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Ecological Humanist Mosaics: Dislocations and Relocations of the Autobiographical
Self in Terry Tempest Williams's *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*

Sharman Tullis Gill

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Ecological Humanist Mosaics: Dislocations and Relocations of the Autobiographical Self in Terry Tempest Williams's *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*

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Scientists and theorists are defining the contemporary era as the Anthropocene, an epoch of unprecedented human dominance. Terry Tempest Williams, in *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, asserts an ethical place for the human being in the 21st century. In light of ecological humanism, as an eco-critical lens that ethically centers the human in relational systems, she presents the metaphor of mosaic as a human-directed response to relational fragmentation, putting her in conversation with theorists of the Anthropocene. Her narratives of the self in various communities evoke mosaic as relational harmony, harking back to Romantic notions of wholeness and subject-centrism while adding the contemporary aspect of an interconnected and changeable self who, in the Anthropocene, recognizes a stewardship in the construction and maintenance of mosaic. Williams employs literary techniques that suggest dislocations and relocations of the human subject in ethical modes of being. Through narrative modes, multidisciplinary language, and themes of conversation, gift-exchange, listening and response, Williams reflects ecological humanist mosaics, suggesting cooperative regeneration—an intersection of material beings facilitated by an ethical human imagination that listens, receives, and gives toward patterns of beauty, including, but not limited to, being human in a collective world. This eco-critical analysis of Williams's work affirms the human being in post-humanist philosophy and repositions relational Romanticism for the 21st century.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Romanticism, ecological humanism, Terry Tempest Williams, Novalis, environmental ethics, eco-criticism, post-humanism

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Ecological Humanist Mosaics: Dislocations and Relocations of the Autobiographical

Self in Terry Tempest Williams's *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*

Fragmentation and breaking up is indeed the essence of the twentieth century./ We are now living in the twenty-first century.

—Terry Tempest Williams, *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*

The foundation of creation lies in the will. Faith is the effect of the will on the intelligence.—Objective and subjective intelligence. . . .

—The world etc. gradually arises out of this application.

—Novalis, *Notes For a Romantic Encyclopaedia*

We live in an era increasingly dominated by the human species, an epoch that scientists and theorists are defining as the Anthropocene (Lewis and Maslin; The Geological Society). Humans have become the primary drivers of global atmospheric change, widespread movement of invasive species, evolutionary and technological transformation of species, habitat change, and the intertwining environmental and economic factors associated with social conflict. Collectively, such factors indicate a world—including both the human and the natural—in flux with opportunities for human reconfiguration. Some emerging literary theories explore the postmodern emphasis on subject displacement in light of a contemporary global sense of fragmentation and the need for human-generated reconstruction, as reflected by the discourse on subjectivism and objectivism that Srinivas Aravamudan predicts “will yield its place to both the terrible and the beautiful” (25). Terry Tempest Williams, in *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, affirms the beautiful as she presents fragmentation and reconstruction in multiple narratives that include the autobiographical self as part of the Tempest family, as part of a research team among Utah prairie dogs, and as part of a humanitarian team among genocide survivors in Rwanda. These stories cohere through a theoretical paradigm of mosaic, which she develops from a visit to Italy where she studies the ancient art of mosaic. With the motif of mosaic, Williams evokes relational harmony between beings, harking back to Romantic notions of wholeness and subject-

centrism, while adding the contemporary aspect of an interconnected and changeable self who, in the Anthropocene, recognizes a stewardship in the construction and maintenance of mosaic.

William's autobiographical self is relational, meaning that she frames self-identity within the context of community story and external environment. This relational self parallels Linda Anderson's theoretical presentation of autobiography in which "the story, once crystallized, is inevitably the story of an 'exposure' to the world, or our relations with others. It becomes a kind of 'biography' of what we have been" (119). The autobiographical self, as a textual self, emerges from author memory, insight, and purpose, as well as from cultural contexts of both the writer and the reader. In *Finding Beauty*, Williams employs literary techniques that suggest the ethical necessity of a self who dislocates and relocates in relation to others. Through narrative modes, multidisciplinary language, and themes of conversation, gift-exchange, listening and response, Williams reflects ecological humanist mosaics, suggesting cooperative regeneration—an intersection of material beings facilitated by an ethical human imagination that listens, receives, and gives toward a pattern of beauty, including, but not limited to, being human in a collective world.

"Mosaic" as Ecological Humanist Motif

Mosaic, for Williams, includes diversity and respect, interconnection, a careful anthropocentrism, and a "light" beyond the self. In combination with some theoretical considerations, her mosaic motif provides a framework of thought that elucidates my subsequent textual analyses of the dynamic and relational autobiographical self as an expression of ecological humanism. Firstly, diversity is fundamental to mosaic work as "it is the tension that ties one tesserae [tile fragment] to another" (16), a tension that produces conversation between and among the fragments (6). Signifying the importance of contrast, she situates the self at points

of difference in her familial, interspecies, and intercultural relations—an ecofeminist self in a family that runs a pipeline construction business, a human researcher in a prairie dog community, and a foreigner traveling from a stable community to war-torn Rwanda. She intersects both the living and the nonliving to create meaning, recognizing both biotic and abiotic factors as integral to an ecological state. Her concept of contrast inspires new borders and patterns between politics, cultures, genders, family delineations, religions, continents, species, tools, rocks, and tombs, as she engages the self as a dynamic being in a complex system.

Williams’s idea of diversity conjoins with respect toward other beings. In her words, the master mosaicist discovers mosaic by “listening to the stones” (25). She implies a cooperative becoming that includes both human intention, even human niche-creation, but with a validation of the intrinsic value of all beings: “each tessera sparkles from the security of its intended niche” (25). While Williams affirms the value of all beings, she steers away from deep ecology,¹ a theoretical move that Michael Zimmerman also makes in a book review published in *Ecology*, a premier scientific journal. Zimmerman agrees that objects and systems deserve “ethical consideration simply by being what they are, where they are and interacting with other items in the way they do” but he steers an earnest reader of “ecological substance” away from deep ecology and back to Aldo Leopold’s land ethic (1964-65). Leopold, in his 1949 classic, *Sand County Almanac*, positions the human being as both a part of nature and steward of a greater land community (Leopold). Gesturing toward this ecological humanism, Williams inserts an extensive passage from Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac* and strategically places it between a description of the government-sanctioned “Rodenator” and a poetic plea for human-animal ethical

¹ Deep ecology, as an ecological world view, was coined in 1973 by Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosophy professor. This ecophilosophy decenters the human being in light of “biospheric egalitarianism” (Brennan and Lo 99).

interaction. Thus, an ethical stance mediates difference, implying a sense of conversation but one generated within a concept of “light” or a perspective that ethically checks human-centered interests.

