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Natalie Diaz Poetry Analysis

Natalie Diaz is a Mojave-Mexican-American poet, language activist and educator. In all honesty, I first chose Diaz because she has a Spanish last name so I immediately assumed she was Hispanic like myself. As I learned more about her I found that we had some conflicting, yet similar life experiences through her poems. One of her poems that really caught my eye was her "They Don't Love You Like I Love You" piece. The numerous song references and metaphors in this poem had me confused at first, and I'll admit, I had to read it multiple times. I think one would have to spend some time looking up these references like I did in order to really understand what Diaz is expressing.

I found this poem a bit hard to understand, but nonetheless I was able to decipher the author's message behind it. From my point of view, this poem represents Diaz's relationship with America and the white people that colonized the land. Considering that this is just one poem from her book published in 2020, "Postcolonial Love Poem", the title of the book gives us a good idea of what topics might be included in this selection of poems. Throughout this poem Diaz's feelings towards white people clash with one another in the sense that she wants to be both accepted and wanted by them. However she also knows what they've done to her land and people so part of her acknowledges that they're no good for her as an indigenous woman.

The first thing I noticed about “They Don’t Love You Like I Love You” was that the poem title continues into the first sentence of the poem. Her usage of song references was another straightforward element that I found in this poem. I was confused when I read the first stanza since I had no idea who the Yeah Yeah Yeahs were. Once I looked them up her “Beyoncé lifted the lyrics/from the Yeah Yeah Yeahs,” (Line 3) line made a whole lot of sense. She purposely referenced their song “Maps” in order to line her ideas together about the people that currently and once resided on this land. Another element found in this poem is the constant usage of metaphors which connects back to the song references she includes. She believes that “America is maps” and “Maps are ghosts: white and/layered with people and places I see through” (Lines 21-24). These lines are also examples of the imagery she induces in the readers. When I read this I immediately pictured a map as well as the ghosts of Native Americans that once ruled the vast land by the millions.

Another good poem that can be found in Diaz’s 2012 published book “When My Brother Was An Aztec” is “My Brother At 3AM”. This poem takes a more sinister turn into the life of her brother where he’s up at 3AM sitting outside the front door step of their house, where he’s crying to his mother, claiming the devil is out to kill him. I think this one is more about internal struggles or “demons” that most of us have and tend to suppress. In the end we’ll have to face them whether we want to or not. Just like in “They Don’t Love You Like I Love You”, I noticed that this piece has a lot of repetition, every stanza in this one has a line from the last. She chooses lines like “O God, he said. O God ” (Line3) and “He wants to kill me” (Line 4) in order to showcase the gravity of her brother's claims to their mother. Towards the end of the poem, this devil her brother claims to see reappears, this time showing his tail. Their mother finally sees the tail of the devil and goes on to say “O God, O God ”(Line 28) like the brother when she first came to check on him. These sets of repeated sentences also set a thrilling mood for the poem for

the readers. Here we begin to see the shift in the mothers attitude towards the brother, going from worried and unsure of his words to an alarmed state.

When I listened to the way Diaz performs her poems, I can sense that she's really into her work and puts a lot of emotion into it. She has a tendency to stretch out her words to add more of a dramatic effect, this also puts more importance on the overall topic she usually touches on in her poems. As a Hispanic woman of color who was born and raised in the United States, I've always had this internalized want to be accepted and fit in with my white counterparts. Growing up my mother always encouraged me to date outside of my race, specifically white men with money and status , which unfortunately was something she felt was rare in our community. This kind of mentality changes your perception of not only those around you but yourself as well, and not in a good way. Some may end up assimilating and mimicking those who we are seen as "less than" while others like myself start feeling resentment towards those who are not like us. This is something I was able to relate to when it came down to Natalie Martinez's poems. She understands that what is expected of them will not be the same for us.

Works Cited:

"They Don't Love You like I Love You by Natalie Diaz - Poems | Academy of American Poets." *Poets.org*, Academy of American Poets, 20 June 2019, <https://poets.org/poem/they-dont-love-you-i-love-you>.

"My Brother at 3 A.m. by Natalie Diaz.", Poetry Foundation, 2012, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56355/my-brother-at-3-am>.