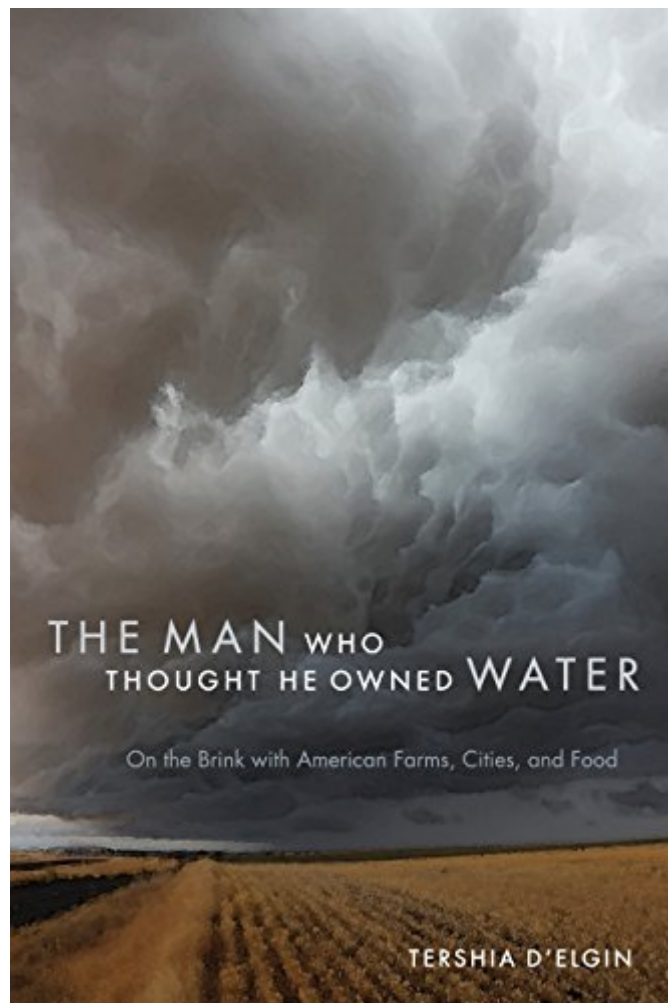




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The Man Who Thought He Owned Water: On The Brink With American Farms, Cities, And Food



Synopsis

The Man Who Thought He Owned Water is author Tershia d'Elgin's fresh take on the gravest challenge of our time—how to support urbanization without killing ourselves in the process. The gritty story of her family's experience with water rights on its Colorado farm provides essential background about American farms, food, and water administration in the West in the context of growing cities and climate change. Enchanting and informative, The Man Who Thought He Owned Water is an appeal for urban-rural cooperation over water and resiliency. When her father bought his farm—Big Bend Station—he also bought the ample water rights associated with the land and the South Platte River, confident that he had secured the necessary resources for a successful endeavor. Yet water immediately proved fickle, hard to defend, and sometimes dangerous. Eventually those rights were curtailed without compensation. Through her family's story, d'Elgin dramatically frames the personal-scale implications of water competition, revealing how water deals, infrastructure, transport, and management create economic growth but also sever human connections to Earth's most vital resource. She shows how water flows to cities at the expense of American-grown food, as rural land turns to desert, wildlife starves, the environment degrades, and climate change intensifies. Depicting deep love, obsession, and breathtaking landscape, The Man Who Thought He Owned Water is an impassioned call to rebalance our relationship with water. It will be of great interest to anyone seeking to understand the complex forces affecting water resources, food supply, food security, and biodiversity in America.

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Customer Reviews

Illuminating story of one family's experience with how development in the West has affected water resources and the environment--something crucial to the well-being of all of us and future generations.

This project is advertised as: "A story no other water book, no other farm book, no other climate book is telling." The unique component here is that Terisha Elgin looks at the problem of water in the West not only as an environmentalist or as a propagandist for business interests, but rather from both of these perspectives in an attempt to reconcile their conflicting interests. He acknowledges that there is a need to urbanize, but argues that it should be done in a sustainable way. The sector this study is concerned with is farming. The solution proposed is that urban and rural areas should cooperate on water to jointly succeed. Given these grand promises, it is frustrating to find creative and abstract chapter titles like "Vagaries of Basins" and "At the Not-O.K. Corral." Like other books with these types of headings, the author is insisting that you read it cover-to-cover, as few land posts or directions are provided to get exactly where the reader might need to go. The insides of the book are a bit more inviting to students, as definitions for complex terminology like "Biomimicry" and "First Planting" is provided in boxes by the margins. There are also some illustrations of irrigation, the water cycle and other complex, scientific concepts. Across the book, the author offers interesting histories of how modern water problems came into being. For example, he writes: "On the march toward civilization, Ben and his neighbors had ceaseless tribulations. The winter of 1871-72 was severe, blowing, and frozen with a cold that took bites from colonists' commitment" (31). This is a good example how description can assist a historical account by engaging a reader with the emotions of the scene. It