In addition to the characteristics of diversity and respect, Williams affirms interconnection as a fundamental aspect of mosaic. Her overall method of composition suggests plurality and interconnection through various narrative modes, language styles, correspondence, scholarly inserts and references, quotes, personal journal entries, poems, field notes, and newspaper clippings. This textual mosaic suggests different viewpoints and deferral of the self, presenting both difference and interconnection. Mosaic, for Williams, evokes conversation among beings within the context of interchange and a broader community, suggesting a gesture to early Romanticism—a concept taken up, in general, by Daniel Berthold-Bond in his exploration of the “meaning of ecological thinking” (279). He asserts that ecological humanism can be distilled from the works of the nineteenth-century German idealist, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, who was “a humanist, but with a twist” (281). Berthold-Bond writes that, for Hegel, being includes “‘spirit,’ as the environmental whole in which beings dwell, a position that allows for a genuinely ecological vision of nature” (281-82) and clarifies that Hegel’s subjective positioning is one of reaching outwards, toward “home”—“the authentic self constantly reaches out beyond the limits of the ‘I’ to the standpoint of the “‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘we’ that is ‘I’” (291). Self-consciousness emerges as a relational phenomenon and Williams consistently represents this self in her text.

Williams’s exploration of interconnection, as a component to mosaic, also reflects the theoretical writings of Novalis, a German contemporary to Hegel. Rather than an “I-We” relationship, Novalis clarifies an “I-You” relationship, revealing a relational system of

interchange. In *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia* he writes that “the *ego* principle is the truly communal” and that the I-You relationship “renders possible and assures all determinations—providing them with an absolute connection and significance” (151). Thus the subject is the seat of understanding, but is also dynamic and relational. For Novalis, being is ecological as “we catch a glimpse of ourselves *as an element* in the system—and consequently, in an ascending and descending line, from the infinitely small to the infinitely large—*human beings* of infinite variations” (151). In the “I-You” sense, Williams suggests the self as a product of interaction or system. Furthermore, the subject, as part of a system, produces infinite difference and perspective but also, as a finite subject, chooses and produces change. Williams takes hope in the human subject who recognizes and respects a larger system of being.

In addition to aligning with a relational Romanticism, Williams reflects the theory of ecological humanism as a “moral image” that presents the potential for an individualistic language to tell a greater story of being. Steven Fesmire, in his discussion of ecological humanism as a moral image, argues for “new conceptions of individuality and freedom in touch with the complexity and interconnectedness of contemporary life” (27). Ecological humanism, as an organizing principle for ethics, fosters “creative intelligence” as it anticipates interactive being as both signal and response. The ethical component, which I will later discuss, pivots from an ecological understanding of interconnection and system. Other contemporary scholars associate Williams’s relational writings with the idea of interconnection as rooted in ecological thought, terming them “ecobiography” (Farr and Snyder), “geography of self” (Riley, *Finding One’s Place*), “natural biography” (Straight), and “deep ecology” (Kircher). Ecological models of thought can promote ideas of multiplicity, inclusivity, and interconnectivity. Conversely, they can also subsume the Other (Farr and Snyder 205), “deploy radical sacrificial logic”

(Aravamudan 23), or promote “eco-fascism” in the name of the community (Brennan and Lo 66). Furthermore, there is no consensus among theorists as to the subject positioning of the human being relative to nature. And, in the case of a clear human/nature divide, Brennan and Lo indicate, “the case against anthropocentrism has not yet been clearly proved” (8).

Williams’s human subject is part of an interdependent network rather than a “Great Chain of Being,” a paradigm that topples the human subject as ruler or ascendant and positions him or her as steward. Such anthropocentrism centers the human being in locations of agency and responsibility and decenters the human being through interchange, system, and dynamic perspectives that reveal the Other. Some contemporary theorists are reintegrating this careful anthropocentrism into environmental philosophy. Andrew Brennan and Y.S. Lo argue that the problem of the “special value” or subject-object positioning of the human being in environmental philosophy “makes the subject one of the more exciting and interesting branches of contemporary philosophy” (17). Kate Soper, while affirming the posthumanist move to decenter the human subject, warns against “denying or abstracting from environmental pressures altogether” (366). She settles on “the humanism in posthumanism” as a framework of thought that generates a moral response to environmental dilemmas. Aravamudan traces a similar thread, warning against an “escapist” response to the Anthropocene, recognizing the critical role of the human subject, for “a world where all objects and subjects are on strike . . . is a world where nothing much happens” (18; 20). He recognizes the limitations of Western hierarchical thought and presents a paradox: “anthropomorphization appears to be both the problem and the solution” (14). Diane Ackerman, in *The Human Age*, blurs the divide between humans and nature, generating a sense of cooperative, ecological becoming rather than hierarchical anthropocentrism: “If we are learning anything in the Anthropocene, it is that we are not really

separate at all. An important part of the landscape, our built environment is an expression of nature and can be more, or less, sustainable. The choice is ours” (25). Such theorists of the Anthropocene suggest that a solution to hierarchical abuse may be found in humanism via ethical choice. Williams takes the human/nature and subject/object dichotomies to task and, in the human subject, finds both limitation and solution. As I will discuss in later textual analyses, Williams both fades the self in her presentation of mosaic and asserts a dynamic, ethical self.

Williams affirms a non-hierarchical humanism when she defers to a “light” beyond the self. Whereas a natural ecosystem functions according to laws of natural selection and constraints from laws of thermodynamics, a humanist ecological system recognizes the selecting influence of humans on ecosystem function, including relational choices that increase sensitivity to the Other, or a recognition that “the face of each glass cube is emanating light” (25). The human hand or heart pieces together the living and non-living to construct an assemblage that is charged with the play of light, creating the feel of flow in the mosaic. In framing the rules of mosaic, Williams writes, “the play of light is the first and last rule of mosaic” (5), echoing scientific understanding of ecological systems as being constrained by energy—light—and the associated material transfer. In Williams’s mosaic metaphor, deference to a “light” signifies a listening mode that situates mosaic. For example, in a scene that features her study of mosaic, she visits a church in Ravenna Italy—the same church that Henry James describes in his travel narrative *Italian Hours* (1909). In the recounting of her visit to Sant’Apollinare Nuovo, Williams assumes a humble positioning away from her craft at hand: “I step back” (13). Next, the self recedes in the words of Henry James and, by so doing, overlays experience, seeking for a truth that transcends time and subjectivity. She then responds to the words of James: “I sit down on a bench and watch light” (14). This line, as a single paragraph, indicates careful thought prior to

being “settled on our design” (14). Craft infused with inspiration or “light” becomes art, which becomes being.

The “light” is perhaps seated in Williams’s prevalent Romanticism or in her Mormonism, both of which recognize an infusion of Spirit into all material existence. For example, in “Potsherds and Petroglyphs,” Katherine R. Chandler asserts that Williams’s ecophilosophy connects to core concepts of Mormonism: “that all nature, animate and inanimate, is spiritual; that duality of body and spirit is a false divide; that the earth is home for all living things; that humans need to work toward a relational community” (196). *Finding Beauty* suggests a spiritual “light” as exemplified in the interchange between the narrator and her translator and “son,” Louis Gakumba, as they sit at the oceanside in Maine, harking to Williams’s initial romantic gesture to the sea or Nature as the source of truth. She listens to Louis—her translator—as he listens to Nature—his translator—as he proclaims, “this is how I know God” (383). She responds, “we live our lives looking for that golden thread we can follow to the next clearing of light” (383).

