

This is a pre-print version only. Please use the published version when citing and quoting
Munos, Delphine. 2018. "Speaking of Madness in the First Person / Speaking Madness in the Second Person? Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and "The Cheater's Guide to Love." In: *Madness in Anglophone Caribbean Literature: On the Edge*. Ed. Bénédicte Ledent, Evelyn O'Callaghan, and Daria Tunca. New Caribbean Studies. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. 81-102.

Speaking of Madness in the First Person / Speaking Madness in the Second Person?

Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and "The Cheater's Guide to Love"

Delphine Munos

Masculinity – not madness – apparently lies at the core of Junot Díaz's oeuvre. But perhaps because, in Díaz's Dominican-American fictional world, brute machismo defines what is perceived to be true Dominican maleness, "mad" masculinity is simultaneously reconfigured here in terms of authenticity and toxic cultural ideal. Throughout Díaz's fiction, "mad" masculinity is closely associated with the Dominican-American diasporic story of Yuniór, the author's key character in his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and in his two short-story collections *Drown* (1996) and *This is How You Lose Her* (2012). However, it is only from *Oscar Wao* onwards that Yuniór himself comes to embody, at times reluctantly, a phallogentric Dominican-American masculinity that poses as the real thing yet knows itself to be self-defeating and self-destructive, even "ensnared in [its] own oppression," to borrow the words used by Keith Nurse in a related context (15). In fact, in *Oscar Wao*, even as first-person narrator Yuniór traces the dominant identificatory pole of normative *machismo* back to the colonial legacy of violence in the Caribbean and to Rafael Trujillo's US-backed dictatorship, he still proves permeable to discourses of cultural authenticity that keep reinstating Dominican hyper-masculinity as the gateway to true Dominican (and Dominican-American) maleness. As Díaz explains in an interview, Yuniór is most clearly "one of Trujillo's children" in that he embodies "the masculine derangements" that are tied with "the

national masculine ideal” of “compulsive promiscuity” (Díaz, “Decolonial Love”). Citing the Dominican psychologist Antonio De Moya and applying his work to *Drown*, John Riofrio likewise suggests that Yunior’s notion of manliness is framed in more ways than one by the “ongoing process of stringent, totalitarian ‘gender-work’” (De Moya, qtd. in Riofrio, 25) that originated during the Trujillo era and which has ever since promoted a “hyper-masculinity hopelessly disconnected from reality” (Riofrio 27).

Although *Oscar Wao* has generated a large body of critical work, the fact that Díaz’s novel is written in the first person from the perspective of a self-confessed and half-repentant “madman” – one who is “exceptionally responsive to the reader’s presence,” as Elena Machado Sáez argues (166) – has not been taken seriously enough by critics. Richard Patteson and Machado Sáez are among the few scholars who direct their attention away from the surface plot in *Oscar Wao* (the life of the eponymous Oscar and that of his ancestors) so they can take on board Díaz’s admonishment, namely that Yunior’s “unspoken motivations for [telling this story] are at the heart of the novel and can easily be missed” (Díaz, “Questions”). What is refreshing in Patteson’s and Machado Sáez’s readings of the novel is that they each reflect on the implausible twists of plot in *Oscar Wao* and foreground the role of the reader in accepting (or challenging) Yunior’s extremely placating authority as “narrator-dictator.” In fact, Díaz’s choice of a particularly unreliable first-person narrator implies that the equation between madness and masculinity might not be elucidated and exposed, but in fact distorted, by a confessional element that only adds to Yunior’s incapacitated self-knowledge (and to the reader’s mystification). After all, as Peter Brooks and J.M. Coetzee have each shown, there might be “self-satisfaction” but no “truth value” (Brooks 48) in confession, which finds “behind every motive another motive, behind every mask another mask,” and at the root of which lurks “not a desire for the truth but a desire to *be a particular way*” (Coetzee 280, italics in original). In other words, Yunior’s

acknowledgement of the “masculine derangements” that are associated with the ideal of “compulsive promiscuity,” to reprise Díaz’s phrase, should not be taken solely as a means of re-historicizing and exposing the transgenerational (and transnational) ravages of “dictatorship masculinity,” as the author calls it in his interview with Paul Jay. Indeed Yuniór’s vocal act of contrition and his mantra-like resolve to be “a new man” (326) at the end of *Oscar Wao* can also be seen to function as a perverse testament to his incurable allegiance to the cultural ideal of hyper-masculinity, which, in turn, “rationalizes his own cultural authority as narrator” (Machado Sáez 171) through the back door. Yuniór’s “doublespeak” – his confessional rhetoric – thus begs questions as to how far readers are ready to be taken in by the seductiveness of Yuniór’s “literary dictatorship.”

In her now-classic *Writing and Madness* (2003 [1978]), Shoshana Felman suggests that the literary text is always speaking of itself – of its textual un-decidability and polysemy of meaning – when it speaks of madness. Similarly, it is my contention that Díaz’s narrative strategies in “The Cheater’s Guide to Love,” a short story written in the second person, shifts the ground of analysis even more irrevocably from thematizing and explaining “mad” Dominican hyper-masculinity to dramatizing the status of knowledge and the very possibility of interpretation – what Felman calls the “madness of texts” (251). Included in *This is How You Lose Her*, Díaz’s recent collection of short stories, “The Cheater’s Guide to Love” can be seen to take over where *Oscar Wao* left off, that is, at a point in life where an early middle-aged Yuniór is made to confront, explain (or explain away?) the misery he brings upon himself through his inability to let go of the cultural ideal of compulsive womanizing. What gives a radically new edge to this theme, however, is that, by definition, this text using the second person – what I will henceforth call a “you text” – never surrenders its potential for carrying extradiegetic effects for the reader. As Marie-Laure Ryan remarks, there is an “instinctive reaction to think *me* when we hear *you*” (138, italics in original). What follows is

that madness is here located in a “you” that is, at times, simultaneously diegetic (in that it refers to Yuniór) and apostrophic (in that it addresses the reader). So the two main questions that I wish to explore in this essay are: What does it mean to write of madness – and of a very culture- and gender-specific form of madness at that – in the first and the second person? Does the second person in “The Cheater’s Guide” allow Yuniór (and Díaz) to “speak madness” in ways that the first-person narration of *Oscar Wao* never does? Through comparing Díaz’s narrative strategies in *Oscar Wao* and “The Cheater’s Guide,” my aim is to show that the latter offers an important complement to the ways in which the madness of Dominican hyper-masculinity is simultaneously critiqued *and* recuperated as evidence of cultural authenticity by Yuniór in *Oscar Wao* – possibly for the benefit of readers eager to engage in premium consumption of authentic *dominicanidad*. Thriving on “strategies of referential indeterminacy” (Fludernik 101), Díaz’s “you text” not only further re-inscribes the hidden complicities and hierarchies of power that participate in the shaping of “mad” masculinities; it also brings to light the dynamics of impossible identifications experienced by Yuniór throughout his quest for acceptable maleness in the diasporic Dominican and post-9/11 US contexts.

