of religion. It might be argued that Utah in fact has an established religion in that its state government is dominated by LDS, and it is clear that LDS religious beliefs are reflected in state laws. It is arguable that, with the elimination of polygamy as a tenet of mainstream Mormonism, the church brought itself within the boundaries of mainstream Protestantism, which forms the hegemonic religious discourse in the United States. Thus "establishment" became acceptable as long as the established church fell within the parameters of mainstream Protestantism.

Hunsard, 3175.

Land as Lover

Mormon Eco-Eroticism and Planetary Plural Marriage in the Work of Terry Tempest Williams

Sarah McFarland Taylor

ABSTRACT: Steven T. Katz and James Spickard have argued that even though mystical and ecstatic experiences are often self-defined as unmediated experiences of the divine, fundamentally these experiences are always mediated to some degree through the mystic’s own cultural milieu and religious language. The filtration of Mormon naturalist Terry Tempest Williams’ mystical encounters with nature through a Mormon cultural lens, which is tied to a historic and mythic topophilia, lends Williams’ writing a creative organicism that deftly combines diverse and contradictory elements. On one hand, Williams points to the irony of her chosen subject in light of the problematic relation Mormon culture has had with environmentalism and eroticism. On the other hand, a distinctly Mormon sensibility shapes Williams’ love for the sacred geography of Utah and her attunement to the spiritual dimensions of the American landscape. In Williams’ “greening” of Mormonism, we see the work of religio-cultural production in action, as she creates a unique fusion of nature mysticism and Latter-day sensibilities.

It’s time for us to take off our masks, to step out from behind our personas—whatever they might be: educators, activists, biologists, geologists, writers, farmers, ranchers, and bureaucrats—and admit that we are lovers, engaged in an erotics of place. Loving the land. Honoring its mysteries. . . . There is nothing intellectual about it. We love the land. It is a primal affair.

—Terry Tempest Williams, "The Erotics of Place"

Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions, Volume 8, Issue 1, pages 39–56, ISSN 1092-6690 (print), 1541-8480 (electronic). © 2004 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Send requests for permission to reprint to Rights and Permissions, University of California Press, Journals Division, 2000 Center Street, Suite 303, Berkeley, CA 94704-1223.
June encounters are hot, intensely erotic, D. H. Lawrence's other gods before me. Wilderness courts our communion, and to the truth wild places as "places we desire most—and what we desire most is intimacy." Williams' connection to mystic love contrasts sharply with the sexual taboos of her Mormon upbringing. But, like Nin, who was married to more than one man at the same time, Williams casts herself as one engaged in multiple simultaneous "marriages"—to landscape, community, cultural heritage, and to the truth and value of her own experience. Finding ways to "marry" and remain faithful to two loves in particular—her connection to the Mormon community and to the larger "community of life"—presents her defining challenge. In taking up this challenge, she refers to herself as an "edge-walker," determined to find the narrow path between the strength, comfort, and familiarity of her Mormon heritage and her own artist's heart that resists conformity and is fired by an earthly sensuality. For her "edge-walking," Williams chooses ideal terrain—the desert. Historian and ethicist Belden Lane writes about deserts, mountains, and other wild places as "places on the edge," liminal landscapes that "provoke the identification and reordering of boundaries." Wild terrain, says Lane, tantalizes the human imagination and "confronts people with their own edges." Both culturally and topographically, Williams is strategically positioned "betwixt and between," a position that affords her unique opportunities to shape the complex overlapping ecologies of religion, sexuality, and culture.

**EROS IN ACTION: A TWO-WAY LOVE**

When composing *Desert Quartet: An Erotic Landscape* (1995), Williams says that the question burning inside her was a very private one: "How might we make love to the land?" She also explains that her reasons for choosing the topic were complex:

I am interested in the notion of love and why we are so fearful of intimacy, with each other and with the land. I wanted to explore the idea of the erotic, not as defined by my culture as pornographic and exploitative but rather what it might mean to engage in a relationship of reciprocity.