As another example of Williams’s spiritual sense of ecophilosophy, she chooses “three white lilies against a backdrop of blue-green and turquoise” for a mosaic project, an image that evokes a Godhead with both earthly and heavenly affinities. This image suggests Romanticism and Christianity, a deference to “light” or something that connects being beyond human understanding. The image of lilies on blues and greens also affirms the intrinsic value of all beings and the potential enchantment that comes in a “conversational” reawakening. The “light,” an external source of truth, functions to check the subject, affirming human-centrism insofar that it sustains ethical relationships among beings. Brennan and Lo, commenting on environmental ethics in the contemporary era, write: “for those who do not want to found a theory of ethics and value on religion, the puzzle is to find a new structure within which notions of value, dignity and

equality can make sense” (7). An ethical system provides both the inspiration and the enlivening effect of William’s mosaic, when “light could converse with glass” (4).

Williams creates mosaic through piecing together a variety of styles, images, themes, and narrative modes to explore communities. In the following textual analyses I explore three relational constructs: the autobiographical self in relation to the Tempest family, in relation to a prairie dog community, and in relation to a genocide survivors’ community in Rwanda. Williams creates the effect of being both subject-removed and subject-present, indicating that “mosaic is not simply an art form but a form of integration, a way of not only seeing the world but responding to it” (384). She elucidates ecological humanist theory through her motif of mosaic but she also responds to the theory with actual, contemporary ways of being—subjective while acutely sensitive to relational dynamics.

The Autobiographical Self and the Tempest Family

With an initial sense of fragmentation Williams creates rich relational exchange between family members, projecting a narrative voice that dislocates and relocates, suggesting subject-object interchange that involves both listening and speaking, both giving and receiving. Consistent with her other writings, she validates themes of love and devotion in family relationships. As noted by Jeanette E. Riley, in “Finding One’s Place in the ‘Family of Things,’” Williams’s concept of family, whether nuclear or expanded, creates an antidote to community fragmentation and the base drives that destroy both human and natural communities (261). In *Finding Beauty*, she faces Tempest family fragmentation: philosophical divergence with her father, as well as grief and loss associated with the illness and death of her brother. In the following ecological humanist mosaics, Williams presents the relational self in a system of

interchange through self-father discourse and in her self-brother gift exchange and, in both cases, she presents an ethical self who is in dynamic, relational becoming.

The self-father relationship in *Finding Beauty* exhibits nodes of ecophilosophical difference and discourse. Williams both listens and speaks, engaging in a constructive dialogue that models a hopeful environmental discourse for the American West in general. Williams and her father do not hold the same perspectives: the Tempest ecophilosophies diverge between “the pen” and the “shovel,” between environmental activism and environmental utilitarianism. Williams is an environmental writer and activist, whereas her father and brothers run a family business, constructing pipelines that support human-made systems. She indicates that “the pen” and “the shovel” can become unknowable to the other: “I watched and I wondered what the men in my family know that I will never understand because of one simple thing—their tool of choice is a shovel” (208). Seamus Heaney, another writer who tries to mediate political and ideological conflicts, evokes this occupational difference in his poem, “Digging.” Williams exudes a sense of respect for the tools of a family heritage but expresses a sense of separation, as Heaney does in his poem: “But I’ve no spade to follow men like them. / Between my finger and my thumb / The squat pen rests. / I’ll dig with it.” The “shovel” and “the pen,” as different human-tool relationships, present a synecdoche for polarized land politics of the American West, articulating attitudes of utilization versus preservation.

As a characteristic that informs later self-dislocation, Williams exhibits an ecofeminist self who is biased against the cowboy or conqueror motif of the West, implying a corresponding difference between the narrative self and the Tempest men who “conquer” the land through economic development and the expansion of urban systems. Yet, through narrative technique, Williams opens herself to questions, creating the effects of dislocation and relocation in her

relationships. Her biases against the “cowboy” are unabashed. For example, she sets the budding iris of a “woman’s garden” against the sagebrush of a former homestead (166) and a “man spitting on the prairie dog” contrasts with a woman “pressing her lips against the dying prairie dog baby’s lips” followed by references of “contempt or communion, cruelty or care” (167). Harsh language surrounds the “cowboy” as a mover of machines as he rides a Bobcat in the corral. Williams’s language, at times, becomes coarse in contrast to her field notes, which quote Buddhist poetry and record peace and beauty in nature. For example, “the light on the rabbitbrush and sage is deep and jewel-like, transforming common shrubs into various shades of jade” contrasts with “cowboys piling up the shit. No peace in the corrals. Dust. Neurotic mules. These men work hard” (158). She describes cowboys dressed in the colors and style of the American West: red, white, and blue, with leather chaps that put “special emphasis on their crotches” (124). Nevertheless, her familial ties complicate depictions of “cowboy.”

The Tempest men also wear boots and move the earth with machines, yet Williams loves these men and compliments them as “tough, rugged, beautiful men.” Nevertheless, they are “weathered and weary from decades of beating their bodies against the land” (208). Fundamentally, her resistance to smoke and machine, dust and cowboy, is a rejection of the historic mentality of man as conqueror of nature. This situated self is, in Adrienne Rich’s terms, a “place of location” (230-231) and from this ecofeminist location, the dislocations and relocations of the narrative self emerge as mosaic—for it is “tension that ties one tesserae to another” (16).

Williams produces conversation in the “tension” of difference. She creates textual effects of humble listening and openness in subject-object relations—dislocations of the self. In an extended scene that captures the frustration of environmental politics, she silences the

ecofeminist voice. Her father, looking up from a newspaper article about the efforts of a conservation group to relocate vulnerable prairie dogs from a golf course, proclaims, “I feel for the owners of the golf course” (82). She observes his gestures, motions, and agitations but does not comment. In long passages, Williams further brings her father’s irritated voice to the forefront as he expresses frustration about fulfilling his work contracts, government bureaucracy, contradictions in the implementation of environmental legislation, and his admiration for hard-working men who see only “a fragment of the picture” (84). Occasionally she interjects neutral queries like, “we are talking about Utah prairie dogs, right?” or “what kind of leadership are you talking about?” (84). He expresses his aggravation for nearly four pages as Williams mostly retreats from the dialogue. She observes and listens until her father’s final question, “do you see how frustrating it is for us to hear that we have to shut down our job because of some insignificant little prairie dogs?” (85). In this interchange Williams resists “othering” the opposition. Her relationship with her father calls for self-restraint and listening, attributes that evoke mosaic as she respects difference.

An aspect of Williams’s respect of difference between beings surfaces in her acknowledgment that another being cannot be fully understood. For example, before coming to the foreground, she nods to her father’s way of thinking: he has a “mind . . . trained to map underground” (81), a mind which is critical in the work of the Tempest men who “hold the maps of an underground landscape of labyrinths and mazes that direct the oil and gas, sewer and water lifelines for the construction of our species” (79). Like the underground prairie dog, her father represents to her an unknowable, but relational Other, and so she can only “follow the horizon” (81). Nevertheless, she also presents in the foreground of the scene, responding to her father in a negotiated stance, a careful subject-centrism—a relocated self. A single line rests in white space

as a restrained, yet powerful, response. She presents a question to answer her father's question: "What will we lose if prairie dogs disappear from North America?" Question overlays question, manifesting both listening and response, implying a continuing dialogue and affirming both the dignity of Self and Other in the sense of mosaic.

