



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Advancement | Alumni Engagement and Annual Giving

P.O. Box 160046
Orlando, FL 32816-0046

UCF Alumni Book Club

Postcolonial Love Poem by Natalie Diaz

Book Discussion Guide

Book Description

Postcolonial Love Poem is an anthem of desire against erasure. Natalie Diaz’s brilliant second collection demands that every body carried in its pages—bodies of language, land, rivers, suffering brothers, enemies, and lovers—be touched and held as beloveds. Through these poems, the wounds inflicted by America onto an indigenous people are allowed to bloom pleasure and tenderness: “Let me call my anxiety, desire, then. / Let me call it, a garden.” In this new lyrical landscape, the bodies of indigenous, Latinx, black, and brown women are simultaneously the body politic and the body ecstatic. In claiming this autonomy of desire, language is pushed to its dark edges, the astonishing dunefields and forests where pleasure and love are both grief and joy, violence and sensuality.

Diaz defies the conditions from which she writes, a nation whose creation predicated the diminishment and ultimate erasure of bodies like hers and the people she loves: “I am doing my best to not become a museum / of myself. I am doing my best to breathe in and out. // I am begging: Let me be lonely but not invisible.” Postcolonial Love Poem unravels notions of American goodness and creates something more powerful than hope—a future is built, future being a matrix of the choices we make now, and in these poems, Diaz chooses love.

About the Author

Natalie Diaz was born and raised in the Fort Mojave Indian Village in Needles, California, on the banks of the Colorado River. She is Mojave-Latina and an enrolled member of the Gila River Indian Tribe. Her first poetry collection, *When My Brother Was an Aztec*, was published by Copper Canyon Press in 2012. She is a 2018 MacArthur Foundation Fellow, a Lannan Literary Fellow and a Native Arts Council Foundation Artist Fellow. She was awarded a Bread Loaf Fellowship, the Holmes National Poetry Prize, a Hodder Fellowship, and a PEN/Civitella Ranieri Foundation Residency, as well as being awarded

a US Artists Ford Fellowship. Diaz teaches at the Arizona State University Creative Writing MFA program.

Diaz lives in Mohave Valley, Arizona, where she has worked with the last speakers of Mojave and directed a language revitalization program. In a PBS interview, she spoke of the connection between writing and experience: "for me writing is kind of a way for me to explore why I want things and why I'm afraid of things and why I worry about things. And for me, all of those things represent a kind of hunger that comes with being raised in a place like this."

Quotes from the Author

"I think one of the most rewarding things about poetry is poetry has this incredible capacity to hold what is at once painful and also what is joyful," Diaz said. "It can hold tensions. It can let you not know things. It can let you question things. It can let you even have no language ... to express the ways we feel or the ways we're imagining things." –

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2021/06/11/natalie-diaz-asu-professor-and-activist-wins-pulitzer-prize-poetry/7662619002/>

"...poetry allows me to kind of break down images and kind of see what they're made of. And so I'm able to reinvent images and colors and sounds, and, you know, and all of the senses kind of come together to give you a more truthful picture of what's happening."

Questions

- What were your overall thoughts of the collection? What were some of your initial reactions as you were reading the poems?
- Are you normally a poetry reader?
- How did you approach reading this collection? Did you read it all in one sitting? Or did you spread it out over time?
- Did you find yourself doing research or looking up works while reading?
- Where there any poems that shocked or surprised you?
- What were some of the pieces that stood out to you the most?
 - Would anyone like to share a line or a poem that they liked best or connected with the most?

- Did you research the author before or while reading? What were you able to learn about her through her work?
- Diaz mentions in the book notes that certain poems were inspired by different works, were replies to other poems, or contained lines from other poems or even songs. Did you catch any of the references to these works while you were reading?
- Did you notice any themes or connections between some of the poems?
 - Did you notice the use of the colors (red, green, violet), the use of the garden references, body parts (throat, wrist, thighs, hips) as you were reading, arithmetic, mathematics, desire, beloved and how they were used either similarly or different in the poems?
- Share your thoughts on the use of mythology throughout the collection. Were you familiar with any of the stories or the mythology?
- In addition to the poems, Diaz included some very short flash fiction pieces in the collection. Share your thoughts on those stories. Did you like how they were broken up in between the poems?
- Share your thoughts on the poetry formatting. Diaz uses creative line breaks and punctuation to allow certain phrases and words to stand out. How did this improve or hinder your reading experience? Did any areas specifically stand out to you?
- Diaz speaks not just as herself in the poems, but also from rivers and even from the point of view of a minotaur. What was your preference, when she wrote as herself, or from another viewpoint? Why?
- How did you see the title woven in the poems throughout the collection?
- Were there any pieces that you read that you had questions on that you want to talk about with the group?

- Did you notice any hints of humor in the poems? Example: Top Ten Reasons Indians Are Good at Basketball.
 - From Interview with The Pen Ten:
 - **What was the first book or piece of writing that had a profound impact on you?**

I used to read my mother's Reader's Digests from cover to cover, over and over again. My mother also used to throw these at us, if we were in trouble and she either didn't feel like getting up or had already thrown both of her shoes at us. Those Reader's Digests impacted me in many ways.
- Diaz attended Old Dominion University, where she played point guard on the women's basketball team, reaching the NCAA Final Four as a freshman and the bracket of sixteen her other three years. After playing professional basketball in Europe and Asia, she returned to Old Dominion University, and completed an MFA in poetry and fiction...she said in a 2012 PBS Interview: "It was kind of my way to navigate between the different cultures. On the reservation, if you were good at basketball, you could do anything. You know, fit into any group, and then off the reservation as well."
 - Knowing her background playing basketball, how do you think that came out in some of her pieces *Run'n'Gun*, *The Mustangs*, *Top Ten Reasons Indians Are Good at Basketball*?
 - Did you see some of those themes, such as navigating between different cultures come out in her writing?
- Diaz said in an interview with AZ Central: "The word I use often is the book to me feels like a constellation," Diaz said. "It's able to pool a lot of different communities together. I, of course, have an Indigenous lens, but yet I think that Indigenous lens is extremely important to non-Indigenous peoples. We're all fighting for our water. We're all fighting for this Earth, for one another against injustice." Share your thoughts on this. Were you able to connect with a lot of these topics in her poems?

Resources

Author Website

<https://www.nataliegermainediaz.com/>

Author Bio

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/natalie-diaz>

Select Poems:

<https://www.nataliegermainediaz.com/work>

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/poems/envelopes-of-air-ada-limon-and-natalie-diaz-forge-a-bond-amid-the-shifting-landscape-of-contemporary-america>

How to Read a Poem:

https://www.artidea.org/sites/default/files/imported/other_media/pdfs/HowToReadAPoem.pdf

Review:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/aug/18/postcolonial-love-poem-by-natalie-diaz-review-intimate-electric-and-defiant>

Interviews with the Author:

<https://pen.org/the-pen-ten-an-interview-with-natalie-diaz/>

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/america-is-a-myth-a-conversation-with-natalie-diaz/>

<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2021/06/11/natalie-diaz-asu-professor-and-activist-wins-pulitzer-prize-poetry/7662619002/>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/poet-natalie-diaz-returns-to-her-roots#transcript>

UCF Celebrates the Arts

<https://arts.cah.ucf.edu/event/an-evening-with-natalie-diaz/>

Natalie Diaz, a Mojave-Latina MacArthur Foundation fellow and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet of “Postcolonial Love Poem,” will virtually present her work.