In the “Afterthoughts” section to *Writing and Madness*, a book in which Felman explores “the relationship between the texts of madness and the madness of texts” (251), the critic notes that the “rhetoric of madness” is “mystified and mystifying.” After all, Felman remarks, the statement “I am mad” boils down to a contradiction in terms: “if one is mad, then such a statement cannot be true or at least reliable, whereas if one is reliable, one cannot be mad” (269). To the extent that “madness . . . is what a speaking subject can neither simply deny nor simply affirm or assume” (252), the “rhetoric of madness” thus needs to be differentiated from “the madness that speaks” – supposing the latter even exists. Interestingly for my purposes, Felman links the “rhetoric of madness” to a way of saying “I” and a way of

saying “s/he,” that is, respectively, to a “cry of the subject, who, considering himself “mad,” thereby claims to be exceptional,” and to “a way of acting out a diagnosis which, projecting madness outside, *locates* it in *the Other*” (251, italics in original).

As I will show below, Felman’s remarks offer a fascinating angle from which to relaunch a discussion of Junot Díaz’s Pulitzer-prize winning novel, *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and of its reception. The plot of Díaz’s novel is well-known. In the preface to the book, the as-yet-unnamed narrator famously declares that his fellow Dominicans – living on the island or abroad – have all been plagued by a curse or “fukú americanus” which originated with the arrival of “the Admiral” (1) – known as Columbus – and that of Europeans on Hispaniola. Even if the fukú or “Curse of the New World” can be traced back to conquest, slavery, colonialism, the US occupation of the island in 1916-1924 and the *Trujillato* (1930-1961), “the fukú ain’t just ancient history” (2). Using a language that mixes English with Spanish and that showcases its fluency in registers ranging from street lingo to nerd-speak through academic jargon (cf. Graulund for more on this), the narrator, who identifies himself as Yunior only midway through the novel, affirms that the fukú has followed present-day diasporic Dominicans to the US – indeed that “diaspora” is “Trujillo’s payback to the pueblo that betrayed him” (5). Although the first-person narrator admits that, like everybody in the Dominican Republic (henceforth DR), “[he] [has] a fukú story too” (6), the one he starts telling centers not on himself but on the Cabral-de León family, with a special focus on Oscar de León – the Oscar of the title. Clearly, Yunior sees in the overweight, bespectacled and bookish brother of his on-again-off-again girlfriend Lola de León “a ghetto nerd” (10) and a living outrage to Dominican manliness. Arguably, Oscar also embodies a projection of Yunior’s own anxieties, which might explain why the latter character obsesses over the former, who desperately tries to lose his virginity throughout the novel and “love[s] writing the way [Yunior] love[s] cheating” (186). Because Yunior is unwilling to probe the

destructive dynamics of his compulsive womanizing – that is, in his own words, to “check [himself] into Bootie-Rehab” (175) – he loses Lola. Worse, he renames her brother “Oscar Wao” because of his presumed resemblance with “that fat homo Oscar Wilde” (180) while taking it upon himself to launch “Project Oscar” (176) so he can presumably “fix Oscar’s life” (175). At the very end of the novel, Oscar is reported to have fallen in love in the DR with Ybón, a Dominican prostitute who is supposedly his “last-ditch attempt to put him back on the proper path of Dominican male-itude” (283). Oscar’s story of fulfilled intimacy and consummated love only reaches Yunior via a letter Oscar sends him to his home in Paterson, New Jersey, as the latter character is killed by Ybón’s jealous lover, a captain in the Dominican National Police force, in the same cane-fields where Oscar’s mother was almost beaten to death by Trujillo’s henchmen. Haunted as he is by Oscar’s tragic (or opportune?) death, Yunior finally reveals that Oscar’s “un-Dominican” (11) sentimentality, his “nerdiness” (21), has in fact inspired him to be “a new man, new man, a new man” (326) – the first step to newness being Yunior’s somewhat redemptive rebirthing of himself as the narrator of Oscar’s story and of that of the entire Cabral-de León family. Unsurprisingly, Maja Horn notes that “the novel’s entire plot could be summarized as Oscar’s quest to have sex with a woman for the first time” (130), which hardly pays justice to the narrative complexity of the book. More compellingly, Richard Patteson contends that *Oscar Wao* is “at least three novels in one: the story of Oscar; a tale of immigration to America against a backdrop of tyranny . . . ; and a novel about writing and its power to construct and shape an alternative reality” (8).

Although the full range of implications behind Patteson’s point is generally overlooked, his statement appears *prima facie* to be widely endorsed by critics, starting with Monica Hanna, who reads Díaz’s novel as a “historiographic battle royal,” that is, “a struggle over who controls the narration of the story, including both its content . . . and form” (504).