Williams' culture is Mormon, a culture that the fifth-generation Mormon both honors and critiques. "If I am honest, one reason the erotic is so intriguing to me is because it was raised in eroticism is the ultimate taboo." Then is Williams' innovation of a "Mormon erotic" simply a case of her playing the Mormon "bad girl?" No, as her exploration of the erotic landscape unfolds, a serious and uniquely textured religious-cultural critique emerges. Williams wants to know why Mormon culture in particular (and American culture generally) finds the body, intimacy, and sensuality so very frightening. She suspects that the answer has something to do with our alienation from the very land that supports us. The word "erotic," for Williams, means being "in relation." She finds erotic connection to be "life-engaged, making love to the world," something that comes very naturally.

What distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic is that the erotic is about a "two-way love," a giving and receiving. It is about vulnerability, surrender, and an engagement of soul. This model is demonstrated throughout *Desert Quartet*, but two of her images prove particularly powerful. In the first, after seducing her readers into deep, red, arid canyons, Williams finally arrives at a place that is wet, gushing with water. Her communion with the water is total and climactic: "I dissolve. I am water. Only my face is exposed like an apparition over ripples. Playing with water. Do I dare? My legs open. The rushing water turns my body and touches me with a fast finger that does not tire. I receive without apology.

In yet another erotic encounter with a canyon, Williams reciprocates and responds to the needs of her landscape lover, attending to the desert's own pleasures. "A maidenhair fern hangs from the slickrock; water drips, drips, drips, until I catch it in my mouth. Drink deeply, the desert sighs."

In her collections of essays, *Red: Passion and Patience in the Desert* (2001), Williams engages in further acts of sensual reciprocity, climbing
As we stroll the branches and nestle our bodies deep into the branches of the tree, 11 had forgotten what it felt like to really be held. 12

Hours pass before Williams finally unfolds herself from this embrace and climbs down. When she does, she stops for a moment and gives back to the body that has held her so intimately: "Feet on Earth. I took out my water bottle and saturated the roots. Pink sand turned red. I left the desert in a state of wetness." 13

Once again, for Williams, the erotic is all about reciprocal relationship—passionate, ecstatic, mutual connection.

Williams contrasts the kind of balanced and intimate reciprocity she models in her own terrestrial/human relations to a very different scenario. She warns: "When love is only one-way, eventually it becomes pornographic, a body that is used, rather than a body that is shared." 14

Unlike the erotic relationship, the pornographic encounter, as Williams defines it, is soulless, exploitative, and extractive. And this, she argues, is what our dominant relationship as humans to the land has become. As we mine, as we deforest, as we dam rivers, as we pump gallon after gallon of water out of the aquifers beneath the desert, draining its very life force. Williams finds we cultivate a pornographic relationship in which humans take from the land but do not give back. 15

The land itself becomes an object exploited, rather than a body shared. Similar movements, of course, were made in the movement in the 1970s and 1980s toward a feminist "herotica," in which women writers made a conscious effort to generate erotic narratives that shifted women from the role of exploited "object" to engaged subject. 16

Williams' own approach is somewhat different in that her ecstatic narratives of sacred lovemaking exude an intense mystical union that seeks to erase subject-object distinctions altogether.

For Williams, it is the illusion of separation of the human body from the larger Earth body that leads to the sins of exploitation. 17 She finds that pornography, like our abuse of the land, is predicated on numbing the senses, a hardening and disengaging from emotion that enables us to "annihilate what is beautiful and tender." 18

In the pornographic context, she argues, "[t]he erotic world is silenced, reduced to a collection of objects we can curate and control, be it a vase, a woman, or wilderness. Our lives become a piece in the puzzle of pornography as we 'go through the motions' of daily intercourse without any engagement of the soul." 19

Popular American ecospiritual icon Father Thomas Berry (who calls himself a "geologist") has identified this inability to engage the soul as a kind of "Earth autism," arguing that in modernity we have lost the nexus to communicate with and truly relate to the more than human world—crippled by our alienation, emotional unavailability, and distant vacant gaze. 20 Williams is similarly deeply disturbed that we have become a nation of detached voyeurs who look but do not "see."