In self-father discourse Williams suggests the family as synecdoche for a larger political landscape of the American West. She summarizes the section on prairie dogs with an illustration of the unification of ranchers and environmentalists in the Safe Harbor Agreement (221). This cooperative effort in the mid-1990s brought together landowners and environmentalists in a mutual effort "to become responsible stewards and conservationists" (220), making available funds for range restoration that benefits both cattle and wildlife. The agreement also enhances prairie dog relocation efforts and increases freedom for landowners to live-trap overabundant prairie dogs. In the words of an Environmental Defense ecologist, Williams portrays this as "a win-win situation for everyone . . . for the rancher, the land, the cows, and especially, the prairie dogs" (221). Ecological humanist mosaics are "win-win" modes of being. Williams posits discourse through subject-situated listening and response (dislocations), moving toward ethical modes of mutuality (relocations). Ever subject-present, the narrative self affirms that human beings can "recognize patterns and find our way toward a unity built on empathy." Respect and dignity define the essence and the product of mosaic: "The beauty made belongs to everyone. We all bow" (385).

Gift exchange, in the self-brother relationship, evokes a dynamic sense of bi-directionality, as well as a relationship grounded in an empathy that extends beyond death. Although Tempest siblings, Williams and her brother Steve diverge by gender, differences in occupation, states of health and, eventually, the vast contrast of being alive versus dead. Steve is

a Tempest man, yoked to the family pipeline business, and suffering from illness. She is the last remaining Tempest woman, yoked to her work as an environmental writer, and feeling the fragmentation associated with Steve's illness and the former loss of her mother and grandmothers. From a sense of loss, Williams emotionally reaches toward her brother in correspondence grounded in empathy, perhaps suggesting an invitation to join "the clan of the one-breasted women" from the epilogue to *Refuge*. In *Finding Beauty* she expresses the following to her brother:

Can you share with me not just how you are feeling but what you are feeling?
 What is this experience, Steve? It's true we went through this with Mother, but it feels so different now, my beautiful brother, my littermate. I have no memory of life without you. Educate me. So that I may be more humbly present with you as your loving sister. (110)

Thus, even prior to gift exchange, Williams presents a relational intention grounded in love and empathy, similar to the love and respect that defines the discourse with her father. This ethical self, as a dislocated self, harks to the "light" of Williams's mosaic motif and guides subsequent relocations that, in this case, are sensitive to interchange.

Gift exchange, originating from the siblings' common interest in "bones," creates a mode of interchange that elucidates Williams's ecological humanist ontology with a collapse of time, infusion of "magic," and a sense of inter-being with the non-living world as rich relational exchange. Steve presents his sister with a prairie dog skull, urging that she look for uniqueness in this particular gift, asking, "what do you notice about this skull that is different from others?" (38). She rests it in the palm of her hand but cannot respond. He continues: "the eyes" with a second emphasis, "look at the enormous space for the eyes" (38). She subconsciously receives

the gift and Steve's comments in "the dream." After a double insertion of white space in the text, she switches her language to a dream-like, subconscious state of self-dislocation. Harking to a primeval mode in which the animal speaks on equal terms (38), Steve, the skull, the prairie dogs, and a sense of politics and science, coalesce as dream. She keeps the skull on her desk and later, after twenty-four pages of prairie-dog politics, she returns with a conscious relocation of the narrative self. Her brother's gift and commentary have gradually integrated in her sense of being as she finally answers her brother's initial question with understanding: "the enormity of the eye sockets." The relational influence of brother merges with her developing scientific understanding of prairie dogs as "the eyes of the community," and she accepts this gift as ecological humanist becoming.

In addition to the rich relational context of gift reception, Williams engages the theme of relational gift-giving. For example, alluding to Steve's original gift of the skull as well as the bones strewn across war-torn Rwanda, she responds with a gift of her own. She creates a bridge out of "bones," aiming for an emotional sense of collective goodness, positive connection, and healing. In further detail, she pauses during a nature walk and creates a "doll" out of natural objects and "its fragrance was a jolt of ritual" (218). The doll, animated by nature and human intention, speaks, "make your brother a bridge of bones" (218). The river delivers gifts of "white sticks" and the narrative self builds "bones of intention," choosing "each stick with care and interest. Some were straight, some gnarled and twisted, others more bark than stick" (218). Her artistic gift reaches for relational connections beyond imminent limitations. She is "building a bridge of bones across a river of light, golden light" and asks him, "once on the other side, will you sing your words back to me, my little brother, my lovely, wise brother, a man of construction who welds pipe into art" (219). Later, at the request of her Rwandan friend

Dorothee, the narrative self picks “Stephen” as a name for Dorothee’s baby, because “he worked hard and helped many people” (334) and Williams writes, “even in death, Steve was still giving, still teaching” (209). Thus the cycle of giving and receiving works to connect beings—living and non-living—in meaningful discourse, working toward sympathies that cross time and space.

Williams evokes ecological humanist “mosaics” in the familial realm through inter-being exchange, grounded in ethics of respect, love, and a desire for unity. She surrenders dichotomous difference to a complex expression of being—dynamic interchange between subject and object with a subject who dislocates and relocates, and an imagination that engages with the non-living as tool or metaphor toward an enlivening, even magical effect to ethical becoming. In *Tempest* family dynamics, Williams suggests a relational harmony for a larger political landscape of the American West, as well as a larger global landscape. Her subjects and objects align with Aravamudan’s theoretical call for an increased realization of multiplicity, with Soper’s “humanism post-humanism,” and Ackerman’s humanist, ethical becoming in a much-more-than human world.

The Autobiographical Self and a Prairie Dog Community

As part of the *Tempest* family, Williams’s ecological humanist mosaics emerge from an established sense of community as she depicts conversation that bridges broader differences in the American West. As a study of interspecies relations, *Finding Beauty* also gestures toward conversation in a broader community, but she further dislocates the human subject in relation to the non-human Other. Her narrative of the prairie dog community resonates in the contemporary theoretical era that problematizes anthropocentric thought while recognizing the era of the Anthropocene and a need for human-generated ethics within a theoretical framework of interconnection and systems. For example, Ackerman contrasts the Anthropocene to the

Industrial Age as an era that demands human-constructed change with a sensitivity to Earth-becoming, rather than the past “thrill” of the human being “to master nature everywhere and in every way” (307). Ackerman both decenters the human being through a blurring of nature and culture and centers the human being as an ethical agent of change. Williams entertains a similar ontological complexity as she strives to both de-center the narrative self to community and center an ethical self within an Other-sensitive paradigm. The narrative self joins a wildlife research team in Bryce Canyon National Park and, over a two-week period, explores the self-animal relationship through multidisciplinary modes of cooperative being. Interestingly, her multidisciplinary quest keeps her anthropocentric tendencies in continual check. Williams presents relational beauty through an exploratory journey that includes scientific, naturalist, and poetic stances of the self. In particular, her use of poetry as rich relational expression generates both self-dislocation and self-relocation of an ethical human subject in an ecological humanist mosaic.