Yunior himself comments on “the almost unbelievable nature of the historical reality of the Dominican Republic” (Hanna 503) in numerous footnotes. What is more, in the body of the text, he pieces together not only the stories of Oscar and his sister Lola in New Jersey, but also the sufferings endured by their mother Belicia and their maternal grandfather Abelard during the *Trujillato*. In so doing, the narrator offers a compelling corrective to the denials and the “univocal voice of nationalistic rhetoric” informing the Trujillan historiography “of glorious nationalism” (504) at the same time as he builds bridges between the histories of the US and the DR. Hanna’s over-optimistic suggestion that Yunior’s oppositional historiography is “based on memory and inclusion” (506), that his voice is “self-reflexive, conscious of alternative interpretations, and eager to represent other perspectives” (504) has been extremely influential. Thus Jennifer Harford Vargas contends that Yunior’s “underground storytelling modes” – namely “hearsay, footnotes, and silences” (11) – participate in creating “a counter-dictatorial narrative” (23), even as the critic paradoxically starts her article by emphasizing that “the novel plays on the tensions between the two definitions of dictate,” which implies drawing an explicit link between Trujillo as “political dictator” and Yunior as “narrative dictator” (8). And indeed, Yunior himself already gestures towards the existence of such a connection in one of his oft-quoted “signature” footnotes, as he invites readers to take on board the suggestion that the madness of “dictatorship masculinity” might extend to the narrative realm:

What is it with Dictators and Writers anyway? . . . Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think that’s too simple; it lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like.* (97, italics in original)

Yunior's admonishment that writers, like dictators, have the power to twist reality out of shape, even to forge it, gains new momentum in those numerous passages of the book in which he admits to having invented and/or falsified details of his transgenerational and transnational chronicle of the Cabral-de León family. The first instance takes place in Chapter 3, which is devoted to narrating Oscar's mother's life in the DR prior to her forced escape to the US. In the section of this chapter entitled "The Gangster We're All Looking for," Yunior reveals in a footnote that he decided to change the setting of Belicia's trip with The Gangster, her evil lover, from Jarabacoa to Samaná, because after writing the first draft of the story, he discovered that "there [were] no beaches" (132) in the first location. In the same footnote, Yunior also retroactively acknowledges that he just "couldn't change" the anachronistic image of Oscar dancing the *perrito* at age seven in 1974 in the opening of Chapter 1 (11), although this dance would not be popularized "until the late eighties, early nineties" (132). As Patteson points out, this first admission "opens a path of inquiry" (11) into contradictory and implausible elements within the text, all the more so because Yunior's later confession of having "thrown a lot of fantasy and sci-fi in the mix" (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 285) is still made to coexist with passages in which he persists in claiming that his text is based on source material – among which Oscar's journals (185; 276), manuscripts and letters (334), audio recordings of Belicia (160), and family photographs (275).

Significantly, Yunior directly addresses the reader in most passages where he admits to having altered, or perhaps invented, elements of what he tells, as if he wanted to muddy the waters by implicating his audience. Thus, the footnote in which he acknowledges that he "liked the image [of Oscar dancing the *perrito*] too much" (132) to allow himself to change it in later drafts closes on Yunior's begging his educated readership for clemency: "Forgive me, historians of popular dance, forgive me!" (132). In Chapter 5, Yunior relates the first days of Oscar's grandfather's imprisonment by the SIM, Trujillo's secret police, then cuts short his

narrative to paradoxically instruct his readership about the extent to which Abelard's story is silenced, even interdicted, not only by "Trujillo and Company" (243), but also by Oscar's family itself. Before readers are given pause to backtrack and ponder the paradox that Yuniior has just told the beginning of a story shrouded in a silence that supposedly "stands monument to the generations, that sphinxes all attempts at narrative reconstructions" (243), they are quickly and somewhat preemptively pulled out of the diegetic world through direct address: "Which is to say if you're looking for the full story, I don't have it" (243). The same strategy of thrusting readers in and out of the diegesis, of suddenly shifting from one emotional wavelength to another, and of hiding Yuniior's own "narrative dictatorship" beneath a vocal concern for his readership's assumed expectations (and/or for their moral wellbeing) is further evidenced a few pages onwards:

A thousand tales I could tell you about Abelard's imprisonment—a thousand tales to wring the salt from your motherfucking *eyes*—but I'm going to spare you the anguish, the torture, the loneliness, and the sickness of these fourteen wasted years, spare you in fact the events and leave you with only the consequences (and you should wonder, rightly, if I've spared you anything). (250, italics in original)

A "mysterious narrator" (507), as Hanna remarks, Yuniior only assumes his role as Oscar's friend and bully and as Lola's ex-lover at the start of Chapter 4. Located as it is in the very middle of the book, Chapter 4 opens on an enigmatic sentence – "It started with me" (167) – which lends weight to the idea that the "*true* account of the Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" (*Oscar Wao* 285, italics in original), as Yuniior insists until the very end of the book, is as much about the eponymous Oscar as it is about Yuniior (Jay 181). It is also midway through the book that, as Hanna remarks, Yuniior's name is first referenced as "Yuni" (169), and then as "Yuniior" (177). Such a disclosure does not reveal very much, though, not least because

“[Yunior’s] given name remains undisclosed” (Hanna 507). In fact, Yunior relates in the same chapter that Oscar is so “excited” to be his roommate at Rutgers University that he “[keeps] calling [Yunior] by his full name,” until the narrator quickly refuses this token of intimacy: “It’s Yunior, Oscar. Just Yunior” (189). That Oscar is revealed to know Yunior’s “full name” even if it still does not appear in the text draws attention to the fact that the narrator remains very much in control of the narrative. Moreover, even if it is apparently through Lola’s and Oscar’s speeches, respectively, that readers are finally able to identify the narrator as “Yuni,” then as Yunior – and therefore to possibly draw intertextual links with the same character in *Drown* – these passages lack quotation marks, so they appear to be literally devoured by, and virtually undistinguishable from, Yunior’s narrative. Although the use of free direct speech is one of Díaz’s signature devices in his *oeuvre* – as evidenced, too, in “The Cheater’s Guide” – the persistence of quoted material in the lengthy and “pseudo-academic” (Mermann-Jozwiak 11) footnotes of *Oscar Wao* shows that Yunior applies double standards to the body text and the paratext. The implication is that Yunior as “Caribbean shape-shifter” (Díaz, “Mil Máscaras”) tailors his style and his persona to readerly expectations of “serious writing” in the footnotes, while still accommodating what Díaz has called in interviews “the dream of a transparent narrative” (“Interview with Paul Jay”) and the desire for “the single voice” (“Questions”) in the body text. To put it in a nutshell, it is not only that Yunior’s adherence to hyper-masculinity translates into narrative paradoxes, implausibilities and impossibilities that all gesture towards his absolute control over the text. Nor is it that *Oscar Wao* reproduces, on the structural level, a dictatorial power and “mad” masculinity that the narrator is anxious to repudiate on the surface. Rather, my point is that Yunior’s displays of self-consciousness about the constructed nature of his storytelling put the onus on readers to renounce “the dream of a transparent narrative” and the “desire for a single voice,” to reprise Díaz, which then

leaves them little choice but start engaging in a counter-dictatorial “madness of interpretation” (Felman).