Safely ensconced behind the windows of our automobiles or behind our camera lenses, we consume the landscape from a safe distance. 21 Here, Williams' perspective is evocative of Evelyn Underhill's classical take on mystical experience, that one only truly knows something (God, the beloved, one's own country, etc.) through "an interpenetration of it and ourselves. It gives itself to us, just in so far as we give ourselves to it. ..." 22

Cultural historians such as Roderick Nash and Catherine Alphand have written in detail about the phenomenon of "loving our National Parks to death," but in a twist, Williams' lament over wilderness spectators brings to mind seedier images—the voyeur in the National Park peepshow who "gets off" on the pay-views from the windows of his air-conditioned recreational vehicle but never dares, as she says, to "touch the rock, body, Earth." 23 Environmental historian Jennifer Price explores further the kind of wilderness voyeurism and virtual intercourse Williams describes, as she looks at the packaging and marketing of flattened "nature" images and sanitized "nature entertainment" for mall consumers at such chain stores as the Nature Company and Natural Wonders. 24

Compared to the alienated experiences of modern nature consumption described by Price, the automobile-ensconced voyeur's brand of disengagement from the landscape actually begins to look somewhat sensual.

Williams provides her own very specific illustration of the distinction between the "erotic" and the "pornographic" in Leap (2000), her book dedicated to her obsession with painter Hieronymus Bosch's medieval triptych, "The Garden of Delights," described by Williams as "a hymn to the sensual pleasures of the earth." 25

In her discussions of art, censorship, and the erotic, Williams recounts a 1990s controversy involving Brigham Young University's Museum of Art. The controversy was over whether to display four of sculptor Francois Auguste Rodin's well-known works, including one of his most sensual and famous pieces, "The Kiss." Ultimately, the museum decided not to display Rodin's nude statues because the works of art might preoccupy students with the wrong kinds of thoughts. 26 For Williams, embodied in the museum's decision to censor the nudes was a fundamental confusion, mistaking the erotic for the pornographic. The curators misread the sensuousness of "soulful connection," and the kind of sensual communion that Williams sees as so integral to the sacred, as something antithetical to or undermining of religious values. 27 It is this same misrecognition of the sacramental landscape as dead, empty, and profane matter that Williams challenges with graphic accounts of her earthly sensual unions. Comparative religionist Ninian Smart points out that "extra-sensuous" sexual union is the "best earthly analogue" for the true relationship of individual and "God," and Williams' sacralization of her planetary unions is no exception. 28
Williams further draws parallels between fear of eros and intimacy within Mormon culture and the narrow, unimaginitive valuing of nature solely for its practical human utility. "I see my community's fear of homosexuality even wilderness, as a future of love and imagination. Sex is like land. It must be used for something." Her very personal and intimate experiences with the land and the mystical descents tell her otherwise. As Williams slowly squeezes her body through the narrow passages between Utah's sheer sandstone walls, she says:

The palms of my hands search for a pulse in the rocks. I continue walking. In some places my hips barely fit through. I turn sideways, my chest and back in a vise of geologic time. I stop. The silence that lives in these sacred hollows presses against me. I relax. I surrender. I close my eyes. The recall of my breath rises in me like music, like love, as the persistent muscles between my legs tighten and release. I come to the rock in a moment of stillness, giving and receiving, where there is no partition between my body and the body of the Earth.

In many ways, Terry Tempest Williams does find herself in a "vise," and not just one of geological ancestry and heritage. It is a vise of religious tradition and cultural heritage on one side, and on the other the truth of personal and transformative experiences with nature. Paradoxically, it is a vise that brings pleasure and pain, bondage and sweet release. In a scene from Loops, she stands in Brigham Young Cougar Stadium with sixty thousand other Mormons to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the pioneers' pilgrimage to the Great Basin. As she watches the reenactment of her people's sacred heritage, she observes:

Inside my veins, I feel the pulse of my people, those dead are those standing beside me. A pulse will always be driven by a pulse that registers in my heart. I cannot escape my history, nor can I ignore the lineage that is mine. More importantly, I don't want to. Tears stream down my cheeks. I am home. I remember who I am and where I come from.

However, there are also things about her culture that she must reject. She speaks about her struggle with this internal contradiction, saying: "I am a Mormon woman. I am not orthodox. It is the less through which I see the world. I hear the Tabernacle Choir and it still makes me weep. There are other things in the culture that absolutely enrage me, and for me it is sacred rage." As artist, activist, and naturalist, what she cannot give conscience to is the conformity and obedience mandated by Mormon cultural norms. In her writings, Williams repeatedly champions diversity of life expression (both cultural and biotic). She recalls that it was her grandmother, Mimi, who first gave her a copy of a Peterson field guide to birds, cataloguing the incredible variety of winged species in North America. "[That] was the most subversive text she could have handed me." To Williams, raised in a community that instilled and valued conformity and obedience, the sheer variety of birds seemed radical, defiant, and suggestive. "Ultimately," she explains, "my culture values control, a control which suppresses creative expression. This is necessary because creative expression threatens to undermine the status quo."

