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Review

Purposeful Memoir as a Quest for a Thriving Future: Inspiration for Writers and Seekers

by Jennifer Browdy

(Green Fire Press, 2021)

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Purposeful Memoir as a Quest for a Thriving Future by Dr. Jennifer Browdy is a subversive text in which she asks writers to study what has power over them, whether it be their relationship to time, trauma, or other barriers to creation. By using language imbued with magic and heroics, such as “alchemy” and “quests,” Browdy intends to embolden, and literally en-courage—give courage to—the writer, pen, if not sword, in the air. This reframes writing from the self as a process of healing, rather than exploitation or commercialization of trauma that is often the market of memoir.

The book is part reading list, part scripts and writing prompts, part mentorship and optimism, part self-help, part photography gallery, and all focused on transforming potentially painful memories and experiences into productive growth, progress, and writing that serves a purpose. “Failing, mistakes, and setbacks are often our greatest teachers,” she says, applying metaphors of both archeology and alchemy (54). As archeologists, writers delve, uncover, and inventory. As alchemists, they change the leaden weight holding a person down into rich, purposeful writing that might serve others, or into therapeutic journaling intended only to heal the self. Similar to Julia Cameron’s seminal craft text *The Artist’s Way*, Browdy offers solutions to clear the barriers that might interfere with the writing process, without prescribing what that writing may serve, as long as the purpose is what the writer needs in their journey.

The utility of this text is layered and appropriate for writers of non-fiction and memoir at any level who are looking to tell their own story. But I can also see it working for poetry and fiction writing. The beautiful nature photography from her own camera roll is pleasing not only as its own artform, but inspirational for potential writing prompts. Further, the “alchemical writing” Browdy teaches could be used as fiction, as one turns a story of regret into one of what might have actually happened had events and choices gone differently. This could be a rich place of discovery and creation leading into a new world worth writing, beyond being a tool of self-reflection.

Browdy's literature background is in service as it hums with references to a feminist canon, but also builds a reading list of inspiring thinkers and environmental activists, contributing to the subversive questioning of systems of power including patriarchy, racism, environmental destruction, and capitalism.

Released from Browdy's press, Green Fire Press, she has chosen her own financial terms on which to publish and distribute and create in the world, a demonstration of her desire to write the world (as a worldwright) into existence by asking, why not? This book centers revision as a dynamic process of recreation. We cannot ignore her double entendres of righting the world, which centers marginalized voices and owns authenticity, and encourages her readers to be courageous through judgment, criticism, or the sensation of being disliked. For Browdy, being a worldwright is a place of leadership and enfranchisement for the self, community, and the world (13).

It is an ambitious project in only 98 pages to change oneself, the perspectives of one's story, and ultimately, the world, but it is not intended for single consumption, just like no revolution is achieved in one battle. The book invites and values relationships and centers revision as a tool of authorship key to how we write our future with the lessons of the past. Just as with our loved ones, each return will deepen and nourish with each story we tell.

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