Jay’s suggestion that *Oscar Wao* explores “the relationship between masculinity, sexuality, power, and writing” (191) (or between dominating masculinity and authorship) appears to have opened a much conflicted avenue of investigation into the ways in which Yunior’s adherence to “dictator masculinity” transfers to the narrative realm. Although Jay is more concerned with showing how Díaz’s project, in *Oscar Wao*, is to demythologize and historicize normative Dominican hyper-masculinity by “connecting it to a colonizing and political model of masculinity [that is] later traced through Trujillo . . . to Yunior and Oscar” (187), the critic still makes it explicit that Yunior “keeps verging on using the same dictatorial power and singular authority in a narrative that is meant to *critique* dictatorial power and singular authority” (191, italics in original). That being said, Jay’s cautious prose (“keeps verging”) suggests that his acknowledgement of Yunior’s “dictatorial power and singular authority” is half-hearted only. After all, in his interview with the critic, Díaz told Jay that although “one of the things that’s really happening in [*Oscar Wao*] is that Yunior is attempting to unlearn [dictator masculinity] and expiate himself,” it remains that “[Yunior] is doing it in exactly the same way that the masculinity he’s trying to undermine has always perpetuated itself, by being the only voice speaking.” Problematically, Díaz’s suggestion that *Oscar Wao* belongs to the structural category of “troubled stories,” not of “simple” ones, ends up being significantly downplayed by Jay, who finally ventures that this suggestion is “articulated more clearly in interviews than it is in the novel itself” (191). Having pointed to the ways in which *Oscar Wao* structurally reproduces a “dictatorial power” and “mad” masculinity that the narrator outwardly disowns, Jay eventually forgets the importance of this paradox. Thus the critic concludes his essay by arguing that Oscar’s final letter to Yunior about the “beauty” of lovemaking with Ybón “becomes a lesson” (192) for the narrator – one

that causes Yunior to “drop the mask” and start “weaving a counterspell [i.e. a story] that resists dominant narratives and brutalizing voices” (193). Needless to say, Jay’s backpedaling and his “all-good-again” portrayal of Yunior are highly reminiscent of the ways in which Harford Vargas first likens Yunior to a “narrative dictator,” only to finally fall back on a happy-go-lucky scenario according to which the narrator weaves a “counter-dictatorial” story. To return to, and adapt, Yunior’s words about dictators and writers, we might well wonder: what is it with dictators and critics anyway?

Machado Sáez neither explicitly mentions Jay’s nor Harford Vargas’s essays in her 2015 book, but she does refer to the ways in which the critical consensus about *Oscar Wao* is conditioned by an academic discourse anxious to preserve “celebratory theorizations of diaspora” (157). Citing Stuart Hall’s influential article “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Machado Sáez remarks that Hall’s construction of diaspora as a “counterculture to nationalist logics of exclusion” (157) has paved the way for oversimplistic understandings of the diaspora and the nation, which are framed by binary oppositions between “liberation and oppression, diversity and homogeneity” (158). Applied to *Oscar Wao*, these “academic formulations of diaspora” (158) have led critics to twist Díaz’s novel to suit the theory, so the book is routinely read as a “heroic literary text” (158) – indeed as “a transgressive text that challenges the oppressive structure of the nation-state” (159), one that is complete with a cast of “ideally marginal” and “resistant diasporic subject[s]” (158). When read at a slight angle from this “one-size-fits-all” formulation of diaspora, *Oscar Wao* not only reveals that, far from being a space privileging “diversity” and “liberation,” as the consensus has it, “the diaspora is also conditioned by the logic of the nation” (158) – in this case by the “barometer of belonging” (163) of hyper-heteronormativity. Equally importantly, Díaz’s novel bears witness to what Robbie B.H. Goh has called in a different context “the tense plurality of diasporic identity” (341), which is evidenced by the “tense” differences between Dominican-

born Yuniór and US-born Oscar – that is, between the “authentic” diaspora of immigrant Dominicans and the “un-Dominican” diaspora of Dominicans born in the US. Machado Sáez’s suggestion that the relationship between Dominican-born Yuniór and US-born Oscar is “not on[e] of solidarity, but of competing diasporic identities” (158) is persuasive, not least because it never lets us forget that Oscar’s story is “dictated” by Yuniór until the very end: that is, down to the very moment when, in one fell swoop, the overweight, chaste, and sentimental Oscar loses his “fatguy coat” (*Oscar Wao* 275), has sex with Ybón, and does not even shed a tear (320) when he is executed by the capitán’s henchmen in the DR.

Far from “becom[ing] a lesson” for Yuniór, as Jay understands it, the novel’s conclusion can be likened to a “miracle of divine intervention” (Machado Sáez 166) or a dictator’s dream come true. Not only does this denouement – which includes Oscar’s physical and moral revamping – indeed legitimize the latter’s identity as a Dominican on the very hyper-heteronormative terms through which Yuniór himself defines “authentic” belonging, it also offers a plot resolution that satiates readerly desire for closure and is thus able to direct attention away from the probably fraudulent means through which such “perfect” resolution is achieved. Needless to say, Oscar’s last-minute makeover so fittingly accomplishes Yuniór’s project, back at Rutgers, to remake Oscar in his own image, that one wonders whether *Oscar Wao* itself is not a byproduct of Yuniór’s “Project Oscar.” The fact that, after Oscar’s death, Yuniór keeps Oscar’s “books, his games, his manuscript, his comic books, his papers” in “four refrigerators” (330) in his basement adds credibility to the hypothesis that Yuniór amasses Oscar’s documents, not for the sake of the future generations, as he claims, nor to give readers unmediated access to Oscar’s prose – which he never does – but to lock away and yet guiltily preserve the remains of the person whom he had to kill metaphorically so as to transform him “from inauthentic diasporic male [into] assimilated, unsentimental un-virgin” (Machado Sáez 166). This being said, Lauren Jean Gantz’s suggestion that in his dealings