Nevertheless, Utah is where Williams chooses to make her home and where she has made a conscious commitment to stay engaged in the community of her religious and cultural ancestry, vowing to "stand her ground" in the place that she loves. Williams defines her tradition as both a "blessing and a burden," noting that these are the tensions and conflicts that she commits to carry. She views her marriage of Mormonism and, as she calls it, "Earthism" as a teaching for her about the creative strengths of paradox. In approaching this lesson, she takes her cue from the Great Salt Lake—an enormous body of water, in the middle of a desert, from which you cannot drink. She reflects, "I live now in a landscape called Paradox Basin where salt domes have collapsed under the weight of time."

TOPOPHILIA AND THE SACRAMENTAL LANDSCAPE

Journeying through this landscape of paradox, Williams struggles to reclaim embedded aspects of Mormon culture that have traditionally stressed things such as the values of "sustainable living," small communal village life, community self-sufficiency, revelation received in the wilderness, and a prophetic connection to a sacred land. That is, her mystical love affair with and ecstatic wonderment at the Utah landscape stems not simply from her background as a naturalist and environmentalist but is also fundamentally connected to a powerful cultural mythos of Utah as Zion. Historically, a classic illustration of this mythos can be seen in a map published in William Smythe's Caucasian of the Land of Shakspeare (1900) that depicts Utah quite literally as the Holy Land. [See illustration.] The map outlines the Mormon-identified morphologically identical features of both the "promised land" of Canaan and "Desert," the new American Zion. In these parallel sacred geographies, the location of the holy city of Jerusalem is occupied in the New World by Salt Lake City, home of the Latter-day Temple (headquarters of the LDS Church). Thus, prophetic connections between the landscape of Utah (particularly the Great Salt Lake Basin) and a sacred destiny for Mormons are deeply embedded in the cultural history of a people who place great stock in the importance of roots and genealogy.

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has spoken about the particular bondage to place often associated with an actual or mythic homeland as "topophilia"—literally "the human love of place." Between the sacred narratives of the Mormon journey to the Great Basin, the ancient connections to North America stressed in Mormon scripture, and the
Religious historian Richard Foltz points to further evidence of poor Mormons/environmental relations and enumerates organizations such as Utah’s own Anti-Wilderness Society and Citizens Against Light Rail. Foltz documents the clear anti-environmentalist voting records of Utah’s Mormon United States legislators and draws his readers’ attention to a 1998 pamphlet coauthored by Mormon Republican Senator Orin Hatch that warns Utah parents that “preoccupation with environmental issues” may be a sign that their children are abusing drugs.

Nonetheless, it is the legacy of “Mormon topophilia” and connection to “sacred geography” that Williams chooses to carry forth through her writing and activism. Steven T. Katz and James Spickard have argued that even though mystical and ecstatic experiences are often self-defined as imputed experiences of the divine, fundamentally these experiences are always mediated to some degree through the mystic’s own cultural milieu and religious language. The filtration of Williams’ own mystically unifying encounters with the land through a Mormon cultural lens, which is tied to a historic and mystic topophilia, lends her writing a kind of creative organicism which gracefully unites diverse and contradictory elements. She points to the ironies of her chosen subject, in light of the fact that within Mormon culture eroticism is the “ultimate taboo.” Still, a distinctly Mormon sensibility shapes both her love for the sacred geography of Utah and her passionate appreciation of the legacy of her biotic ancestors, the generations of Earth’s cycles, and the miracle and fecundity of life. Williams deftly strategizes to marry elements and themes of Mormon culture with an engaged topophilia. “I know in Utah, if you say the word ‘wilderness,’ it’s a combustible log. It ignites. So we talk about ‘home’ and it’s a more inclusive topic, rather than one that separates.”