In the spirit of Novalis, Williams engages in multidisciplinary inquiry toward a sense of relational system and interchange. Poesis, for both, marks a premier point in ontological understanding, one that places the human being within nature rather than apart from nature, and with relational exchange being as “I-You” in a system of being. Williams’s narrative self extends from the author’s multidisciplinary background, as she holds academic degrees in both environmental science and English. Her employment history includes being a naturalist at the Utah Natural History Museum and an academic educator and writer in the humanities. She also has a long-standing love for bird-watching and maintains a keen eye for the natural world in her writings, as well as a solid representation of science. The narrative self maintains this multidisciplinary background, experimenting with self-placements through language, often

resulting in self-questioning. Like Novalis—who affirms multidisciplinary query as “a threefold interweaving and interlocking intrigue” —Williams explores ontological understanding through varying modes of Self-Other engagement (*Notes* 84). As Scientist, she adopts a technical tone, deferring to data and sterile observation, but admits to problematical biases. As Naturalist, she freely engages in subjective interpretation of the natural world, but admits to problematical anthropomorphization. As Poet, she defers to the power of language to present a subconscious sense of being, an articulation of ecological humanist mosaic. Williams’s ecopoetry presents non-hierarchical relational being; however, this relational expression requires a surrendering of the self to spiritual mystery and ethical becoming.

Williams asserts the Scientific Self as engaging in valuable work, but from a position that must negotiate perceptual difficulties, ethical challenges, and limited ontological understanding. As a scientist, her observational task seems straightforward: “my task is a simple one: observe prairie dog behavior” (95). She physically reorients toward the prairie dog community, enduring the discomfort of wind, cold, aching back, and tedium, spending long hours in an observation hut—“a four-by-six plywood box on stilts” with a small hole in the floor as a toilet (139). She observes and records particular prairie dogs from a pre-determined, unnatural orientation. The tools—binoculars, notebook, and pen—function to both enhance and narrow focus, furthering to blind peripheral vision. She engages in long hours of data input based on protocol and pre-set categories, such as time, site, and behavioral activities. Outside the hut, she helps capture prairie dogs, noting details like markings and “number of capillary tubes of blood collected” (135-46). Her scientific notes are sterile and factual. For example, at 7:25 “P Dog #24 went to bed at 9J” and at 7:26 “Unmarked went to bed at NW” (108). Williams finds value in scientific inquiry but

she also recognizes that science, as an ontological quest, comes at potential costs, both ethically and perceptually.

At times, the scientific protocol strains Williams's ethical self. For example, she considers the capturing and labeling of the prairie dog babies "the hardest part of my job" (113). Her language suggests the animal as victim: "These babies in the next day or two will be dyed, hooded, striped, numbered, bled, and pierced. Right now, they are innocent and camouflaged, the color of clay" (128). However, in conjunction with empathy she sees a benefit to scientific study, for "the payoff is being with the prairie dogs, holding them, talking to them, trying keep them calm, all the while learning from John [the lead wildlife biologist] as he measures, marks, and identifies them. He is constantly teaching us what he knows, what he has learned and continues to learn each day" (131). Through empirical study and empathy, the self finds both scientific and relational knowledge.

Nevertheless, in the Scientific Self's quest she presents incomplete dislocations of the self as she describes her own perceptual biases and the limitations to scientific query. For example, while following scientific protocol, she veers toward personal interests, a field of vision that includes pre-disposed preferences and her imagination. This is the ever-present self, a place "from [her] perch" where she is especially drawn toward a myriad of bird species and metaphors (120). Her imagination perceives the clouds in the sky as the human brain, ships, and turtles. She remembers associations to other animals and themes. At one point she becomes like a turtle, "carrying the self [on her back]. The self as home" (120). This language suggests a tension between scientific protocol and the ever-present subject. She writes, in regard to observational science: "each day is a discipline. To stay focused on the task at hand—prairie dog activity among the North Clan" (120). The scientist strives to reduce subject bias in deference to

particular objects; however, the relational expression of community resists scientific language, presenting questions to the scientist such as “who am I not seeing on the periphery?” (201) or “what is hidden from us?” (136). At one point the Scientific Self completely reorients her perspective to the rear of the observational tower, taking in a new view of prairie dog, forest, meadow, and ecosystem. These tensions and reorientations indicate inherent perceptual limitations in the Scientific Self, but suggest that ethics can facilitate scientific understanding toward ecological humanist ways of being in the world—ways that bolster the well-being of all beings.

Williams validates ethical scientific pursuits but she also desires more, like Novalis’s teacher in *The Novices of Sais* who spent a period of time “making notes in the sand, gather[ing] all things from nature” but who still felt that “something more created a yearning” (7). This “yearning” is toward a relational self—sensory, exploratory, and open to new perceptions and relational mergings. Novalis defines this naturalist stage as a realization of the self as part of “antithetical relations and experiences” (*Notes* 84), meaning that the human subject freely relates observations as part of self-experiences. The Naturalist Self benefits from the tangible results of scientific query but abandons the delineation of subject and object, and engages in uninhibited relational “meetings and encounters.” She is open to novelty, experiences that come without pre-design. For example, after following standard procedure for checking prairie dog traps, Williams writes, “walking back to the tower, it struck me, what must a prairie dog’s point of view be?” (151). She suddenly assumes a dramatic change in posture, creating a Self-prairie dog:

I am down on my belly. I lower my eyes to meet theirs—sage level with so much sky; how could you not rely on other members of your community? The world is too vast to rely on one set of

eyes and too small not to discount what you do see (151). Another time, the naturalist merges with predator, indicating a self who is unfixed, exploratory, even contradictory in nature: Through the square hole in the floor of my tower, I watch P Dog #24 forage below, a hawk's view, talons on its back. I can't help it; I instinctively think like a predator. Why else would I have eyes forward? (160).

Such explorations of perception address the potential "monster" in the self but can also present a problematical anthropomorphization of the non-human Other, as she especially indicates in an overlay of herself on Madame Head Wide Apart, in whom, she admits, "it's easy for me to project my own thoughts" (127) and in whom she sees a "dark strain of tears" (126). Williams recognizes the offending capacity of anthropomorphization even as she defends it as a mode for empathy and connection. She allies herself with author Mary Midgley in the proclamation that "the real act of anthropomorphism is to assume animals don't think or feel. To postulate and suppose that we are the only species that has consciousness is the ultimate act of solipsism" (140). Williams's anthropomorphization can exude a sense of sympathetic connection between beings, in a way that suggests an ethical self activating toward relational harmony, though perhaps not non-hierarchical being. For example, each day Madame Head Wide Apart comes to the base of the tower and looks up at the Naturalist. She responds, "Hello, Madame Head Wide Apart" (138). This is a bi-directional greeting, a relational exchange between subject and object, but also a hierarchical placement of the Self above the animal in a position of anthropomorphizing control. Despite Williams's efforts against solipsism, her anthropomorphization, in the mode of Naturalist Self, sometimes distills self-empathy, selective empathy, and hierarchy.

Paradoxically, the Naturalist Self counters self-animal hierarchy when she assumes a role as student of the prairie dogs, suggesting human humility and stewardship rather than dominion. Williams writes that the prairie dog is a teacher of powerful concepts such as “the force of . . . personalities,” the impact of a species on communities, “resiliency in the midst of a damaged landscape,” and “watchfulness” (139). She emphasizes, “they are teaching me what it means to live in community” (139). Thus, the Naturalist Self—as student and steward to the prairie dog—postures an egalitarian ethic: “To be able to witness the embodiment of a different kind of knowing, an intelligence that is not human but prairie dog, is to realize we are just one consciousness among many” (197). The Naturalist Self’s realization of interconnection and diversity becomes the Poetic Self’s ethical engagement of diversity, or a relocation of the self in ecological humanist mosaic.

