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# Linguistic Disobedience: Towards a Lyric Theory of Intactness in Contemporary American Poetry

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## **Abstract**

Oxford English Dictionary

Intact, *adj.*

Definition: “Untouched; not affected by anything that injures, diminishes, or sullies; kept or left entire; unblemished; unimpaired”

Etymology: “Latin *intactus*, <*in-* [prefix expressing negation or privation] + *tactus*, past participle of *tangĕre* to touch”

To be intact—to be unbroken—is to be untouched.

Theodore Adorno defines lyrical language as an expression of an individual’s personal subjectivity into universality through specific concepts and signs. However, to render a minoritized subject into a language designed to oppress them is to make that subjectivity lose its intactness. By bringing in Paul Ricoeur’s conception of the metaphor as a discursive linguistic act which has to work on the level of the sentence as a thought-structure, this essay examines how line breaks and metaphors enable the expression of a minoritized subjectivity. I argue that the poetry of Ilya Kaminsky and Natalie Diaz disrupts the logic of the sentence and unsettles the metaphor, breaking the “wholeness” of the sentence while maintaining the “intactness” of the thought. This essay applies sociolinguistics to contemporary American poetry in order to theorize the place of the poetic line in Ricoeur’s rule of the metaphor. If “in the phenomenon of the sentence, language

passes outside itself,” then the breakage of that sentence into the poetic line has the potential to decolonize an oppressive language.

*Keywords:* Intactness, Decolonization of Language, Poetic Line, Metaphorical Integrity

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The famous Eiffel Tower has the names of 72 French scientists, engineers and mathematicians engraved on the sides as an homage to their contributions to their respective fields. One of those names is Dr. Paul Broca. Dr. Broca was a nineteenth century French physician, anatomist and anthropologist best known for the discovery of Broca’s area—the area of the brain that performs semantic and phonological tasks in addition to playing a key role in speech production. Dr. Broca’s research revolutionized the understanding of comprehension, speech production, and language processing. It also provided the first concrete evidence of localization of function within the brain (Fancher). However, Broca’s contributions also included pioneering the field of physical anthropology and the invention of cranial measuring instruments that he used to “prove” the superiority of Caucasian men to women, to Black people and to other peoples of color (“Memoir of Paul Broca”). Broca’s understanding of brain structure as a site of both language creation and white male superiority are inextricable from each other. Within a white-centric Western understanding of physiology, the colonized subject’s speech is controlled by a part of the brain named after a man who also “proved” the inferiority of that very brain. The violence of colonization is encapsulated in the very language we use to articulate it. The English language has historically functioned as a tool of British colonialism and continues to perpetrate American cultural imperialism across the globe. In the words of Solmaz Sharif, “the maiming and obliteration of language preempts and attempts to excuse the maiming and obliteration of bodies.” English has

been the tool of that linguistic obliteration. For many English speakers, the language is inherited as a legacy of colonization while it simultaneously functions as a symbol of high status within the colonial system and serves as the only provision for international communication. For minoritized writers in English, poetry allows us to, as Joy Harjo says “speak directly in a language meant to destroy us.” The aesthetic tools characteristic of poetry such as metaphor and the line enable the expression of intact minoritized subjectivity in English by strategically interrupting the syntactical process of sense-making.

Like Harjo, a number of contemporary American poets are harnessing the decolonizing potential of the line break and metaphor to subvert the imperialistic functions of the English language. This essay will be focusing on the latest books of two of those poets: *Deaf Republic* by Ilya Kaminsky (2019) and *Postcolonial Love Poem* by Natalie Diaz (2020). Kaminsky and Diaz are both poets whose primary language is not English. Kaminsky is a native Russian speaker who learned English upon coming to the United States at the age of sixteen. As a hard of hearing poet, his perspectives of language and sound inform *Deaf Republic* just as much as his family’s history in connection to the colonization of his homeland of Odessa. Diaz is an Aha Makav poet who grew up bilingual in the colonial languages of English and Spanish and is currently learning Mojave in an effort to preserve her native tongue. *Postcolonial Love Poem* is a primarily English-language defiance of Native erasure. Both of these poets tell the narrative of a land violently colonized by an invading force and of the inheritance of that land as language itself. Kaminsky, as an immigrant poet, and Diaz, as a Native American poet, also provide two separate minoritized subjectivities to investigate “American” as an identity.