Williams invokes values traditionally embedded in Mormon culture such as the importance of marriage and family, genealogy, the constancy of community, and the importance of prophecy, while transforming and expanding their meanings in ways that are in keeping with her naturalist’s concerns. In New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community (1998), Williams and her co-editors purposefully tie notions of sustainability and reverence for nature to sources of scriptural authority, citing passages from the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and The Doctrine and Covenants. Each author in the book co-edited by Williams relates a different theme to his or her own personal story and then provides a kind of “green” scriptural exegesis. In this context, Williams argues that ecological concern and Mormon ethics are indeed a good match. “Many people would say ‘Mormon environmentalists’ is an oxymoron,” she says, “but that is only because of the stereotype and veneer that is attached to the religion. . . . If you go back and look at the teachings of Brigham Young, his journals and sermons, they are filled with very
strong sustainability.\textsuperscript{60} This includes issuing admonitions against overgrazing and wasting water, and promoting the utopian ideal of the self-sufficient communal Mormon village.\textsuperscript{62}

Williams reminds her readers that the LDS Church began with a mystical vision received by Joseph Smith, who was visited by the angel Moroni in a sacred grove of trees (no less) in upstate New York. Williams identifies Smith in positive terms as having been a "mystic . . . a restorer, a man of signs, a student of the occult, a practitioner of magic." And yet, she laments, "[t]here is little mystical about us now, we have abandoned the vision of Joseph."\textsuperscript{63} She repeatedly juxtaposes the story of the prophet Joseph receiving his vision in the sacred grove and the story of Jesus reclaiming his spiritual resolve in the wilderness. In light of these two figures who have so powerfully shaped her cultural pat-

bison, places with names such as Moon-Eyed Horse Canyon, Red River, and North Fork Virgin River." She is on a

research on the Western Apache, his Apache informants told him that

"personal engagement."

"To Brooke, For the Duration." In the contexts of landscape and human relations, Williams repeatedly casts marriage as a commitment to "stay with" for the "duration," a commitment she characterizes as not stagnant or dull but dynamic, "moving as the river moves."\textsuperscript{66} Williams points to the strength of her marriage to Brooke, but she also calls the names of her other loves to which she is wed, places with names such as Moon-Eyed Horse Canyon, Red Mountain, and North Fork Virgin River.\textsuperscript{65} She is on a "personal basis" with the landscape and calls it by its many names. She begins one of her essays in Red by reciting a list of more than 150 place names in her region, the names themselves simultaneously functioning as introduction, invocation, and incantation.\textsuperscript{67}

Anthropologist Keith Basso recounts that when he began his field research on the Western Apache, his Apache informants told him that

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story of the prophet Joseph receiving his vision in the sacred grove and the story of Jesus reclaiming his spiritual resolve in the wilderness. In light of these two figures who have so powerfully shaped her cultural pat-

"personal engagement."\textsuperscript{70} Thus, according to contemporary Mormon polygamist and writer Elizabeth Joseph, who speaks of the intimate relationships among herself and the other seven women in her family: Margaret, Bo, Joanna, Diana, Leslie, Dawn, and Delinda. Joseph writes: "You don't share two decades of experience, and a man, without those friendships becoming very special.\textsuperscript{72} Unlike Joseph's "symbiosis" arrangement, however, in which her husband has multiple wives but she only one husband, Williams makes binding vows to multiple loves, entering into a kind of planetary plural marriage.

In committing to "stay with" for the "duration," to remain simultaneously committed to both human and non-human biotic communities, Williams shares the fact that her grandmother's family was part of the so-called "Mormon underground" that continued to practice polygamy even after it was no longer sanctioned. Williams admires her ancestors for their capacity to engage in and faithfully maintain simultaneous multiple sacred commitments.\textsuperscript{73} There is something valuable to be learned from polygamy, she suggests, about moving beyond exclusivity

before they could teach him anything of their ways or their stories, impart any kind of rudimentary understanding of their worldviews and philosophies, he would have to learn the names of all their places. It is through the stories embedded in these place names and inscribed into the very features of the land that the universe is made meaningful.\textsuperscript{74}

Later in Basso's research, he came across an Apache who recited these place names out loud to himself over and over again as he strung fence. When asked why he was doing this, the man responded that the names "are good to say," and Basso little by little unpacked the full meaning of this—that these places are alive, that they are infused with a caring spirit and protective energy, that the land "looks after" the Apache, and that the spirit of the land moves. Basso learned that there is a bond between the people and these places that is so strong that the Apache say that when they go away from the land, they become sick and forget "how to be strong."\textsuperscript{75}