should be a pleasant experience to read this book cover-to-cover as the author hopes readers will do. Only after showing the evidence on what the problems are, does D'Elgin begin to offer suggestions as to what should be done about them, or to philosophize on their nature. For example, amidst a drought, he has a conversation with his sister about rationing from the Boulder's reservoir. He reflects: "Cities need water. Apart from everyone in cities consuming products that require water to produce, cities use less water than farmers, therefore farmers should not grow?" (158) It is a good idea to add some personal experiences and reflections to a scientific study, as without them it would be too dry even for scientists to read. In parallel, it is a good idea to introduce a new perspective into an old argument. It is not a "yes" or "no" debate on what should be done about water shortages in the West. There is a lot of gray areas in the middle, and the problem cannot be solved before this gray area is fully understood and the outcries of both sides are addressed. Therefore, this is a great book that any researcher or student of environmentalism should read. I also like the painting on the cover: it is detailed in the center, and the edges are smudged as if they were diluted by water falling on the painted page.

Pennsylvania Literary Journal: Volume IX, Issue 2, Interview with Carol Reardon, Battlefield Guide and Professor

This is a remarkable book. Drawing on research in geology, ecology, hydrology, demography, agronomy, animal husbandry, politics, public policy and law, D'Elgin illuminates a topic on which the great majority of us, in our urbanized society, are profoundly and even dangerously ignorant: the complexities surrounding our dependence on water. Given the technical terrain she navigates, her prose has a freshness, wit and poetic resonance all too rare in scholarly literature. It is a treat to encounter academic writing as warm, elegant and supple as hers. D'Elgin focuses on Colorado, a region with water resources critical both to agriculture and to cities throughout the irrigated West. She uses the history of her family's farm on the South Platte River to luminous effect, looping back and forth between the conditions of one farm she knows well and the larger factors and distant forces affecting the farm's access to water and therefore the options available for land use. In the process, D'Elgin clarifies what is at stake in the competition for water among different interests. Her heart is with sustainable agriculture and sustainable cities. She identifies the signs that we will have neither if we don't act to get our priorities straight. An engaging and impressive work

d'Elgin's book reminds me of Jane Jacob's "Death and Life of Great American Cities". The authors, although not formally in their subject matter, have inquiring minds that will not rest until they find answers to serious questions. For Jacobs, this was "which civic designs lead to cities that satisfy their residents" and for d'Elgin it is "how can farms survive while water is increasingly apportioned to the burgeoning cities that surround them". Written from the perspective of the tribulations of a single family farm on the outskirts of Denver, the book is relevant for every city that needs to keep alive local production of the foods that sustain us.

The Man Who Thought He Owned WaterI came to The Man Who Thought He Owned Water as a water professional, involved with water issues at many scales.

d'Elgin's storytelling makes fairly technical material very accessible, but what really struck me is her heart. She elucidates how this precious resource is the lifeblood of our planet and affects us all individually and collectively. I am grateful for her reminder that as our global resources diminish and our population grows, it is increasingly important that we are compassionate and share both responsibility and what belongs to us all. Thank you, Terisha.

In The Man Who Thought He Owned Water, d'Elgin exposes an archaic, disfunctional system of water management that threatens more than our ability to grow food. Coupled with extensive research and first hand farming experience, d'Elgin beautifully illustrates the web of issues around water security that we face today. A must read for anyone who seeks to better understand the vital link water plays in the chain of events that is causing the destruction of our environment.

Before the world changed and there was , I had a bookshop. Twenty years after it closed, I still find myself reading books with an eye to how to sell them. The Man Who Thought He Owned Water would have been easy. Appreciators of good writing, people trying to understand the mysteries of Western water, people who look at the West as both tragic and resilient, and also that (rather small) group who like to have their prejudices challenged, all will like your book.

This book is so beautifully written that I struggled with reading faster to understand the story, or slowing down or even re-reading to savor the language and the perspective. A wonderful book!

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