In “Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy,” Judith Butler argues that identity can be understood as a mode of “being dispossessed, ... of being ... by virtue of another” (19).

She structures the “I” of a narrative as being undone in its relation to the Other because the self is composed of one’s ties to others. Because she inextricably links relationality to identity, she also posits grief and desire as sites for loss of intactness:

One does not always stay intact. It may be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one’s best efforts, one is undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of the touch, by the memory of the feel. (19)

Butler’s relational conception of the self seamlessly conflates the dictionary meaning (“not damaged”) and the etymological roots (“untouched”) of the word *intact* (Stevenson 908). To desire, to be touched, by another is to construct a new social self—and to lose that relationality is also to lose the intactness of the socially constitutive self. In the essay, “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” Theodore Adorno looks at the role of this individual subjectivity in poetry written within the context of capitalist society. He posits the potential for lyric poetry as a site of a progressive aesthetic and suggests that a lyric poem’s aesthetic and social qualities are separate and inseparable from each other. He argues that the social element of lyric poetry is crucial to understanding their quality. The subjective “I” in lyric poetry defines itself as separate from the collective “objective” experience and depicts alienated humanity—something which is both socially progressive and aesthetically valuable. Butler, however, recognizes that the sociality of the self is at odds with the language of autonomy. She argues that the self is socially, not autonomously constructed. Because power dynamics play a key role in identity formation, the social construction of the self allows Butler to construct the self as the basic unit of a complex political community. According to Adorno, lyric poetry is the extreme manifestation of the process of relationality that Butler describes. He claims that the lyric work hopes to attain universality through unrestrained individuation (Adorno 339). “Even the solitariness of lyrical language itself is prescribed by an

individualistic and ultimately atomistic society, just as conversely its general cogency depends on the intensity of its individuation” (340). He ties this seeming contradiction to the condition of language, which he defines as an expression of an individual’s pure subjectivity into concepts and signs which creates a relationship to the universal and to the general society.

While Adorno does not explicitly engage with minoritization or suppression, the inherently contradictory unity he speaks about manifests itself in systems of oppression and thus in languages of oppression. M. Nourbese Philip talks about working exclusively in a language of colonialism and empire. As an English speaker, Philip explores what, and how, language means for her. She feels “language bears culture and culture feeds language,” but her lack of intactness is defined by her having to work in English, a language that she calls her father tongue or “a foreign anguish” (Philip 31, 30). “Condemned to work in a language that commits a rape in [her] mouth every time [she] speak[s],” she frames her experience as one of always looking for vocabulary to articulate colonial grief and trauma (Butler’s loss of intactness) (Philip 31-32). She argues that English and other languages in which colonialism happened do not have words for the experiences of the colonized and that the resulting absence of vocabulary renders the understanding of those colonized experiences impossible in colonizing languages. Gayatri Spivak would consider this lack of empathy arising from lack of vocabulary an epistemic violence which centralizes the colonizers’ perspective and causes “the asymmetrical obliteration of [the Other-ized colonized subject] in its precarious Subjectivity” (76). The strict imposition of colonial languages thus serves to obliterate the Foucauldian episteme, replacing it with a linguistic codification of colonial power-knowledge. Describing her search for specific words in a colonial language to describe colonial traumas, Philip claims that “poetry becomes the tool that enables me in this difficult search” (31-32). In a later interview, she elaborates:

I don't believe English ... can truly speak our truths without the language in question being put through some sort of transformative process. A decontaminating process is probably more accurate, since a language as deeply implicated in imperialism as English has been cannot but be contaminated by such a history and experience. (51)

To understand the specific mechanics of how poetry may allow for this decontamination to happen in conjunction with a distrust of language, it is important to understand how poetic metaphor fundamentally changes the denotative processes of language.