Williams' own relationship to the land in all its mutuality bears some similarities to the phenomenon Basso describes. She speaks of the powerful value of Earth literacy and of the sacred commitment to "stay home, to learn the names of things, to realize who we live among . . . plants, animals, rocks, rivers and human beings . . . I think our lack of intimacy with the land has initiated a lack of intimacy with each other . . . community is extremely intimate."\textsuperscript{76} As she talks about reclaiming what she calls "fugitive faith" (a term she borrows from Eduardo Galleano), she again says that this all begins with "learning the names of things, at the age of two or five or whatever. Great Blue Heron, Long-Billed Curlew, Sage, Cedar, Spruce. It creates an intimacy of engagement."\textsuperscript{77} In some ways, it is an intimacy not unlike that described by contemporary Mormon polygamist and writer Elizabeth Joseph, who speaks of the intimate relationships among herself and the other seven women in her family: Margaret, Bo, Joanna, Diana, Leslie, Dawn, and Delinda. Joseph writes: "You don't share two decades of experience, and a man, without those friendships becoming very special.\textsuperscript{72} Unlike Joseph's "symbiosis" arrangement, however, in which her husband has multiple wives but she only one husband, Williams makes binding vows to multiple loves, entering into a kind of planetary plural marriage.

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and about learning to share oneself in a variety of ways—not just with humans but with the whole community of life. "Every time we make love to a human being, fully," she contends, "we are making love to everything that lives and breathes. In that sense it becomes communion. It is a sacrament." In this multiple extension of love, relationship, commitment, and ecstasy, she asks:

Why don't we talk about what it means to be married? What it means to be married to our self? What it means to be married to a lover, a partner? What it means to be married to the earth, to our dreams, to our community? What it means to be married to a politics of place that can both inform and inspire us?78

The critical tension found throughout Williams' work is, of course, whether she can indeed serve multiple loves, marrying the Earth in all its creative, sensual lustiness while not divorcing the Mormon culture that she credits for having first helped to nurture and create her soul.79 Challenging and questioning the borders and boundaries of the religious landscape, she asks:

What is Christian? What's a pagan? Recently I was in Costa Rica, where I had the privilege of meeting a tribal medicine man.... He turned and said, "I am Christian, cosmologist, scientist, Earthist.... And I thought, that's what I am too! You know whether it's Christian, whether it's pagan, whether it's a writer, a lover of language, a lover of landscapes, can't we just say that our spirituality resides in our love? If that makes us pagan, perhaps. If it makes us Christian, perhaps. But I love the notion that it is not this or that, but this, that, and all of it. And, in a way, this is how I see spirituality emerging on the planet.80

CONCLUSION

In Williams' strong affirmation of the ability to embrace an expansive multiplicity of loves, commitments, truths, and experiences, despite conflicts and tensions, she resists easy dualisms and defies a narrowing down of life's plural form expressions. The relationship between language and landscape is itself "a marriage of sound and form, an oral geography, a sensual topography, what draws us to a place and keeps us there."81 Her life is not only filled with paradox and contradiction (desert and wetness) but also populated by the complex marriages of unlikely participants: Mormonism, environmentalism, eroticism, mysticism, artistic freedom, community responsibility, and personal revelation. Many of these are not easy marriages, but Williams suggests that there is a deepening that occurs in the process of negotiation and faithfulness required to make and sustain such sacramental bonds, and that the nature of that deepening is itself redemptive.

The last three words Williams' grandmother uttered before she died were, "Dance! Dance! Dance!"82 And dance Williams does, although that dance takes a variety of forms throughout her work. At some points it is a delicate dance, as when she substitutes the word "home" for "wilderness," depending on her audience. At other times it is a bold, unself-conscious, erotic dance in which she seduces her readers into sensual earthly encounters. In leading us in this dance, Williams skillfully draws upon what she calls the "magnetic pull of our bodies toward something stronger," a magnetic pull in which she says "arousal becomes a dance with longing," and through which "we form a secret partnership with possibility."83 In essence, Williams also invites us to her own dramatic desert wedding dance of unlikely partners.84 Describing herself as a woman "wedded to wilderness,"85 she engages her whole body in a profound union of place, paradox, patrimony, passion, and personal conviction. Once again, it is connection above all that is important, the bridge between the things we would otherwise hold and conceive of as being separate. And there is clearly a meaningful and internal sense to her joining together of these diverse elements. "In trying to wrap my arms around my own religious beliefs," explains Williams, "I am aware that I pick and choose what feels right to me.... I accept the Organic Trinity of Mineral, Vegetable, and Animal with as much authority as I accept the Holy Trinity. Both are sacred."86 Ultimately, through her mystical experiences of the landscape, Williams dares her readers to risk true intimacy and to play (even erotically) with the form and content of religion and culture. In doing so, she composes a kind of latter-day terrestrial canticle, infused with a passionate planetary polyfidelity that simultaneously affirms and challenges the inherited blessings and burdens of her religious tradition.

