and essays.

In "Labor," Williams muses upon one of her visits to The Birthing Rock, a boulder with an image of a woman giving birth etched onto it. This ancient Anasazi petroglyph prompts her to contemplate her decision not to have children and the way she and her husband have chosen to define family.

"I look across the sweep of slickrock stretching in all directions, the rise and fall of such arid terrain. A jackrabbit bolts down the wash. Piñon jays flock and bank behind a cluster of junipers. The tracks of coyote are everywhere.

Would you believe me when I tell you this is family, kinship with the desert, the breadth of my relations coursing through a wider community, the shock of recognition with each scarlet gilia, the smell of rain."

Other essays argue for the value of wilderness and the importance of conserving it. However, the struggle to protect wild lands is a difficult battle when corporations are clamoring to develop them. In "To Be Taken," she recounts how the issue of conservation vs. development and profit divides even her own family. A family gathering at Christmas becomes tense when her uncle vents his frustration at his business' work being held up by environmental groups because the land they want to develop is a desert tortoise habitat.

Williams' writing fits well with the desert setting she describes. At first her words seem almost spare, but as you wander deeper into her pages, you see that her thoughts have a quiet power to them that reflect her seemingly barren but actually vibrant surroundings.

"These wildlands are alive. When one of us says, "Look, there's nothing out there," what we are really saying is, "I cannot see."

The Colorado Plateau is wild. There is still wilderness here, big wilderness. Wilderness holds an original presence giving expression to that which we lack, the losses we long to recover, the absences we seek to fill. Wilderness revives the memory of unity. Through its protection, we can find faith in our humanity."

Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert is an evocative, slowly meandering book about the vulnerability, power, and beauty of the desert. Terry Tempest Williams makes convincing arguments for conserving America's wild lands for future generations in this collection of passionately written pieces.

More book reviews at Books Speak Volumes.

Annie says

Terry Tempest Williams has a lot of wilderness in her soul. I love her for that. She says that until you can cut your arm and bleed red sand, you do not own the redrock country of southern Utah. I can feel the desert around me as I read her words. Her writing is moving and lyrical, however this book is difficult for me. As a Mormon who also believes in conservationism, I love that my Religion has so much room for every good thing. But TTW leaves me feeling a bit hollow in a lot of ways. She says that there are too many people. I wonder then, which ones does she think are too many? She uses some LDS scripture and history to make her points, but I wonder how she rationalizes the incongruity between some of her ideas and LDS teachings. If she wants to belong to the wild completely, she seems to agree with the religion partially. This may be too much of a judgement to make from just what is written here, but since she brings it up, I wonder how she resolves it.

Sschoville says

I'll admit I've started a love affair with Terry Tempest Williams. This book found me at the second hand store; I read it, and now I am feverishly scanning the library for every book she's written. Even if you don't know the desert (myself included), you will fall in love with it because she loves it so much. It also made me ask: what are my stories of the land?

Jill says

On a quest for lady naturalists to counterpoint Edward Abbey's crabby borderline misogyny, I came across Terry Tempest Williams. I wasn't sure-- first couple chapters, and the quartet at the end, are pretty woo woo. But it's reasonable. I fell in love with Utah's slickrock desert and it's well worth being a little wacky over. There is much good, nutritional nature and solitude meditations in here, and some really nice thinking about society vs wilderness.

Sandy says

We read this powerful book in my reading group..... sadly I got distracted somehow and could not remember the author's name although the subject matter has impacted me greatly in the years since I read it. Williams' name never came back to me until recently when it came up in, of all places, a memorial service for my cousin.... Suddenly I had the link back to RED. I WILL finish at some point.

I am a devout believer in the importance of leaving places UNTOUCHED, UNCOMPROMISED,

UNADULTERATED in ANY way by human beings. THE IMPORTANCE OF WILDERNESS for its own sake is what she writes about with passion and insistence. In this world where we impose ourselves on everything, with a human-based rational for doing so, no matter what the consequences, I whole-heartedly agree with her. STAY AWAY! LEAVE WILDERNESS ALONE. NO PEOPLE, NO ROADS, NO RECREATION, NO DEVELOPMENT OF ANY KIND. We MUST stop imposing our will on the planet. Otherwise nothing will survive.

Amy says

I keep trying, and failing, to enjoy Terry Tempest Williams's writing. When I first read *Refuge* as a first-year college student, I was not a fan. I later taught that same first-year literature course and had to teach *Refuge* in class. Through that experience, I came to enjoy the book a bit more, but only a bit. Before my recent trip to Bryce and Zion in Utah, her book *Red* came up on a recommended reading list, and I decided to give Terry Tempest Williams's writing another go. It was a quick read, and very informative, but I simply don't enjoy her poetic (to me, melodramatic) writing style. That said, I am glad to have read the book because of what I learned about Utah's natural history and the then-current (and still ongoing) political battles over Utah's land. A for informational content, C for enjoyment.

Stephen says

I read this on an early morning plane to Utah. Williams's *REFUGE*, which is an absolute masterpiece, was largely responsible for taking me to Utah in the first place. This collection, however, was disappointing. Much of the writing seemed rushed, and nothing much sank in for me. The titular essay about discerning variation in color was interesting, and of course I support her intentions, but I can't say that anything from this book has really lingered with me a week after reading it. Perhaps I should blame reading it on a dark plane at five in the morning after a night of sleeplessness?

Helynne says

In her typically eloquent plea for love and protection of the American West wilderness, Terry Tempest Williams states, "The eyes of the future are looking back at us and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time. They are kneeling with hands clasped that we might act with restraint, that we might leave room for the life that is destined to come" (215). What a quotation! I can see this chiseled in stone in the offices of the Senate and House of Representatives. If only our lawmakers and advocates would take this beautiful statement seriously! Speaking of U.S. law, Williams includes at the back of this book a detailed description of America's Redrock Wilderness Act of 2001 with all of its provisions for protection of wilderness areas of the Great Basin. She also includes an astonishingly long list of specific areas that beg protection from developers and others who would exploit the land for personal gain. "Only a few generations ago, Utah was settled on spiritual grounds. It is ironic that now Utah must be protected on spiritual ground for the generations to come . . . Wilderness reminds us what it means to be human, what we are connected to rather than what we are separate from" (75). I will ever be grateful to Williams for her beautifully written admonishments for the preservation of our wilderness areas. This book, as well as her others, are truly a gift.

Sherri Vigil says

I enjoy journal keeping. Terry's books seem like that to me and she has opened hers to the public. She definitely writes from her comfortable place.

Jo Benson says

An interesting collection of pieces that gives a great insight into the political climate of Utah (as far as environmentalism and national parks go, at least) and the author's personal connection with her home. It was very interesting for nonfiction, but did stray into the realm of strange more than once. Which isn't always a bad thing.