Williams integrates poetry throughout the interspecies narrative, much of it either self-authored or coming from *Tao Te Ching*, an ancient Chinese text that points toward Daoism as the “path” or the “way.” While I focus on Williams’s self-authored poetry as an indication of ecological humanist thinking, I note that *Tao Te Ching*, as traditionally told, emerged during a time of warring states when many thinkers asked “Where is the Dao?” and explored answers pointing toward a “way” that governs both humans and nature (Miller). Williams’s insertions from *Tao Te Ching*, such as, “the root of the noble is in the common” (184), “the unwanting soul/Sees what’s hidden” (174) and “the wise/wear their jade under common clothes” (157) reinforce her moves to temper subject centrism. The poetic passages of *Tao Te Ching*, paralleling Williams’s motif of mosaic, indicate a surrendering to mystery and harmonious relationships.

In regard to her own shifts from scientific and naturalist language to the poetic, Williams increasingly releases the subject to a sense of ecological being, to a “way” of Nature that

includes human ethical intention. Literary critics have identified an ecological sense in the poetic leanings of Novalis who also explores the interconnected self. For example, Kuzniar writes that Novalis's proclivity for poetry parallels a sense of dynamic inter-being: his "galvanistic references to fluidity and stimulus, as well as to poetry's elasticity, limitlessness, mutability, and organicity link Novalis's concept of poetry to a kind of animal-like dynamism" (433). Williams intersperses poetry throughout the Bryce Canyon narrative, creating a sense of ecological being as well as providing a rhetorical strategy that invites readers to respond to her ecophilosophy.

Novalis clarifies Williams's Romantic spirit of poetry as relational truth: "poetry has been the favorite instrument of true friends of nature, and the spirit of nature has shone most radiantly in poems. When we read and hear true poems, we feel the movement of nature's inner reason and, like its celestial embodiment, we dwell in it and hover over it at once" (*The Novices* 25). Similarly, poetic language for Williams creates a spontaneous and intuitive realm, a language that evokes a sense of being. Williams juxtaposes scientific, naturalist, and general narrative language with insertions of poetry, gesturing toward an ethical "light" of being that facilitates relational beauty or mosaic.

Williams recognizes "the pen" in nature, a language that goes beyond the object-oriented observations. She hears it among the prairie dogs: "'click, click, click, click, click, click'—their calls sound like a pen tapping on wood. [She sees] their pink mouths as they continue their chipping, chirping" (125). It seems a Romantic call to the Poetic Self from Nature. She writes, "I feel at peace because the memory of wild nature is held within the nucleus for each living cell. Our bodies remember wholeness in the midst of fragmentation" (198). Language, as intuitive expression, expresses deep ontological understanding.

Williams interjects poetic language as a synergetic force, validating a relational sense of being. For example, before taking a nap at her observation tower, the Poetic Self imagines a connection between music, ecology, and resilience:

Before falling asleep, I listen to Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony. . . . I hear it as a raised fist against oppression. The calling of strings is an outpouring of emotion. A lone clarinet. An oboe weeps in sorrow, echoed by a bassoon and then the voice of the flute. A melody emerges in the midst of mass tragedy" (131).

She associates the flute with the prairie dogs: "Or perhaps it is the prairie dog's voice that holds the place of the flutes. There is an ecological orchestration that is ongoing, a symphony of voices, sometimes dissonant, sometimes harmonious, always dynamic" (131-32). Williams follows this poetic passage with a sharp return to her technical notes: "P Dog #70 returns to Burrow NJ. Her pups are still out" (132). She further summons a sense of vulnerability and danger: "P Dogs #35, #21, and #70 are standing on the edge of the East Woods, upright, alert" (132). The poetic prelude of ecological resilience gives new meaning to "her pups are still out." We listen for the "melody" amidst vulnerability and fragmentation. The naturalist alerts us to a repetitive plea, a countdown, a premonition, even a warning. The scientific notes reflect states of danger—"upright, alert" prairie dogs and "a dust devil" that disperses mules (an allusion to the proximity of the "cowboy" mentality). Poesis synergizes Williams's language, evoking an ecological humanist ethic.

As another example, Williams presents a concrete poem that, in its white space, presents the shape of a prairie dog. Significantly, this poem follows an interplay of technical language on two topics, mosaic-making and prairie dogs—the first as a reminder of the theory of mosaic, and the second as an implied connection with the prairie dog or the nonhuman Other. The "dance"

between the two topics blurs the boundaries of the technical, preparing a place for the poetic. A page turn beyond this interplay, Williams presents a full page of poetry in which words are arranged to form, in the white space they surround, the shape of the prairie dog (36). Names of creatures and vegetation, beginning with golden eagle and ending with buffalo grass, are seemingly random with a centralized top and pedestal. The white space of the prairie dog, though potentially invisible, stabilizes the structure of a perceived ecosystem. The species diversify as they become less visible, more essential to the elements, and surprisingly many. This highly visual poem is inseparable from the text. Words vitalize with meaning.

Williams traces Novalis's multidisciplinary endeavoring toward relational beauty, and especially manifests his relational Romanticism in her eco-poetics grounded in the ethics of equality and inter-being becoming. Like Novalis, who expresses quests toward beauty and truth that "relate to irrational Nature—In rational being" (127), Williams indicates a Self-Other dynamic that include dislocations and relocations of the self, creating the effect of being self-referential without being ego-centric. Furthermore, she invites readers toward a response that would indicate a closure to an enthymeme of beauty and interconnection,² toward ecological humanist mosaic.

The Autobiographical Self and a Rwandan Community

In the Rwandan narrative of *Finding Beauty* Williams depicts the most significant physical and emotional dislocations of the autobiographical self, indicating both self-questioning and a reorientation that completely redefines the relational self. In the Tempest family, Williams affirms an existing community (while gesturing toward a broader community), and in the prairie

² According to Jeanette E. Riley's "The Eco-Narrative and the Enthymeme," Williams employs narrative forms as rhetorical strategy toward an ecofeminist agenda in *Refuge*. She utilizes enthymeme, or a shared emotional sense between the writer and reader, as an unspoken premise that requires reader participation.

dog community she explores ways of interacting in a non-human community but one that is still part of the landscape of the American West. Markedly, in the Rwandan narrative she leaves her “homeland,” completely redefining community and thus her sense of self. This relocation of the self reaches a climax in her adoption of the “man-child,” Louis Gakumba, as a son.

As a backdrop, in the Rwandan setting Williams continues to explore the subject of self within a systems motif and, thus, part of the complex web of relational disharmony that extends beyond the Tutsi-Hutu conflict. She links instability between social and natural systems; furthermore, she presents a global-system component that contributes to the Rwandan tragedy, including historical colonialism and current international attitudes that bolster or neglect Rwandan power structures. In keeping with this complex relational representation of Rwanda, she recognizes undesirable and unstable features in the self, juxtaposing this with choices toward increased humility and ethical responsibility in a global community. Williams does not presume to entirely understand or solve the complex predicament of post-genocide Rwanda but she advocates for the ethical human subject in a relational system. In her role as scribe for the Barefoot Artists, she engages an ethical, relational self as she both listens and responds to the Rwandan story, for “it is the stories that move us to a place of change” (336).