As environmental values gain broader acceptance in American culture, faith-based environmental consciousness and activism in the United States continues to gain greater notice and legitimacy. From sport utility vehicle-protesting church groups carrying signs asking, "What would Jesus drive?" to the growing number of those who now attend Gaian masses, St. Francis Day animal blessings, and environmental seders, notions of "creation care" and the "greening of religion" are making their way into the mainstream of American public discourse.87 A 1995 anthropological study of environmental values in American culture found that environmentalism had already become integrated with core American values such as parental responsibility and obligation to descendants. Of those surveyed, 78 percent agreed with the statement, "I am an environmentalist."88 At the same time, however, tensions have arisen over issues of orthodoxy, environmental consciousness, and a widening variety of nature-inspired spiritual practices.89 Looking more closely at a new generation of "nature mystics" such as Williams, and their struggles to "edge-walk" between tradition...
and change, provides a rare and intimate view into the organic and intertwined processes of religion and culture as they shape and reshape the American landscape.

ENDNOTES


6 This dynamic is most clearly demonstrated in Williams’ Desert Quintet: An Erotic Landscape (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993). See her comments in Derrick Jensen, "Interview With Terry Tempest Williams,” in Listening to the Land: Conversations about Nature, Culture, and Enso (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1995), 312; also, her interview with Benjamin Weil in Feminine Faith: Conversations on Spiritual, Environmental, and Community Renewal (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 160. In the Weiss text, Williams speaks of how “our body is the earth and the earth is our body.” Comparisons can also be drawn between Williams’ mystical union of Earth, body, and the divine and ecstatic religions such as the image of the Earth itself as “the body of God.” See Sally McFague, The Body of God: An Ecological Theology (Montreal: Fortress Press, 1993).

7 Terry Tempest Williams, Unspoken Hunger: Stories From the Field (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 79; and Jensen, "Interview," 317.

8 Webb, Feminine Faith, 163.


11 Scott London, "The Politics of Place: An Interview with Terry Tempest Williams,” [radio broadcast transcript], Insight & Outlook, Santa Barbara, California, 22 May 1996.


13 Jensen, "Interview,” 312.

14 I first presented this notion of fusion “Mormon eco-erotica” in the “Landscape, Literature and Lust” session of the American Academy of Religion, Denver, November 2001, and I am grateful to the session participants who offered comments and reflections.

15 Jensen, "Interview,” 310.

16 Jensen, "Interview," 312.

17 Williams, Desert Quintet, 29.

18 Williams, Desert Quintet, 11.

19 This collection also includes a reprint of Desert Quintet, first published in 1995.

20 Williams, Red, 107.

21 Williams, Red, 168.

22 Jensen, "Interview," 312.

23 Williams, Unspoken Hunger, 70-72.


25 This is an interesting twist on the Christian definition of “sin” as separation from God.

26 Jensen, "Interview," 312.

27 Jensen, "Interview,” 312. Here, Williams echoes the work of ecocritics such as PaulMiddle, who has argued that pornography is not an expression of erotic feeling and desire but a “look,” a way of looking and a desire to silence women. See Susan Griffin, Pornography and Silence: Culture’s Raging Against Nature (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

28 Thomas Berry, The Dream of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988). Viewed through this antihumanist lens, says Berry, the Earth and cosmos appear as a “collection of objects,” rather than a “communion of subjects.”


34 Williams, Leap, 185.

35 Williams, Leap, 185-87.


37 Williams, Leap, 184 (italics mine).

38 For a discussion of the mystic in the desert and the potency of desert mysticism, see especially Lane, Soles of the Desert Landscape, and Phillip Sheblakre, Spaces of the Sacred (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 31.

