

[**HARDCOVER: US**]

Terry Tempest Williams finds hope in dire times

The Utah author's journey from prairie dogs to the Rwandan genocide finds much savagery amid beauty

BY **WILLIAM PORTER**
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, DENVER

Seventeen years have passed since Terry Tempest Williams gave us *Refuge*, an indelible meditation on her mother's battle with cancer and the devastation wrought on a bird sanctuary by rising waters in the Great Salt Lake.

Since then, fans of this Utah native and naturalist have come to expect a common thread through her books: the artful weaving of observations from the natural world with the labyrinths of the human experience.

For Williams, this is not a stock formula. It's her sublime art.

Now she delivers *Finding Beauty in a Broken World*, an ambitious, even audacious, work.

Williams takes us from the breathtaking, Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna, Italy — a city she has spent time in — and uses them as a metaphor for two communities, a besieged prairie dog colony in Utah and a village in Rwanda, where she helped build a memorial to victims of a 1994 genocide that killed 1 million in that African country.

That's quite a juxtaposition, all delivered against the not-so-tact backdrop of the Iraq war and the Bush administration's foreign-policy adventures.

Although Williams made her reputation as a naturalist and defender of the West's wild places, in recent years she has turned her eye toward the broader world.

Still, in her view, genocide in Rwanda can be equated to the war waged against the prairie dog, and vice versa. It is all about humanity's inability to recognize, at least in a sustained and universal way, the worth of communities.

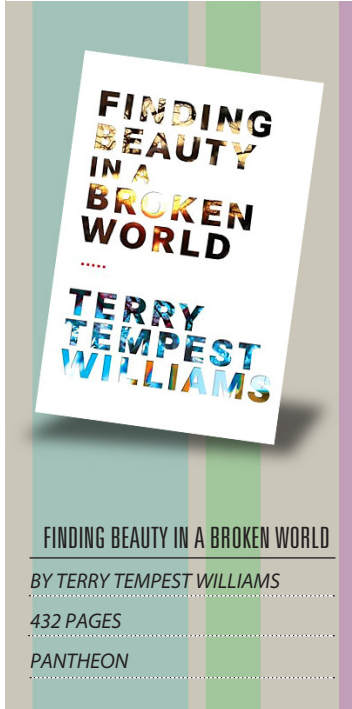
The Utah prairie dog is one of six species in the world viewed as most likely to become extinct in the 21st century. Of course, this assessment was made in 1999, before global warming and its impact on polar bears was fully appreciated.

Prairie dogs have long endured "vermin" status in the West. Ranchers despise them because cattle and horses have a way of stumbling into their holes, breaking legs. Beyond that, they were viewed as vermin that spread vermin.

Now they are threatened just as much by the tract homes sprouting in the New West. So these creatures, pack animals who communicate in distinct dialects, are torched and gassed in their holes.

"We are all complicit," Williams writes. "A rising population is settling in subdivisions. The land scraped bare. The prairie dog

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towns and villages are being displaced. Sad, sorry state of habitation. They are prisoners on their own reservations."

The Rwandan village Williams visits is Rugerero. Today it is home to massacre survivors from three villages that were erased from the Earth. The violence was tribal, Hutu killing Tutsi. Much of the butchering was done with machetes. As one aid volunteer informs Williams: "That's Rwanda."

So much savagery amid such beauty. Here is Williams limning the Rwandan landscape: "We arrive in Gisenyi at dusk. Smoke. Shadows. Figures captured in headlights. Lake Kivu is a long reflective mirror. I am reminded of scenes captured in a ring I once had as a child; inside a plastic orb were the silhouettes of palms against a twilight sky made of iridescent butterfly wings, turquoise blue. We are surrounded by enormous mountains, a crown of peaks, snow-tipped and jagged. And then, suddenly, an eerie red glow is emanating from the Congo. An active volcano."

We live among such a disconnect in this world: apart from nature, apart from each other. It's a comfort to have Williams in our midst, reminding us of the mosaic formed by every creature on Earth.

But that comfort is also our challenge.

"Shards of glass can cut and wound or magnify a vision," Williams tells us. "Mosaic celebrates brokenness and the beauty of being brought together."

figures such as Gavin Menzies, the author of popular history books that claim the Chinese discovered the New World and inspired the European Renaissance. Such arguments, according to one academic, are "the historical equivalent of stories about Elvis Presley in [a supermarket]."

Needham also tended to see Chinese footprints in every aspect of modernity, but he is not so easily dismissed. His academic credentials were dauntingly impressive. A brilliant Cambridge biochemist, he remains one of the very few people to have been a fellow of both the Royal Society and the British Academy, and before he died the only living person to hold, in addition to these titles, that of Companion of Honour. As one of the founding officials, he was also the man who literally put the letter "S" for science into UNESCO.