Paul Ricoeur applies the linguistics of phenomenology to the concept of the metaphor in order to arrive at a theory of the symbol. In *The Rule of the Metaphor*, Ricoeur defines the metaphor as a discursive linguistic act that uses the processes of "seeing-as" to achieve its purpose. The metaphor fundamentally functions as a copula of the verb "to be" by denoting both "is not" and "is like." However, in order to achieve this function, the metaphor has to work on the level of the sentence as a thought-structure. "Only at the level of the sentence, taken as a whole, can what is said be distinguished from that of which one speaks... the sentence is the carrier of the minimum complete meaning" (Ricoeur 84, 2). The signifier can only operate as a metaphor due to its syntactical and rhetorical relations with other signifiers within the thought-structure of the sentence as a whole. Poetry allows for a disruption of this denotative process by breaking the whole of the sentence into fragmentary linear logic. While the sentence is constructed in accordance with the rules of grammar, the line disrupts that syntactical logic while enhancing, interrupting, complicating and/or challenging the function of the sentence as a linguistic artefact.

In addition to being equally important for analysis, sentence structures and formal elements like line breaks frequently work in tandem. Natalie Diaz's 2020 poetry collection *Postcolonial Love Poem* features both lineated and prose poetry that utilize the line break to disrupt syntactical

logic and polylinguality to disrupt metaphorical logic in order to decontaminate the English language and articulate minoritized subjectivity. Section 78 of “*exhibits from The American Water Museum*” by Natalie Diaz consists of two parts separated by a change in the narrative voice. The section begins in a didactic third-person voice that details the process of colonization. The second part of section 78 is a first-person plural narrative from the perspective of the colonized. The transition from a detached instructive speaker to a first-person account of colonization is accompanied by a change in the speaker’s relationship with English as a language, characterized by metaphorical interplay and disjunctive syntax. The first three stanzas are in the voice of a third-person didactic narrator who addresses colonizers:

The first violence against any body of water  
is to forget the name its creator first called it.  
Worse: forget the bodies who spoke that name.

An American way of forgetting Natives:  
Discover them with City. Crumble them by City.  
Erase them into Cities named for their bones, until

You are the new Natives of your new Cities.  
Let the new faucets run in celebration, in excess.

Who lies beneath streets, universities, art museums? (Diaz 64)

These three stanzas introduce three images of the victims of colonization: the body, the land, and water. The three are interconnected but separate. The land and water are named by/for the body of those who inhabit them. The erasure of the indigenous body is tied to the forgetting of the names

of the land and water, a forgetting that enables colonizers to become “the new Natives” and exploit nature as a resource (“let the faucets run ... in excess”). As the poem shifts to a first-person plural account addressed to other colonized subjectivities, the metaphysical boundaries between the metaphors begins to blur:

My people!

I learn to love them from up here, through concrete.

La llorona out on the avenues crying for everyone’s  
babies, for all the mothers, including River, grinded

[page break]

to their knees and dust for the splendid City. Still,  
we must sweep the dust, gather our own bodies like  
messes of sand and memory. Who will excavate

our clodded bodies from the banks, pick embedded  
stones and sticks from the raw scrapes oozing  
our backs and thighs? Who will call us back

to the water, wash the dirt from our eyes and hair?  
Can anybody uncrush our hands, reshape them  
from clay, let us touch one another’s faces again?