Williams resists traveling to Rwanda, associating it with the familiarity of death and the horror of genocide but chooses to engage in humanitarian work as an ethical, relational self. She eventually accepts the invitation of her artist friend, Lily Yeh, to become scribe for the Barefoot Artists, an organized response to a Rwandan expression of need. The Barefoot Artists come to Rwanda for about a month to plan and prepare to build a genocide memorial, as well as to jumpstart local arts and development efforts in the Genocide Survivors Village of Rugerero. Williams accepts this work with the sense that “my own spiritual evolution depended on it”

(225). She leaves the security of homeland and comes to the borders of the Congo where active ethnic violence continues, facing a profound sense of physical and emotional dislocation. For example, her whiteness stands out as “Muzungu! Muzungu!” (228) and she senses the limitations of language in a “foreign landscape” (272). She witnesses mass graves, war-wounds, and “ghosts everywhere” (232) and feels the press of crowds, poverty, erosion, heat, and pathogens. At one point she leans against “a tree wishing I could disappear. The physical and psychic assault of Africa has deflated me. I close my eyes” (251). She admits a near breaking point: “it has become too much—the residue of violence, the brokenness, the instability of the land and the people, Rwanda is an open wound” (391). Such depictions of discomfort, even despair, suggest 21st century fragmentation and brokenness, with leanings toward nihilism or escapism. However, in the spirit of “mosaic” as an ecological humanist construct, Williams re-grounds the self toward relational reconstruction and healing.

Williams’s ethical and dynamic self aligns with a contemporary humanism that steers the human subject away from a sense of superiority while still exerting an ethic of stewardship. Aravamudan describes such subject-object dynamics as a becoming with “malleability” and “openness from the subjective to the objective world,” claiming that these ontological attributes are critical in contemporary theory (22). Ackerman also calls for a flexible, evolving human subject: “Perhaps we also need to think about the beings we wish to become. What sort of world do we wish to live in, and how do we design that human-made sphere?” (308). Such contemporary humanism includes a relational human subject who is both self-questioning and self-asserting.

In line with the aforementioned relational humanist theory, Williams steers the narrative self away from superiority as she questions self-motives and her own potential for evil. For

example, she recognizes her ignorance in the statement, “I am touching only surfaces,” (267) and she questions the invasiveness of scribing story, admitting to personal demons and her own potential for violence: “None of us is immune from inhabiting the dark corners of human nature” (275). As an outsider she feels guilt and a collective sense of “what a mess we Americans are” (309). Such discomfort fosters reorientation, a possibility that she recognizes in an “independent mind.” With a choice to seek beauty in fragmentation, she travels into the “open wound” of Rwanda. Hope manifests in “the most exciting moment” when she sights “the yellow bamboo, so elegant in the landscape. It became a pause of wildness in the midst of overwhelming deforestation. I wept” (301). In this redemptive image, she recognizes culture and nature as relational beauty: deforestation or genocide contrasts with yellow bamboo or beauty and the beginnings of reconstruction. The crying, perhaps, comes in response to an ethical sense of hope, affirming Williams’s later statement that “we have not lost faith in God” or a sense of “light” to mosaic (342). Thus, the human subject—both in forward and in retreat—intends toward a “beauty” but also assumes a humility that indicates an openness and ability to change.

One of the ways that Williams depicts a dynamic self is through the listening and response aspects of her work recording the experiences of the Barefoot Artists in Rwanda. As scribe, Williams writes down and interprets numerous stories that arise from the ashes of genocidal horror. Some events are yet unspeakable, emerging from “the storied ground” of genocide history (371). In other cases, stories integrate the self, eliciting changes in her own perceptions and challenging the former borders of the self. This is evident in relationships between the self and two very different Rwandans: Kawawa, a Hutu prisoner guilty of war crimes, and Louis, a Tutsi interpreter, assisting in reconstruction efforts. Williams’s work as scribe leads to self-adjustments, signifying mosaics of being.

Kawawa is a self-confessed murderer, and when he enters Gacaca, or the local council that convicts or releases prisoners suspected of genocidal acts, the locals trust his stories even while they remember his war crimes with horror. At the one Gacaca she attends, Williams records the testimony of Kawawa but also describes an interchange between herself and the criminal that challenges the narrative self, complicating subject-object dichotomy and leading to a re-orientation of relational becoming. Before Kawawa enters the scene, Williams withdraws the subjective voice with over five pages of objective language, similar to the truth-seeking scientific tone she uses in the data-collection mode of the Scientific Self among the prairie dogs. As with her exploration on the limitations of science to capture a sense of relational being, Williams presents multi-faceted destabilizations of perspective in her scribe notes. For example the “Black Cap Prisoner” and “Old Man Prisoner” contradict one another and themselves, and members of the crowd demand corrections of testimony (322-326). Audience members interject personal authority (323-25). Order falls to chaos of opinion and questionable fact and Williams continues recording the proceedings without an obvious self-presence, noting an escalation of interruption and noise (324-26). In the silencing of the self, she evokes a kind of “listening” that eventually elicits self-questioning, but also grounds a moral ethic that unequivocally rejects Kawawa’s actions.

An interchange between Williams and Kawawa further complicates her self-identity. Kawawa enters as the charismatic and reliable truth-teller, despite being “one of the worst leaders of the genocide and responsible for most of the killings in the Gisenyi region” (326). The narrative self surfaces with, “what I remember is this,” followed by a description of her attempt to list the names of the prisoners. As she tries to spell “Kawawa” she finds him leaning toward her, spelling his name for her. She responds, “our eyes locked. I became frozen with fear.” Then

her identity fluctuates: “Kawawa just spelled my na—I mean, *his* name.” (328). The interaction results in a merging of names, complicating identity, dislocating the self. Later, Williams reassesses this entanglement: “Kawawa just spelled my name. His name. My name” and recognizes “the charisma of evil”—her attraction to its power. Kawawa is a horrific storyteller; she is also a storyteller, focusing on the horrific details of a traumatized people. She questions the motivations for the telling of “truth,” such as a potential ulterior motive of healing from personal grief, or in the “hunger” for story, questions the relational dynamics involved in storytelling: “I have chased at my own conscience until my mind is ragged” (333). Her work as scribe, including the interchange with Kawawa, leads to a humbling self-assessment. She recognizes that Rwanda is reconstructing her even as she strives to contribute to healing in Rwanda. While Williams’s collapse in self-identity is brief, the narrative self maintains a tone of humility and continual reorientation of the relational self.

Further indicating self-dislocation, Williams develops the theme of “listening” as critical in the role of Scribe, recognizing this human capacity for, what Soper terms, a “re-imagining of what it means to be human” (2). She recognizes, “I am capable of both altruism and atrocities, blessings and brutalities. With both hands open, how can I judge another?” (336). She is not condoning the actions of Kawawa but clarifying a need for her work as scribe to include a “re-imagining” of the relational self toward resilience and restoration. Williams is aligning her scribe work in a Rwandan community with a humanitarian heart, for “we can respond to the suffering of another human being. To hear and share one another’s stories becomes the open channel to compassion” (284) and she relocates the self in a purposeful scribe work that suggests a dynamic “mosaic,” for much work remains undone, especially in the untold stories of the women of Rwanda. Nevertheless, she engages the idea of continual process in relational becoming. Beauty

comes in the re-orientation or “re-imaging” of the Self toward ethical relationships with other beings.