The editor and co-author of *Science and Civilisation in China*, a massive, multi-volume study, he spent more than half a century collecting and compiling



Above and below: Indians take vows after converting to Buddhism during a mass religious conversion ceremony in the central Indian city of Nagpur, Oct. 14, 2006. Thousands of low-caste Hindus in India converted to Buddhism and Christianity to protest against new laws in several states that make such conversions difficult.

Left: Krishnammal Jagannathan, far left, won the Right Livelihood Award on Wednesday for promoting social justice in India.

PHOTOS: AP AND REUTERS

“I took a vow in my childhood that I must liberate dalits, specially women, from the clutches of the landowner.”

— Krishnammal Jagannathan, social activist

Indian couple spend lifetime working for social justice

Krishnammal Jagannathan and her husband battle to improve the dalits' lot, who despite India's affirmative action policy, are still among the country's poorest citizens

BY **SHAHIDUL ISLAM**
DPA, NEW DELHI

Krishnammal Jagannathan, 82, and her husband, Sankaralingam, 95, have spent a lifetime fighting for the rights of the deprived, especially the dalits, the former "untouchables," who form the lowest rung of India's ancient caste ladder.

The couple — named Wednesday among the recipients of the 2008 Right Livelihood Awards, often called the Alternative Nobel Prizes — have ensured over decades that thousands of hectares of land were distributed to landless dalit laborers in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu.

The Jagannathans and their organization, Land for the Tillers' Freedom, were cited by the awards jury for "realizing in practice the Gandhian vision of social justice and sustainable human development."

Krishnammal Jagannathan comes from a landless dalit family and managed to get a university education in spite of her family's poverty.

"I took a vow in my childhood that I must liberate dalits, specially women, from the clutches of the landowner," she said while remembering the troubles of her mother, left a widow at 32 with 12 children.

"Six of them died, but she made every effort to see that the rest of us were brought up with some dignity, and she was poor and not educated," Krishnammal

Jagannathan said.

Despite India's affirmative action policy, the dalits are still among the country's poorest, and a majority of them remain landless laborers and manual scavengers.

Krishnammal Jagannathan said she would use the award money to build "beautiful houses" for the dalit women who work hard in paddy fields by day and then return to do housework and often are beaten by drunken husbands at night.

"I have succeeded in getting land for 13,000 women," said the prize winner, who with her husband is to share the US\$300,000 prize with the three other award recipients. "Now I want for them beautiful homes. The award money will help."

"The award is a gift for my hard work over a long period," she added.

And a very long period indeed, spanning more than 60 years.

Krishnammal Jagannathan met her husband when she joined Gandhi's social reform movement in the 1920s. Sankaralingam Jagannathan was born into a wealthy family but left his studies in college to join India's freedom movement led by Gandhi, of which the social reform element was an intrinsic part.

Gandhi's philosophy of *sarvodaya* — which encompasses dignity of labor,



an equitable distribution of wealth, communal self-sufficiency and individual freedom — inspired the couple to take up the cause of the rural poor, especially the landless dalits.

After India gained independence from British rule, the couple joined another Gandhian leader, Vinoba Bhave, in his *bhoodan* (gift land) movement where the activists walked the roads trying to persuade landlords to give one-sixth of their land to the landless.

The Jagannathans started their work on land reform in Tamil Nadu's Thanjavur district in 1968 after the Kilvelmani

massacre, in which 42 dalits, mostly women and children, were burned alive in a remote village in the district by a landlord's hired goons over a wage dispute.

Land for the Tillers' Freedom was an outcome of the Jagannathans' decades-long struggle for the landless. It was founded in 1981 with the aim of bringing the landless and the landlord to the negotiating table and to obtain government and bank concessions for loans so the landless could buy land at reasonable prices.

The organization, which is committed to raising the social status and acceptability of the dalits, also helps the tillers farm collectively and repay loans through cooperative efforts.

And now the group is helping dalit laborers and farmers build livable houses, one more step in the Jagannathans' efforts for a better life for dalits.

While Krishnammal Jagannathan is still active in the organization — she was on a bus traveling between two towns for it when called for this story — her husband is more frail and can no longer move around as before.

But the couple's efforts continue to receive recognition, including one of the country's highest awards, the Padmashri.

