

Alyx Beaudoin

Instructor Joshua Whitehead

Indigenous Studies: Contemporary Indigenous Non-Fiction

November 5th, 2023

### Short Essay – Interpretations on *Rehearsals for Living*: Part 6

The essays in “Rehearsals for Living” take the form of letters between the writers Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Robyn Maynard. These letters critically debate some past and most modern socio-political circumstances and engage them with Black and Indigenous perspectives. Part 6 starts with a discussion on the wildfires that occurred in 2021 and turned the skies orange and green, and the intersection of the impacts of smoke held amid COVID-19 quarantines. The beginning of this letter feels very focused on current events, before shifting into more lyrical writing—supplying the connection one has with their body and thus more the connection bodies have with the land and space surrounding them. Relating this with “Exquisite Vessels” is easy when applying the 4 major concepts, especially that of *Twining* within, for Simpson and Maynard do this very beautifully. They speak on the Indigenous connections between water and body and breath between people, feeding the letter a deeper understanding of how each of the events discussed are truly attached and intersected with one another. The idea of the exquisite vessel is one that uniquely and adeptly qualifies the difference between Indigenous non-fiction to non-Indigenous non-fiction. Particularly, the concept encapsulates the essays between these two writers entirely as ones that fulfill each of the roles laid out; *Technique*, *coiling*, *plaiting* and *twining* (Washuta and Warburton, 17–18).

Unlike other readings of “Half-Bads in White Regalia” and “Carry”, which can each be easily categorized by at least the title ‘Memoir’, “Rehearsals for Living” is not as refinable by Western genre standards. “For Native writers, nonfiction offers the opportunity to unsettle our/their positioning within literary publishing by asserting agency in recalling, narrating, organizing, and interpreting experience”, as expressed by Washuta and Warburton (pg 12). It’s evident that within Simpson and Maynard’s writing, they do a little of everything as described by the other pair, especially in the way of expressing a personalized narrative to a much larger scale of topics. They’re able to talk about the rise of BLM movements and the strains of COVID-19 restrictions with deep consideration, mass fires and unsafe waters with critical understanding, while stylistically performing their storytelling with a sense of wonder and extended view beyond a clinical retelling. There is an interconnectedness that plays within each of their own sections, that from a Western perspective wouldn’t have been intuitive.

The work is *plaited* together through the call and receive nature of Simpson and Maynard’s letters to each other. They actively engage with each other’s topics without direct responses which allows the narrative to flow without unnecessary repetition, working against and with each other in carefully curated ways that allow for immense eloquence for the tough or grittier subject matters. Within this, the two of them demonstrate a sensitive understanding of the colonial shadow that blankets their chosen topics and lays out the places in which harm subtly and overtly lurks. “We both know hope is a luxury; my ancestors have taught me that,” Simpson says (pg 256), recognizing the areas of work and life in which colonial powers forced their stories trajectory, but furthermore how it a mixture of the good and the bad that fulfills the steps towards decolonization, optimism and pessimism, recognition of all sides. That recognition to all sides feeds the concept of the exquisite vessel itself. “To pay attention to only the contents would

be to ignore the very relationship that such vessels sustain” (Washuta, pg 4), where the creation of the vessel is as much part of the project as the final production. To understand all aspects of what goes into colonialization is every aspect that comes out of decolonization as well. It’s this understanding of the *process* as a *feature* that makes up one of the many unique qualities of Indigenous non-fiction.

Part 6 features an exemplary positionality from Maynard of wellness as a depleted facet of modern society, apt to the part naming of *areyousureyoureallywanttobewell*. Wellness understood from a decolonized lens reflects that the capitalist society we live in is actively harming itself from every angle, be it the 1% or complacency at the bottom. Maynard proclaims, “Because isn’t this a grave of sorts for all of us, when some must die or live in deprivation in death’s proximity so that others may live in an excess of luxury?” (pg 251) There in the letter is engraved a story for the cilia of the lungs working millions of tiny parts towards a common goal, using both the nature of the body and the essence of community to demonstrate the ability for change in unity. The piece as a collaboration has the ability to hold additional facets of the exquisite vessel. This is Maynard’s *coiling*, using the narrative of cilia to make its way through each topic and bind together the differing aspects that make the overarching discourse.

Where Maynard leaves off with the breath of community and collective action, Simpson reinvigorates the section with the embodied understanding of water as a caregiver. The ways in which these two sew together a natural flow between current events is encapsulating. There is a “misguided notion is the very one that permeates approaches to Native nonfiction described above, which assume that Native authors writing nonfiction must always be explaining their lives as Native peoples” (Washuta, pg 16). Disregarding that misguided notion is achieved within “Rehearsals for Living” for the Native-ness of the writing lives within a relationship with the

words and not a justification laid bare. That very relationship is the process of weaving the exquisite vessel of Washuta's theory. The final collection of their essays provides a view of *technique*; the "harmonious whole" (pg 17). Together they created something that could be claimed to defy genre, or rather—it is *Indigenous*. The genre they display is Indigenous non-fiction, in which "Exquisite vessels" precisely seek to identify.

## Works Cited

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