with Oscar's "forcibly absented archive," Yunior "re-silences" (128) Oscar and therefore "replicates the discursive practices of the regime [he] denounces" (123) is only half the story.² Of course, there is little question that Yunior's final act of contrition in relation to Oscar and Lola directs attention away from the fact that Oscar's miraculous makeover reflects a little too well on Yunior's normative hyperheterosexuality – and by extension on the narrator's "exceptional" cultural authenticity, to return to Felman's point. However, it remains that *Oscar Wao* is primordially about how *readers* are forced to reckon with Yunior's "discursive practices" and strategic self-exposure at the risk of being thrust out of their (interpretative) comfort zone. This is again reminiscent of Felman, who, in her analysis of Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), comments on how the destabilizing "reading effects" at play in the novel lock readers in a "madness of interpretation" (268) in relation to the ambiguous visions relayed by the first-person narrator. And Felman adds: "the most scandalous thing about this scandalous story is that we are forced to participate in the scandal, that . . . there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text" (144). Undoubtedly, the same could be said about Díaz's novel, since Yunior's displays of self-consciousness about his adherence to Dominican machismo and about the constructed nature of his storytelling are revealed to have no truth value in the end – they only boil down to confessional role-playing. Because they "uncover layer upon layer of a truth that cannot be distinguished from fiction" (Brooks 48), these confessions indeed dare readers to take such dubious "truth" at face value. Alternatively, as previously suggested, readers may fully respond to the novel's implausibilities and impossibilities by engaging in a "counter-dictatorial" "madness of interpretation" within which there can be no such consolation as a neatly-packed redemptive ending. Of course, a further implication is that there can be no "counter-dictatorial" narrative either, only "counter-

² As Gantz shows (129), the fact that Yunior silences Oscar's writings repeats to some extent what Trujillo is rumored to have done with Oscar's grandfather's manuscripts and book collections, as "every paper [Abelard] had in his house was confiscated and reportedly burned" (*Oscar Wao* 246).

dictatorial” readings, so the burden of reckoning with “dictator masculinity” ultimately gets transferred from the characters to the reader.

If we are to believe the blurb, Díaz’s second collection of linked stories, *This is How You Lose Her*, “lay[s] bare the infinite longing and inevitable weakness of the human heart,” which is to say, it problematizes – yet again – Yuniór’s embrace of hyper-masculinity through the misery he brings upon himself. Second-person narration and passages of direct address to the reader feature high on Díaz’s agenda in this book, as if Yuniór needed a “you” (as addressee, character, or reader) to signify or perhaps just bear witness to his loss. Among the nine short stories that make up the collection, six texts directly deal with Yuniór’s loss of a woman; half of them are second-person narratives proper, while the rest of the stories are first-person narratives in which “you” generally marks the spot of a less-than-ideal addressee – or alternatively operates as a buffer zone for a less-than-ideal “I.” In the first-person narrative “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars” in particular, Yuniór typically starts by thrusting “you” in a position of second-best mainstream reader in relation to the DR – one that is complete with *A Small Place*-inspired comments on “Eurofucks [who are] beached out on a towel like some scary pale monsters that the sea’s vomited up” (15).³ He then moves to claiming (de-racialized?) forms of guilty intimacy with a rehabilitated “you”: “I don’t even want to tell you [the Dominican resort] where we’re at. . . . Let’s just say my abuelo [grandfather] has never been there and neither has yours” (13-14). Of course, such “slap-and-embrace” mode of addressing the reader, as Toni Morrison puts it in a different context (Morrison, qtd. in Gilroy 181), is reminiscent of what happens in *Oscar Wao*, as Yuniór shifts from constructing his audience as ignorant – presumably US – readers who might have “missed their mandatory two seconds of Dominican history” (2) and thus stand in need of

³ Yuniór’s outburst here clearly nods toward a passage in Jamaica Kincaid’s “you text,” *A Small Place*, in which white tourists in Antigua are famously disparaged as “incredibly unattractive, fat, pastrylike-fleshed” (13) men and women enjoying themselves on the beach.

enlightenment, to hailing and rehabilitating his readers as competent “Negroes” who are likely to dismiss his account of Oscar’s romance with Ybón as nothing more than a ludicrous instance of “Suburban Tropical” (285). To link this more explicitly with my argument that the narrative contradictions at play in *Oscar Wao* participate in “projecting madness outside” (Felman) of the narrator – thus thrusting readers into a “madness of interpretation” – it is worth noting that the opening story of Díaz’s recent collection appears to prolong the “reading-effects” generated by *Oscar Wao*. More precisely, Yuniór’s strategy to simultaneously alienate and embrace his audience recasts the act of reading as an act of interpretative strife, of conflicted negotiation between identification and dis/identification with the “you” of the text. As I demonstrate below, these same “reading-effects” are not only prolonged, but gain new complexity, in the last story of the collection, “The Cheater’s Guide to Love.” Indeed this story feigns to rehearse the set formula according to which Yuniór cheats on a woman, loses her, and then embarks on the road to redemption. Yet, as a text written in the second person, the story “speaks madness” through a narrative regime of ontological uncertainty while complicating the assumption that hyper-masculinity is all about matters of Dominican authenticity.

“The Cheater’s Guide to Love” opens with “Year 0” – that is, “the ground zero of love” (Saldívar 336) – as “you” is caught cheating by his girlfriend. True though it is that “you” as “empty signifier” (cf. Benveniste) always extends to the reader an “irresistible invitation” (Kacandes 139) to feel addressed, the first lines of Díaz’s text encourage its readership to identify “you” with Yuniór, the protagonist, well before “you” is revealed to be the narrator of the story too. It is not only that, save for two stories in *Drown* and one in *This is How You Lose Her*, Yuniór “appears as the protagonist or narrator (or both) of every narrative in each of Díaz’s first three books” (242), as Paula M.L. Moya remarks. Rather, the signature slangy register of the story and its overarching themes of infidelity and impossible