Has anyone answered? We've been crying out

for 600 years—

*Tengo sed (64-65)*

Each comparison between body and land escalates the intensity of seeing body as land. The first comparison is a simile “we must sweep the dust, gather our own bodies like / messes of sand and memory.” The “bodies” are *like* “messes of sand,” creating a similarity which assumes difference. The second comparison is a metaphor-by-modification “excavate / our clodded bodies from the banks” where the adjective “clodded,” typically applied to sand, modifies “bodies,” intensifying the initial simile into a metaphysical conflation. The bodies *are* clodded, as sand would be. The very last metaphor is a conflation-through-verb “uncrush our hands, reshape them / from clay” where the action of reshaping the body (“hands”) is achieved with land (“clay”), completing the conflation of the two through intentional action. As the grammar makes each subsequent equivalation between the land and the body metaphysically stronger, the vocabulary introduces more water (wetness) to the land imagery, from “sand” to “clodded” to “clay.” For the third-person narrator, the separation of the three is essential because the means of accessing the resources of land and water is the erasure of the indigenous body. For the first-person plural narrator, the land and water are extensions of the body—damage to the body is damage to the land, the hand can be made intact again from clay and the unanswered cry is Spanish for “I’m thirsty.” While the body, land and water are simply images for the first three stanzas of the poem, their conversion into metaphor is a tool for them to be “seen as” each other.

The prose poem “The First Water is the Body” elaborates on this connection in a discursive move by providing Diaz’s readers with a basic Aha Makav vocabulary lesson:

This is not metaphor...This is not juxtaposition. Body and water are not two *unlike* things—they are more than *close together* or *side by side*. They are *same*—body, being, energy, prayer, current, motion, medicine...In Mojave thinking, body and land are the same. The words are separated only by the letters ‘i and ‘a: ‘iimat for body, ‘amat for land. In conversation, we often use a shortened form for each: *mat-*. Unless you know the context of a conversation, you might not know if we are speaking about our body or our land. You might not know which has been injured, which is remembering, which is alive, which was dreamed, which needs care. You might not know we mean both.

If I say, *My river is disappearing*, do I also mean, *My people are disappearing?* (48)

In the prose form, the English language fails the speaker in explaining the land-identity connection: “How can I translate—not in words but in belief—that a river is a body, as alive as you or I?” (48) Even the translation of *Aha Makav* as “*the river runs through the middle of our body, the same way it runs through the middle of our land*” is “a poor translation, like all translations” (46). The reason the translation is inadequate is “in the American imagination, the logic of this image will lend itself to realism or magical realism” (46-47). This prose poem, confined to sentences, constantly slips into *Aha Makav* to articulate the message and in several self-reflective discursive moments and asks “who is this translation for and will they come to my language’s four-night funeral to grieve what has been lost in my efforts at translation?” (47) Diaz’s “The First Water is the Body,” constantly navigates the gaps of languages to articulate identity despite the loss of language and land. But in doing so, it challenges the basic structure of Saussurian differentiation. Body and water are “not unlike” each other and thus their definitions do not depend on them being separate from each other but in them being “*close together* or *side by side*. They are *same*.” Similarly, the signifiers for body and land in Mojave are not self-contained. One cannot know if a

speaker is referring to body or land unless they “know the context of the conversation.” But even the desire to know is futile because they “might not know we mean both. / If I say, *My river is disappearing*, do I also mean, *My people are disappearing?*” Diaz’s poetry must actively subvert the processes of sense-making in order to make a connection between water-land-identity attachment in colonizing languages.

