

Ecologies of Intimacy: LOVE AND LOSS IN LEANNE BETASAMOSAKE SIMPSON'S "THIS ACCIDENT OF BEING LOST"

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I was compiling research for an academic paper earlier this year when I came across the term “an ecology of intimacy”¹ in an anthology by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. The words made me pause. I immediately thought of another one of her literary collections, *This Accident of Being Lost*, and the ecology of intimacy she constructs between love, grief and land in the book.

An award-winning writer and musician, Betasamosake Simpson creates ecologies of intimacies between love and loss, land and memories, songs and stories in her works. She is from the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory, along the north shore of Chi’Nüibish (Lake Ontario). Her definition of an ecology of intimacy, from the anthology, is an “ecology of relationships in the absence of

coercion, authority, or authoritarian power.” It is an ecosystem of connectivity, reciprocity and responsibility, formed by Indigenous resistance against colonialism and nurtured by diverse Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

In *This Accident of Being Lost*, Betasamosake Simpson writes about the entanglement between love and grief in Indigenous communities in Canada. Fragmented stories and poems portray Indigenous characters reclaiming land and traditional ways of being, grieving the years spent unable to do so and loving each other in an intimate web of connections. Her experimental form transcends conventional genre rules by constructing an ecology of intimacy that draws on the love and grief present in human, more-than-human, and natural relationships. For example, in the poem “to the oldest tree in the world,” she writes:

“i’m worrying about / what you’re drinking / you’re worrying about what i’m breathing” - *This Accident of Being Lost: Songs and Stories* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (House of Anansi Press, 2017)

I read this book last year overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, bundled against the cold, my gloved hands clumsily flipping pages. I learned about Anishinaabe language and stories, as well as networks that rely on the intimacy of love and loss. The intimate relationship between the two is present in the story, “Leaning In,” when she describes a spirit world interlaced with a natural one:

Paige (she/her) is a writer, runner and student at Dalhousie University, where she is completing her master’s degree in English literature. She loves reading by the ocean, playing her violin with the windows open and cooking meals for friends.

PHOTO: Lindsay Lee



An old-growth sugar maple.

PHOTO: Irwin Barrett

TAKE ACTION

Read Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *This Accident of Being Lost* and find an intimate ecology of love and grief that showcases how storytelling can be an act of decolonization and climate action.

“When you were ready, Niibin [Summer] took your hand, kissed your cheek, and led you to the canoe, which you paddled down the river to the west, crossing back over the sky, into a better world.” - *This Accident of Being Lost: Songs and Stories* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (House of Anansi Press, 2017)

Reading is an act of resistance and relation-building. As a white settler living on colonized land, reading, listening and learning are part of my responsibility in my community's ecosystem. To read this book is to enter into an ecology of intimacy within literature and language. It is to learn how to resist destruction of Indigenous peoples and the land on which we all live with love, grief and hope.

REFERENCES

1. Betasamosake Simpson, Leanne. 2020. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.