[**HARDCOVER: UK**]

Communist apologist's redoubtable legacy lives on

In spite of his myopic infatuation with communism, Joseph Needham expanded our knowledge of China and its unparalleled scientific innovations

BY **ANDREW ANTHONY**
THE OBSERVER, LONDON

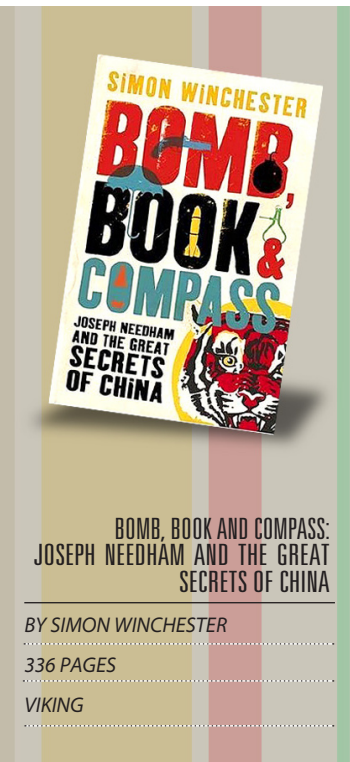
Joseph Needham is one of those extraordinary characters whose life was so large and sprawling that it needs first to be condensed into a list. He was a scientist, polyglot, traveler, diplomat, Christian, socialist, exponent of free love, nudist, morris dancer and Sinophile. All these aspects of Needham's life are explored in Simon Winchester's *Bomb, Book and Compass*, but it is Sinophilia that animates every page. The title refers to Francis Bacon's choice of the three inventions (all Chinese) that changed the world. However, the American title — *The Man Who Loved China* — better describes the thrust of the book.

To a certain school of Western thought, China has long been a kind of intellectual Shangri-la, although rather than immortality the gift of this Oriental utopia is invention: it's the place where every idea was born. It's a tradition that trails a sometimes dubious reputation, including as it does

evidence that China was the birthplace of everything from chess to cartography, from the stirrup to the suspension bridge. In the process, he probably did more than any other individual to shift the balance of scientific history towards the East.

Needham fell in love with China by first falling in love with a Chinese woman, a research assistant named Lu Gwei-djen (魯桂珍) who came to Cambridge in 1936. Though he was married, the relationship was apparently "open" and for the next 52 years Lu would be his mistress. The couple eventually married in 1989. With the help of Lu, the biochemist taught himself Chinese (Nanjing Mandarin) and in 1943 was flown into war-torn China by the British government on a diplomatic mission to help embattled Chinese scientists and academics. It was a dangerous assignment and one filled with will-sapping logistical difficulties, yet Needham maintained an unflappable optimism that was

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nothing less than heroic.

The finest sections of Winchester's book describe the excursions Needham made to the further reaches of China, ostensibly goodwill trips, but really as a way of gathering data for the book that would become *Science and Civilisation in China*. Here we see Needham at his most intrepid and eccentric, a sort of Waugh character by way of Indiana Jones. China in the war years bore little resemblance to the economic powerhouse of today. Its industry was all but destroyed, roads were ancient (or non-existent) and poverty was widespread. How the once mighty Chinese empire had come to fall so low is, in essence, the basis of what became known as the "Needham question."

Needham wanted to know why Chinese scientific innovation had ground to a halt in the 16th century, just when European science was taking off. As Winchester says, the Cambridge don "never fully worked out the answers." Nevertheless, he was

convinced that the solution to China's problems was communism. He befriended Zhou Enlai (周恩來), number two to Mao Zedong (毛澤東), and managed, like many other intellectuals, to excuse or ignore the brutality and totalitarianism of communist rule.

In this field, he had form. He visited Moscow in 1935 and returned "powerfully reinforced" by the experience. This willingness to believe the best of the worst would almost destroy his professional standing. In 1952, Needham joined an international commission set up by the Chinese government to investigate reports that the Americans had used biological weapons in the Korean War. Led by the nose by Chinese agents, who mocked up sites and faked results, Needham declared the US guilty as charged.

In this conclusion, he was almost certainly wrong. As Winchester writes: "Needham was intellectually in love with communism and yet communist spymasters and agents, it turned out, had pitilessly duped him." For

a while, it looked as if he might lose his position at Cambridge. But the controversy passed and he went on to be elected master of Gonville and Caius College.

Needham was sympathetic to the student rebellions of 1968. During one sit-in, he sent a note to protesters: "I wish you to know that I support entirely all the reforms for which you are demonstrating today." And in spite of his long-standing defense of Chinese academics, he was also an advocate of Mao's Cultural Revolution, which terrorized academia.

All the same, by the time of his death in 1995, Needham's ideological beliefs were comprehensively overshadowed by his intellectual achievements. Chief of these are the Needham Research Institute in Cambridge and the enormous, perspective-altering endeavor that is *Science and Civilisation in China*. Such testaments speak for themselves, but what's left to say is said with great verve and style by Winchester in this biography.