Louis Gakumba, in contrast to Kawawa, has a steady presence in the Rwandan narrative, and one that represents reconciliation, hope, and beauty. While her interchange with Kawawa evokes horror, self-questioning and ethical assertion, her relationship with Gakumba leads to the strong redefinition of herself as “mother.” This relational mosaic surfaces in a narrative self that withdraws and presents, indicating a dynamic subject-object sense of being. Gakumba has a rich story with his own voice. Williams depicts their relationship both indirectly and directly, with Louis initially in the background as her translator, and then in the foreground with his own words as an eloquent poet and letter-writer. The book closes with a coalescence of voices: Louis’s words, “What a beautiful catastrophe!” and an interchange between the narrator and Louis:

“Do you remember?” I ask.

“I do.”

Williams suggests that beauty can surface from catastrophe through intentional, relational being and she depicts this “becoming” through dislocation and relocation of the self—a listening and a response that reveals a malleable self.

Like others in his community of survivors, Louis, a 21-year-old Tutsi, experienced great loss and sorrow during the genocide. Despite his traumatic background, he exhibits resilience, hope, and unusual talent for language. He speaks “impeccable” English, Kinyarwanda (spoken by both Hutu and Tutsi), “French, Swahili, and two Congolese dialects” (239). He carries the power of “words,” which Williams defines as “our tools for understanding and misunderstanding. Words can ignite and incite, kill and cull, and at the same time, words can create bridges between cruelty and compassion” (272). Louis recognizes his talent for translation

as “deeper than just trading words” and Williams acknowledges Louis’s “voice” as “entering my bloodstream in ways unknown to me” (273). Their relationship, first defined as translator and scribe, becomes redefined as family as she comes to accept him as son. Once again, as in the analysis of the narrative self and Kawawa, Williams aligns with a contemporary humanist thought that endorses less subject-centrism without shying from ethical, relational becoming. The listening and response characteristics of the self elucidate a relational flux and ethical grounding that resists hierarchy. Beings change and, as indicated in the relationship with Louis, the self evolves in surprising ways, but with unsurprising ethical intention.

Williams depicts a strong sense of “listening” in her relationship with Louis. At times, Louis’s words come to the forefront, with bare introduction and no interpretation. This silenced self suggests humility and relational balance. She refrains from scribing Louis’s story, allowing it to surface through his letters and poetry. For example, she includes personal correspondence with Louis and correspondence between Louis and Shaffer, a United States Consular officer. In these letters Louis expresses his dream of furthering his education: “hope still lives with the dream of improvement” (346). While Williams plays a key role in helping Louis obtain a visa and funding for continuing his education in the United States, she keeps the self in low-profile, revealing her influence indirectly through Louis’s words—“I am so happy to have met you, Terry”—and through the Consular officer’s affirmation of her involvement (346; 348).

As another example of a dislocated narrative self, Williams presents the voice of Louis through his poetry, an indication of his knowledge of the Rwandan relational system and his desire to reformulate relations in new ways. He poetically implicates colonialism and an international contribution to Rwandan fragmentation: “France, stop painting us a Red Camel” and “France, glorious murderer” (364), references that locate his call for international

cooperation and help—“Let everyone give you a hand, Rwanda, / Put your strength together/Set the world right, claim your right” (364). Following the two-page poem, Williams begins a new page with significant white space before presenting metaphor in the description of a finished mosaic work in which “jeweled letters are complete” (366). Williams defers her language to the words of Louis and then to metaphor, affirming the relational humanist intention of her text.

In addition to self-deference through “listening,” Williams responds with openness to evolution. She relocates her identity in a mosaic of being by allowing Louis to “walk” with her—a request that he first made symbolically through his gift of the sandals: “When you walk in these shoes, I walk with you” (341) and then directly with his title of “mother.” She adopts Louis, against her initial desires, as a response to both his assumptions and his parents’ ritualistic transfer of a symbolic parenthood to Williams and her husband, Brooke. She writes, “Louis Gakumba made me a mother, his mother in America. I didn’t see the need; he did” (386). Williams opens her being to change, both in self-identity and marriage-identity, as Williams and her husband chose early in their relationship to not have children (though he seems to support the new definition of “family”). The self is becoming: “I am coming to understand that saying yes to Louis is about engagement, a reconfiguration of everything I have known.” (386). She also writes that this motherhood, while requiring an open sense of self, creates relational beauty: Louis is “a safe harbor I could not have imagined.” She helps Louis fulfill his dream and at the same time she recognizes a bi-directionality to their relationship: “What I didn’t know is that I would need him much more than he needs me” (386), indicating Williams’s commitment to the idea of community: “we don’t have to live in isolation” (385).

In sum, Williams evokes ecological humanist mosaics in intercultural relations through the voice of Scribe who engages in phases of listening and response, revealing a dynamic sense

of compassionate relations: “beneath the open sky, there is no fixed horizon on humanity, only lives lived and stories shared from one broken heart to another” (342). She intends to tell more stories, and yearns toward opening the silence of the Rwandan women. Although this approach of a Western story teller in an African landscape may challenge postmodernist sentiments, Williams suggests validity in the role of humanist Scribe as she portrays storytelling toward new modes of relational beauty, ones that include self-questioning, hesitation, and intentional becoming as ecological humanist mosaic, resulting in drastic redefinitions of the self.

Implications

In *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, Williams responds to the Anthropocene, asserting the human need to “belong to an ecological mosaic” (384). As she navigates complexities of relational being, Williams presents the hopeful role of the human subject in a rich system: “Outside. Inside. Aboveground and below. There is a way of being in the world that calls us beyond hope” (384). In an era of postmodern sensitivity against hierarchy and the objectification of the Other, Williams presents an inter-being discourse that includes difference, equality, interconnection, and dynamic becoming. She questions the mode and means of the human-influence in this becoming. Paradoxically, Williams’s ecological humanist mosaics both de-center the self as subject and centralize her ethical agenda—social justice and environmental protection. She resists egotism in deference to ethical relationships based on empathy and humility, recognizing the outcome as the “joyful emancipatory gesture of creating beauty” (336). Williams positions a self-conscious subject, the autobiographical self, in eco-centric relational harmony.

Williams’s ecological humanist “mosaics” elucidate the dislocations and relocations of an ethical and dynamic human subject in an era that is theoretically moving beyond the human

being, and yet, paradoxically, in the age of the Anthropocene. For Williams, relational becoming is strongly influenced by the human subject as an inter-relational being, marking her writings relevant in posthumanist discourse, an angle of which highlights the ethical human subject. She reminds us of evolution and choice: “Who will give up this world?/The catalog of forms is endless” (28). In addition to gesturing toward “humanism in ‘post-humanism’” (Soper), Williams’s work repositions a relational Romanticism for the 21st century, supporting Kate Rigby’s general assertion, in *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*, that Romanticism is making a 21st century return in eco-critical studies and “could indeed represent a road not taken, to which we might now return in seeking to make our way forward into an alternative (post)modernity” (163). Such anthropocentrism calls for the human subject who recognizes relational systems and who integrates the self in creative and collaborative ways that foster mutual well-being.

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