In section 78 of “*exhibits from The American Water Museum*” the grammar also marks a shift in temporality between these two sections. For the third-person didactic voice, the verbs of enacting violence upon the land, water and the body are “forget” and “erase.” Although there is a temporal progression from the “first violence” in the first stanza to “new Natives of your new Cities” in the third, each of the verbs in all three stanzas is in simple present tense. The colonization depicted here may be a process with a beginning and an end, the acts of violence perpetrated in the service of that colonization are rendered into a constant unchanging present. The temporal progression is best exemplified by the enjambment combining two syntactically intact independent clauses, “erase them into Cities named for their bones” and “you are the new Natives of your new Cities” with the temporal conjunction “until.” Even as the violence of forgetting and erasing is rendered into a constant present, the colonized subjectivity in the subsequent stanzas pairs a simple present resistance (“we must sweep,” “pick embedded stones”) with a future tense in rhetorical questions (“who will excavate,” “who will call us back”). While the first-person plural speaker does acknowledge that “we’ve been crying out / for 600 years,” they refuse to allow the silences to continue. They demand that the colonized be “excavated” from beneath “the splendid City” of the “new Natives.” If the third-person voice rendered the violence of colonization into a continuous present, the first-person plural voice uses the future tense to resist the acceptance of colonial violence as the status quo.

While Diaz's verbs show a form of resistance, all the verbs of resistance in Ilya Kaminsky's "We Lived Happily During the War" are rendered empty by the formal structures of the poem. An homage to the (often misquoted) Martin Niemöller poem "First They Came..." Kaminsky's poem is the frontispiece of his play-in-verse *Deaf Republic*. The poem depicts ongoing life during "the war," a clear reference to the Trump presidency. The line breaks of the poem insert silences at strategic points to subvert the verbs and render them ineffective:

And when they bombed other people's houses, we

protested

but not enough, we opposed them but not

enough. (Kaminsky 3)

The first line sets up the stakes of the poem in the opposition of "other people" and "we." The speaker of the poem identifies themselves in relationality to the "other people" whose houses are being bombed. While other people's houses are being bombed by the opaque "they," the "we / protested." The verb "protested" begins the next stanza and is isolated on its own line which forces the reader to dwell on it. However, in the very next line, it is subverted and rendered ineffectual by the oppositional conjunction "but not enough." Grammatically, the sentence should end there, but a comma splice propels the reader into a syntactically parallel independent clause "we opposed them but not / enough." The disruption of grammatical logic confines these independent clauses into a single thought-structure and serves to equate the verbs of protest (war) and opposition (those who bomb houses). Moving the line break from before the verb to after the negation of the verb creates an equivalence between the linear thought-structure "we

opposed them but not” and the rhetorical thought-structure “we opposed them but not enough.”  
To not oppose the bombing of others’ houses enough is to not oppose it at all.

around my bed, America

was falling: invisible house by invisible house by invisible house

I took a chair outside and watched the sun. (3)

Because the speaker refuses even to witness the destruction of a nation “invisible house by invisible house by invisible house,” their verbs of performative resistance do not hold any power and are constantly negated by the line breaks and punctuation. Similarly, the guilt of the speaker in the last two lines is negated by the parentheses:

our great country of money, we (forgive us)

lived happily during the war. (3)

Just as parentheses are used to set aside insertions which have no grammatical relationship to the text, the guilt of the speaker and their request for forgiveness is enclosed in parenthesis and set off from the fact that they lived happily during the war (*The Chicago Manual of Style*). The placement of the parenthetical at the end of the stanza with an enjambment leading into the isolated last line of the poem places the emphasis heavily on the repetition of the title. The guilt and penitence may be present at the end of the poem, but their presence is not disruptive to the complacency of the speaker.

*Deaf Republic*, however, does illustrate the disruptive power of true witness in subsequent poems. The first few poems tell the story of the invasion of a fictional town by an external military force. While breaking up a gathering, a soldier shoots and kills a young deaf boy, an event

witnessed by the entire town (Kaminsky 11-17). In protest, “our country woke up next morning and refused to hear soldiers” (14). The refusal to hear renders deafness into an act of insurgency against colonizers and because the physical inability to hear creates a political community; deafness itself becomes an identity made possible by the collective act of witnessing the death of a deaf boy in “That Map of Bone and Opened Valves”:

Observe this moment

—how it convulses—

The body of the boy lies on the asphalt like a paperclip.

The body of the boy lies on the asphalt

like the body of a boy (16).