redemption nudge readers into inscribing it in a series of narratives in which Yuniór both claims *and* disowns the madness of Dominican hyper-masculinity through a confessional rhetoric (“you” goes as far as to describe itself as a “batshit cuero [a crazy slut]” (175) in the first lines of the text). The fact that in the opening of the story the protagonist’s fiancée catches him cheating not with one, but with fifty women over a six-year period, pathologizes the character’s excessive masculinity at the outset. Spanning a further six-year period after the breakup, the narrative follows Yuniór as he all-too-optimistically “drops the sex addict groups” (177-78) and attempts to get over the loss of his never-to-be-named fiancée – she is just described as a “bad-ass salcedeña [one who originates from Salcedo in the DR]” (175) – but gets plagued by severe depression instead. Assisted by his friend and alter-ego Elvis who presents himself as a guardian angel but more closely resembles an evil twin, Yuniór strives to overcome loss by resorting to solutions – or rather “new addiction[s]” (186) – which all add up to his life’s misery and its “bersekería”⁴ (193). Thus excessive womanizing gives way to excessive drinking, excessive smoking, and excessive exercising, which then translates into severe insomnia and suicidal impulses, all of which results in ever-increasing physical breakdown, until Yuniór is finally diagnosed with stenosis, an ailment symbolically leading to paralysis. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the theme of failed paternity is all-pervading, as Yuniór agrees to give away his home to a resurfacing ex-lover who claims to bear his child in “Year 4,” only to be shattered as he later realizes the truth that has been staring at him all the time – that the child is not his. In the same year, the flamboyantly-named Elvis, who is already the legitimate father to a daughter in the US, is similarly lured into believing that he has a love child in the DR – one whose planned baby name, “Elvis Xavier Junior” (197), would ominously mix that of Yuniór and his own – before the “you-protagonist” encourages him to take a paternity test, whose result is negative. Intersecting with the theme of failed paternity,

⁴ In a fine instance of Spanglish, Díaz coins the noun “bersekería” by relying on the English adjective “berserk” and the Spanish nominal suffix “ía.”

the madness of hyper-masculinity comes to be described in terms of a passion for womanizing as much as in terms of a conflict between fantasy and reality, bravado and self-punishment. Significantly in this context, Yuniór describes his depression “Like someone flew a plane into your soul. Like someone flew two planes into your soul” (180), which likens his condition to that of the USA post 9/11 and might even suggest that the real cause of Yuniór’s depression is not the loss of love, but the loss of a fantasy of omnipotence. Far from causing Yuniór to identify more closely with the country where he migrated as a young child, however, the plane-attack metaphor only draws further attention to the fact that his post 9/11 depression translates into an ambivalent attachment to the US, as the character’s move from New York to Boston following the breakup with his fiancée exposes him to “a lot of racist shit” (178):

White people pull up at traffic lights and scream at you with a hideous rage, like you nearly ran over their mothers. . . . Security follows you in stores and every time you step on Harvard property you’re asked for ID. Three times, drunk whitedudes try to pick up fights with you in different parts of the city.

You take it all very personally. I hope someone drops a fucking *bomb* on this city, you rant. This is why no people of color want to live there. Why all my black and Latino students leave as soon as they can.

Elvis says nothing. He was born and raised in Jamaica Plain, knows that trying to defend Boston from uncool is like blocking a bullet with a slice of bread. Are you OK? He asks finally.

I’m dandy. Mejor que nunca [better than ever]. (178-79, italics in original)

I have quoted this passage extensively for two different but related purposes. First, it illustrates how Yuniór’s dislike for “uncool” Boston reworks the much-loaded plane-attack

metaphor by suggesting a conflicted – even impossible – identification with the US. Indeed what this excerpt makes clear is that “you” casts itself in both the roles of victim *and* terrorist sympathizer, since “you” is the (possibly plural?) entity who feels “like someone flew two planes into [his] soul” while paradoxically hoping that “someone drops a fucking bomb” on Boston. Secondly, this passage shows how Díaz’s choice of the second person strategically intersects, at times, with his device of using free direct speech to designate and/or attribute dialogue so whole segments of text become ambiguous in relation to their address-function. In the above-quoted passage for instance, even if paragraph breaks signal a transition from one speaker to the other, the fact that Díaz refrains from using either reporting verbs or quotation marks to clearly link back the last two sentences of Yuniór’s ranting to the “you-protagonist” (“This is why no people of color want to live there. Why all my black and Latino students leave as soon as they can”) begs questions about whether these segments of text are addressed to Elvis during a past conversation, or are added by the narrator for the benefit of the reader – in which case Moya’s suggestion that Yuniór is “presumably talking to himself” (254) in “The Cheater’s Guide” needs to be challenged. Upon closer scrutiny, it appears that the great majority of the dialogues taking place between “you” and Elvis display self-contained and somewhat free-floating segments of text that are left untethered to the conventions of direct and indirect speech. This occasionally exacerbates the “play of the double” taking place between “you” and his Dominican-American evil twin. In a dialogue in which the two characters evoke their new responsibilities as “fathers” to unplanned sons, for instance, punctuation makes it virtually impossible to disambiguate the identity of the speaker: “Babies are fucking expensive. Elvis punches you in the arm. So just get ready, buster, to be broke as a joke” (197). More generally, the self-contained and free-floating segments of text that are included in the “dialogues” between Elvis and “you” nudge readers into a circuit of communication that exceeds the ontological threshold of the storyworld and yet still

superimposes itself onto the one taking place within the diegesis. Thus a conversation during which Elvis exhorts the protagonist to find himself “a good Dominican girl” finally morphs into a more abstract exchange wavering between self-address and address to an unspecified listener: “Do [good Dominican girls] even exist?/ You had one, didn’t you?/ That you did” (182). In a related way, at the start of the story, the passage stating that Elvis “knows a little about pain,” because “four years ago [he] had a Humvee blow up on him on a highway outside of Baghdad” (180) complicates the conventions of self-address within which this “you-text” first appears to be cast, since it extends information about Elvis’s experience in Iraq to a third party, as would befit a story told with an external audience in mind. The suggestion that the circuits of communication at play in “The Cheater’s Guide” are underpinned by a form of ontological uncertainty or “double deixis” (cf. Herman 1994) that extends to the reader is further evidenced by the fact that the referent of the “you” clearly shifts, at one point, from protagonist to reader. Towards the middle of the story, an unsavory aside about the sexual practices of one of the protagonist’s ex-girlfriends indeed leaves the reader little choice but to negotiate an identification with a “you” hitherto safely confined to the diegesis: “She takes, if you get my meaning” (193). To the extent that such an unstable “you” collapses and confuses the homo- and heterodiegetic levels in the text – that is, respectively, the very categories of the inside and the outside – it can be said that “you” marks a spot of ontological uncertainty. Françoise Davoine and Jean-Max Gaudillière argue that madness never pertains to the structure of an individual but relates to a *place* instead. By positioning itself in the symbolic order – that of language – and yet subverting (in fact exceeding) the equation between the signifier and the signified, “you” simultaneously asserts and collapses the ontological boundaries of the Symbolic, which also emphasizes the suggestion that “you” marks the spot of madness itself.