39 Williams, Desert Quintet, 9-10.

40 Literature on mysticism and nature experience makes frequent reference to the connection between ecstatic faith states and blissful states of supreme union and experiences with the natural world. In The Varieties of Religious Experience, for instance, William James identifies the transformative religious experience as being the "sacred organic thrill which
we feel in the forest at twilight, or in a moonlit gorge; only this time it comes over us at the thought of our supernatural relations." See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1981), 40.

41 Williams, *Leop.,* 177–78.


43 In adopting this stance, Williams might be said to be embracing what ethics Linda Holzer has termed "erotic moralist." Holzer argues that "[i]n dualistic, disembodied philosophy inevitably gave rise to an ethic based on logos—on rules, authorities, and duties—that rendered our awareness of giving rise to an ethic based on one, a semantic, insubstantial form of agency in which empathy, compassion, and care are the central moral qualities." See Linda Holzer, *Erotic Morality: The Role of Touch in Moral Agency* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 1.

44 Webb, *Fugitive Faith,* 162.

45 Jensen, *Interview,* 318.

46 Williams, *Unpolished Hooves,* 149. Elsewhere, I have argued that this conscious decision to "stay at home" within one's religious tradition, while creating innovative ways to "more sustainably" within that tradition, can be characterized in terms of "religious re- habilitation." See Sarah McFarland Taylor, "Rehabilitating Religion: Green Sisters, Ecological Renewal, and the Biogeochemistry of Religious Landscape," *Walden, no. 3* (December 2002): 227–52.

47 Webb, *Fugitive Faith,* 168.

48 Webb, *Fugitive Faith,* 164.

49 Williams, *Leop.,* 266.

50 Zion is the hill in Jerusalem upon which the sacred Temple was twiced built and destroyed. Even after the Temple's destruction, Zion continued to be the symbolic center of Jewish national life.


60 Webb, *Fugitive Faith,* 161.


62 See, for example, Lowery: Nelson's *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952).

63 Williams, *Leop.,* 145.

64 Williams, *Refuge,* 148.


68 Williams, *Ref.,* 169.

69 Williams, *Ref.,* 66–68.

70 Williams, *Ref.,* 63–68.


74 Webb, *Fugitive Faith,* 165.


77 Jensen, *Interviews,* 513.

78 Jensen, *Interviews,* 518.


81 Williams, *Ref.,* 136.


84 For a discussion of "women wedded to wilderness," see Williams' essay on "The Wild Card" in *An Unpolished Hooves,* 149.

85 Williams, *Unpolished Hooves,* 149.

86 Williams, *Leop.,* 147.

Soka Gakkai in Australia

Daniel A. Metraux

ABSTRACT: Japan's Soka Gakkai International (SGI) has established a small but growing chapter in Australia that in 2002 had about 2,500 members nationwide. Since its founding in the mid-1960s, SGI Australia (SGIA) has evolved into a highly heterogeneous movement dominated by ethnic Asians, of which a large number are Chinese from Southeast Asia. SGI's appeal is both social and religious. A key factor for SGI's growth is its emphasis on community. The fast pace of life, constant movement of people, and a sizeable growth of immigrants have created a sense of rootlessness among many Australians. SGI's tradition of forming small chapters whose members often meet in each other's homes or community centers creates a tightly bonded group. SGI members find their movement's form of Buddhism appealing because it is said to give them a greater sense of confidence and self-empowerment, permitting them to manage their own lives in a more creative manner.

Today Australia is experiencing a significant Buddhist boom with nearly two percent of the population declaring some adherence to this very traditional Asian religion. A vast majority of the adherents are ethnic Asians who have been immigrating to Australia since the early 1970s, but there is a growing interest among some Caucasian Australians as well. One of the more successful Buddhist organizations is the Australian chapter of Soka Gakkai, an organization that originated in Japan.

Soka Gakkai is one of the strongest of Japan's new religious movements with eight to ten million members. Soka Gakkai has also nurtured a highly successful international movement (Soka Gakkai International or SGI) that, according to Soka Gakkai estimates, has some two million followers in 187 foreign countries and territories. While Soka Gakkai and SGI chapters abroad share the same religious

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