The speaker asks the reader to not just see but observe the moment. The line breaks, silences further strengthened by em-dashes, around “how it convulses” force the reader to slow down and focus on the scene. The scene itself: “The body of the boy lies on the asphalt like a paperclip.” The simile comparing the body of the boy to an innocuous household object softens the horror of it lying on the asphalt. But the simile is not allowed to do so for long. In a repetition of the sentence, a line break cuts it off just before the simile and the reader is forced to focus on the reality of a dead child without the help of a desensitizing comparison. The lack of simile is further reinforced by the next line “like the body of a boy.” The only adequate comparison for the image of “the body of the boy” is “the body of a boy.” The tautology resists any attempts at desensitizing similes. In the very next poem “The Townspeople Circle the Boy’s Body,”

The townspeople lock arms to form a circle and another circle around that circle and another circle to keep the soldiers from the boy’s body ... Someone has given [Sonya] a sign, which she holds high above her head: THE PEOPLE ARE DEAF. (17)

Once the vague “they burned other people’s houses,” an event which the narrator refuses to witness, is replaced with a highly detailed image of a specific boy killed by a specific soldier, the vague conceptual verbs of “protest” and “oppose” are also replaced by a specific action of townspeople locking arms in a collective protective gesture. Moreover, protest is not a singular act performed at a given time but a fundamental change to the identity of the people. Deafness as identity is only created through the violent relationality of the townspeople to the colonizing soldiers who killed one of their own.

While the first poem of Kaminsky’s collection criticizes complacency by undermining the verbs, the last poem of *Deaf Republic* enacts the same criticism by emphasizing the verbs. The last poem is set amidst state violence “In a Time of Peace,”:

I once found myself in a peaceful country. I watch neighbors open

their phones to watch

a cop demanding a man’s driver’s license. When the man reaches for his wallet, the cop

Shoots. Into the car window. Shoots.

It is a peaceful country. (75)

Unlike “We Lived Happily during the War,” “In a Time of Peace” emphasizes witness by placing the verbs “open” and “watch” at the ends of their respective lines. Similarly, the verb “shoots” both begins and ends the last line of the stanza, framing the scene of the car window. However, the line breaks also create silences that distance the subject of the sentence “neighbors” from the object being observed “a cop demanding a man’s driver’s license.” The separation of the actual shooting into the next sentence also syntactically removes it from the verb of witness “watch.”

Thus, while it is clear that the neighbors witness the shooting on their phones, the rhetoric and form of the poem create several degrees of separation between the violence and those who witness it. Intercut with scenes of everyday life like shopping for basil and dentist appointments are scenes of witnessed state violence:

Ours is a country in which a boy shot by police lies on the pavement for hours.

We see in his open mouth  
the nakedness  
of the whole nation.

We watch. Watch  
others watch. (75)

The image of a body of a boy shot by a cop lying on pavement mirrors the image of the body of a boy shot by a soldier lying on asphalt from the earlier poem. However, in this instance, the reality of the death is made abstract by a metaphor “we see in his open mouth / the nakedness / of a whole nation.” While there is a sense of hyper-witness “we watch. Watch / others watch” in this poem, the rendering of image into metaphor desensitizes the speaker, creating emotional distance. Thus, the witness is not followed by any verbs of protest or opposition because the several degrees of separation allow the neighbors to distance their selves from the victim of state violence, leaving them unharmed instead of rendering them deaf. The identity formation of the speaker in this poem is diametrically opposed to the identity formation of the deaf townspeople. In both “We Lived Happily During the War” and “In a Time of Peace,” the harm is happening to “others” and the speaker’s identity emerges from a place of relative safety. While the war is characterized by an

external threat to the nation (“America / was falling”), the violence in “a peaceful country” is violence against citizens perpetrated by the state. The witness of such violence is part of daily routine and does not elicit even performative protest. Kaminsky’s line breaks and punctuation disrupt the syntactical logic of his sentences to reveal the emptiness of performative speech from a privileged perspective. They also critique complacency towards injustice from those who are not directly harmed by that injustice.