Significantly, this narrative regime of ontological uncertainty – of constant repositioning of the readers in relation to “who speaks” and “who is spoken to,” of constant shuttling back-and-forth between the diegetic and extra-diegetic spaces – is lifted in passages giving voice to some of the protagonist’s girlfriends, whose speech is italicized. Interestingly, this concurrent narrative regime typically takes place as these female characters pull themselves out of the protagonist’s orbit. The implication is that italics here signal a space that remains off-limits to “you” – that is, as seen from a different perspective, a space that remains immune to an uncontainable “play of the double” taking place between Elvis and “you.” In “Year 0,” for instance, the fiancée leaves “you” at the moment when “she sit[s] up in bed and say[s], *No more, and, Ya [that’s it]*” (176-77, italics in original; see also a related instance on 183). Equally importantly, in “Year 4,” as the protagonist prepares to meet with his alleged son in the birthing room, the italicization of the mother’s revelations (“*I don’t want him here. I don’t want him here. He’s not the father,*” 201, italics in original) emphasizes their “unmetabolizable” character for “you” as well as retroactively reveals the extent to which Elvis’s own fixation on having a son has travelled from one character to the other, altering the protagonist’s own grip on reality. It is significant in this context that at the start of the story, Elvis’s wife confides that her husband “was going to name [their child] Iraq” (181) if their first-born had been a boy, which associates the madness of hyper-masculinity – here the projected nirvana of occupying the sovereign patriarchal position of “Father to a Son” – with a country recently at war. Likewise, as the protagonist and his evil twin fly to the DR to visit Elvis’s presumed love child – in fact his status symbol – the narrative recasts Elvis’s self-aggrandizing mirage of miraculous paternity as an illusionary shield against traumatic realities. Again, these traumatic realities are directly linked to Iraq – specifically to the Second Persian Gulf War. As he tries to convince the protagonist *not* to take the paternity test that will expose his complacency in buying too easily into the script of

his Dominican “hijo” (204), Elvis unwillingly reveals the futureless, trauma-bound, and downright delusionary nature of such a script by returning to his brush with death as a US soldier in Iraq: “When I got into that shit in Iraq I kept thinking, Please God let me live just long enough to have a son, please, and then you can kill me dead right after. And look, He gave him to me, didn’t He? He gave him to me” (207).

True though it is that, in Kacandes’ understanding of Benveniste, “the appearance of ‘you’ always presupposes an ‘I/you’ pair and concomitantly relationship and communication” (140), the fact that Díaz’s story sticks to the second person even as “you” is finally revealed to be the narrator of the story suggests that such a “you” has also become a means of referring to an “I” that defers, perhaps even forsakes, its very existence. In other words, although the ending of “The Cheater’s Guide” appears to rehearse Yuniór’s dubious promise, in *Oscar Wao*, to renounce the madness of hyper-masculinity and become “a new man” through writing, here, it does so in such a way that this promise of a new subjectivity is structurally held in suspension by the persistence of the second person even *after* the moment of writing. This is not to say, however, that Yuniór’s “I” only exists *in absentia* in Díaz’s story. In fact, traces of subjectivity tentatively appear in the text, as “you” prepares to accompany Elvis for his fated trip to the DR, where the latter character will put “the Plan” (205) into action: that is, arrange for his “son” and “the baby mama” (202) to be sent to the US. As the two characters take their leave, Elvis’s daughter “lets out a wail that coils about [the protagonist] like constantine wire” (202), as if sensing that her father’s hitherto unrevealed fantasy is about to wreck her family life forever. Elvis’s blatant absence of emotional response – he “stays cool as fuck” (202) – causes the protagonist to suddenly distance himself from his evil twin: “This used to be me, you’re thinking. Me me me” (202). Here, while the multiple repetition of “me” signifies the opening of a breach for the emergence of a sense of Self, the constantine-wire (razor wire) metaphor confirms and reworks the equation between hyper-masculinity and war

zones (or between hyper-masculinity and traumatized identities), which is now experienced from the perspective of a child in desperate need of her father. It is certainly no accident that, although it was used to create a presumably impenetrable border between Iraq and Kuwait in the wake of the Gulf War in 1991, constantine wire was paradoxically the very material that allowed US troops to penetrate the Iraqi territory in 2003 through (presumably man-made) holes in the border fence. In that sense, Elvis's daughter's cry signals not only the toxicity but also the futility of "walled-up" identities that cling to the fantasy of a sovereign Self to quell vulnerability and past injury. The appearance of "me" as a response to that cry of anguish suggests a possibility for "you" to evolve a new subjectivity – or at the very least to step out of its specular relationship with Elvis – by reckoning with what Judith Butler calls the "problem of a primary vulnerability to others" (xiv). And this is exactly what happens as "you" is first introduced to Elvis's presumed love child in the homeland, in "squatter chawls where there are no roads, no lights, no running water, no grid, no anything" (203). It is not only that the extreme poverty of the slums where the "piercingly cute carajito [little kid]" (205) lives with his mother further exposes Elvis's fantasy of himself as "Father to a Son" as a form of self-indulgence enabled by his relatively comfortable life in the US. It is also that the conflation of hyper-masculinity and Dominican belonging that is challenged only on the surface in *Oscar Wao* finally gets subverted for good in "The Cheater's Guide." An epitome of extreme vulnerability, the fatherless child "with mosquito bites on his legs and an old scab on his head no one can explain to you" (205) is also a disturbing embodiment of origins for the protagonist. Indeed the "carajito" lives in the very slums out of which the protagonist's own Dominican family "came up" (203) – in the very place from where "you" can "stare . . . out toward the mountains of the Cibao, the Cordillera Central, where your father was born and where your ex's whole family is from" (206). Through the boy, the diasporic belief that hyper-masculinity constitutes a gateway to being "a DR original" (190), as Elvis calls the

protagonist, here gets exposed as a self-serving fiction. In other words, the fatherless boy who lives in the place of origins *is* the “DR original,” and he is dirt-poor, “hold[ing] on to [the protagonist] tightly” (207) in the car driving to the DNA testing clinic, as if already sensing that Elvis will abandon him once the results of the paternity test prove negative. The moment when the protagonist is “suddenly overcome with the urge to cover [the boy] with [his] arms, with his [own] body” (205) thus signals a new coming to terms with the notions of origins and authenticity, which are now associated, not with the performance of hyper-masculinity, but with the recognition of the Other’s vulnerability. It is in that sense that the opening of the last paragraph to a new referent for the second-person pronoun – namely the woman whose loss provoked “the ground zero of love” – can be seen as an outcome of the protagonist’s return to the DR, which here refreshingly figures a site of revelation, not of fukú or transgenerational and transnational curse. At last able to address his fiancée in imagination (“you did the right thing, negra. You did the right thing,” 212), that is, to put an end to the narrative “madness” of ontological uncertainty by reattributing the second pronoun to his real object of loss, the protagonist “bends to the work [of writing] because it feels like hope, like grace – and because you know, in your lying cheater’s heart, that sometimes a start is all we ever get” (213). And notice, here, the final shift from “you” to “we,” as if to better lay the basis of a new community grounded in misapprehension, delusion, inadequacy, and vulnerability.

Works Cited

Benveniste, Emile. *Problems in General Linguistics*. vol.1. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek.

Coral Gables: U of Miami P, 1971. Print. Trans. of *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966. Print.

Brooks, Peter. *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and in Literature*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000. Print.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004. Print.

Coetzee, J. M. *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Ed. Derek Attwell. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. Print.

Davoine, Françoise, and Jean-Max Gaudillière. *History beyond Trauma*. New York: Other, 2004. Print.

Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Faber, 2007. Print.

---. *Drown*. New York: Riverhead, 1996. Print.

---. "Interview with Paul Jay." 2008. *Academia.edu*. nd. Web. 13 Nov. 2016.

---. "Mil Máscaras: An Interview with Pulitzer-Winner Junot Díaz." By Matt Okie. *Identity Theory*. 2 Sept. 2008. Web. 13 Nov. 2016.

---. "Questions for Junot Díaz." Interview by Meghan O'Rourke. *Slate*. 8 Nov. 2007. Web. 13 Nov. 2016.

---. "The Search for Decolonial Love: An Interview with Junot Díaz." By Paula M.L. Moya. *Boston Review*. 26 June 2012. Web. 13 Nov. 2016.

---. *This is How You Lose Her*. New York: Riverhead, 2012. Print.

Felman, Shoshana. *Writing and Madness*. Trans. Martha Noel Evans and Shoshana Felman, with Brian Massumi. Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 2003. Print. Trans. of eight chapters from *La folie et la chose littéraire*. Paris: Seuil, 1978. Print.

Fludernik, Monika. "The Category of Person in Fiction: *You* and *We* Narrative-Multiplicity and Indeterminacy of Reference." *Current Trends in Narratology*. Ed. Greta Olson. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011. 101-41. Print.

Gantz, Lauren Jean. "'Nothing Ever Ends': Archives of Written and Graphic Testimony in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *Ariel* 46.4 (2015): 123-53. Print.

- Gilroy, Paul. "Living Memory: A Meeting with Toni Morrison." *Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Cultures*. By Gilroy. London: Serpent's Tail, 1993. 175-82. Print.
- Goh, Robbie B.H. "Narrating 'Dark' India in *Londonstani* and *The White Tiger*." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46.2 (2011): 327-44. Print.
- Graulund, Rune. "Generous Exclusion: Register and Readership in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *MELUS* 39.3 (2014): 31-48. Print.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence, 1990. 222-37. Print.
- Hanna, Monica. "'Reassembling the Fragments': Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *Callaloo* 33.2 (2010): 498-520. Print.
- Harford Vargas, Jennifer. "Dictating a Zafa: The Power of Narrative Form in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *MELUS* 39.3 (2014): 8-30. Print.
- Herman, David. "Textual 'You' and Double Deixis in Edna O'Brien's 'A Pagan Place.'" *Style* 28.3 (1994): 378-410. Print.
- Horn, Maja. *Masculinity after Trujillo: The Politics of Gender in Dominican Literature*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2014. Print.
- James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw*. 1898. London: Penguin, 1994. Print.
- Jay, Paul. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2010. Print.
- Kacandes, Irene. "Are You in the Text?: The Literary Performative in Postmodernist Fiction." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13 (1993): 139-53. Print.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, 1988. Print.
- Machado Sáez, Elena. *Market Aesthetics: The Purchase of the Past in Caribbean Diasporic Fiction*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2015. Print.

- Mermann-Jozwiak, Elisabeth Maria. "Beyond Multiculturalism: Ethnic Studies, Transnationalism, and Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao*." *Ariel* 43.2 (2013): 1-24. Print.
- Moya, Paula M.L. "Dismantling the Master's House: The Decolonial Literary Imaginations of Audre Lorde and Junot Díaz." *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*. Ed. Monica Hann, Jennifer Harford Vargas, and José David Saldívar. Durham: Duke UP, 2016. 231-55. Print.
- Nurse, Keith. "Masculinities in Transition: Gender and the Global Problematique." *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. Ed. Rhoda E. Reddock. Kingston: U of the West Indies P, 2004. 3-37. Print.
- Patteson, Richard. "Textual Territory and Narrative Power in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*." *Ariel* 42.3-4 (2012), 5-20. Print.
- Riofrio, John. "Situating Latin American Masculinity: Immigration, Empathy and Emasculation in Junot Díaz's *Drown*." *Atenea* 28.1 (2008): 23-36. Print.
- Ryan, Marie-Laure. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic media*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. Print.
- Saldívar, José David. "Junot Díaz's Search for Decolonial Aesthetics and Love." *Junot Díaz and the Decolonial Imagination*. Ed. Monica Hann, Jennifer Harford Vargas, and José David Saldívar. Durham: Duke UP, 2016. 321-50. Print.