While Kaminsky’s poems focus on witnesses of state violence, Diaz’s book provides the perspective of victims of the same violence. Her poem “American Arithmetic” utilizes sonic repetition with semantic difference to highlight how state violence impacts identity formation for Native American folk:

Native Americans make up less than  
1 percent of the population of America.  
0.8 percent of 100 percent.  
...  
Police kill Native Americans more  
than any other race. *Race* is a funny word.  
*Race* implies someone will win,  
implies, *I have as good a chance of winning as—*  
  
Who wins the race that isn’t a race?  
  
Native Americans make up 1.9 percent of all  
Police killings, higher per capita than any race—

Sometimes *race* means *run*. (Diaz 17)

Diaz unravels the social concept of race by equating it with its homonym. She challenges the Darwinian conception of race because “the race ... isn’t a race.” Within the context of systemic state-perpetrated killings of people of color, race simply “means run.” Even as the speaker acknowledges that the nation-state of the United States of America is inherently anti-Native, they claim the identity of American while taking pride in being Native American. Diaz’s poem forces the statements “We are Americans” and “I am Native American” in tension with each other:

We are Americans, and we are less than 1 percent  
of Americans. We do a better job of dying  
by police than we do existing.

...

But in an American room of one hundred people,  
I am Native American—less than one, less than  
whole—I am less than myself. Only a fraction  
of a body, let’s say, I am only a hand— (17-18)

To be Native American is to be a fragmented American. This loss of intactness reflects itself in police violence, demographics and in the body. The statement “I am less than myself” creates a mutually reflexive discordance between the subject of the sentence “I” and the object “myself,” characterized by the comparative “less than.” While both “I” and “myself” refer to the speaker, the subjective “I,” being Native American is “less than” and “a fraction of” the objective “myself” which refers to the speaker as American. The compound noun, via its modification of “American” with “Native” fractures the identity of American. The Aha Makav are indigenous to the continent

and their bodies are inextricably linked to the land and water. However, once their identity is expressed through a colonial language, it is filtered through colonial discourse and within that colonial discourse, to be Native American is to not be American enough. The speaker of this poem has “had an American education” and their identity formation happened within the context of that colonial and colonizing socialization system (17).

One of the most iconic poems in the English language canon is William Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud.” The poem is a staple in classrooms all across the English-speaking world. It is frequently used in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) A-level examinations in England, Ireland and Wales. It is also part of the class 10 Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) board examinations in India and used to be a required memorization exercise in schools in Trinidad and Jamaica. In *The Middle Passage*, Naipaul expresses bewilderment about a campaign in Trinidad to remove the poem from the school curriculum. He does not understand why schools would want to reject an aesthetically pleasing poem. However, what differentiates the experience of a British student reading a poem with daffodils as the central image from that of a student in Trinidad is that daffodils do not grow in the West Indies. The curriculum of these formerly colonized education systems is oblivious to the aesthetic and geographic specificity of their students’ experience. The daffodil, thus, becomes a symbol of Englishness and whiteness. Success at memorizing or learning this poem is success in aligning one’s subjectivity with affective whiteness. M. Nourbese Philip once said that “one of the most insidious uses of language is to separate us from a sense of integrity and wholeness” (50). For minoritized poets, this “daffodilization” and “nightingalization” creates a distrust in the very language they use to create their art. As opposed to a poet who is not “othered” by English (or another colonial language), a minoritized poet must function in a language that has historically

been engaged in a colonial project, or worse, does not acknowledge their existence. In order to maintain their intactness while rendering their subjectivity into English, poets like Diaz and Kaminsky must fragment the language itself. They must restructure syntax and destabilize metaphors like the daffodil. Their poetry is a form of linguistic disobedience—of protest against the lessons of imperialism.

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