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Abstract

Most research on Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao* has been explored on diasporic negatives highlighting on an infinite regression in dictatorship and the resistance against these dictatorships in forming an authentic identity between conflicting cultures. Diasporic subjects are doomed to be assimilated and thrown back into the Hegelian rubric. What has been underexplored is the pull away from the negative nature of diaspora in creating a new consciousness in exploring transnational literature. I am pursuing this research because I want to highlight on how feminine recovery unpowers this infinite regression in creating a more modern approach in examining cultures and genders living between conflicting borders. I'm using Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* and Hélène Cixous's *Newly Born Woman* because both theorists illuminate how the text performs as a mestiza who battles between opposing borderlands synthesizing a new consciousness within the divine feminine. I'm applying this theory by examining the text's narrative, character identity, and language structures. This research is significant because embracing borderlands enacts feminine progression through difference which is significant in a growing cultural and gendered world. Future research on this topic should examine how transnational literature forms alliances, juxtaposed with other cultural literature, in sharing and borrowing from each other as a way to evolve.

Onward Toward a New Horizon with Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao*

One leading voice of America which led millions of Americans backwards was the presidential rhetoric, with the promise, to make America great again. This axiom which lured a nation of voters to side with the mastery of nihilism, in moving backwards to achieve greatness, proved how America was unaware of its transnational destiny. Whether one wants to protect the values that would stimulate an economy or bring manufacturing back into the US, this rhetoric was more successful in creating a divide than creating hope. Making something great again tapped into the traditional Aristotelian need for reducing uncertainty in a growing globalized and chaotic world. It also tapped into a nostalgia bound tightly to the Hegelian rubric. Within this rubric those who are different are silenced or assimilated. Those who are different risk being exposed as a deviant or Other. Yet, building a superpower on fear and not difference privileges patriarchy moving back to “the father” (Cixous, “Sorties” 579). Moving back to the father enacts the utopian myth of logocentrism as the author of humankind. This means the hierarchy writes one’s destiny and not the other way around.

In the era of postmodernism, the ideology of who and what stands in as American, is evolving. Bodies of people are neighboring volumes of differences in sexuality, language, and culture. The rhetoric of transsexualism and globalism are making new waves in American discourse. Adding to the American landscape is quite complex since it is built on a myth that segregation and closing off one’s borders is key to moving forward. According to Judith Butler, “[i]n the United States, we have been surrounded with violence, having perpetrated it and perpetrating it still, having suffered it, living in fear of it, planning more of it” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 28). Western supremacy depends on violence to distance itself to avoid being “taken” or infected by a foreign Other (8). Gloria Anzaldúa states, “Western culture made

‘objects’ of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing ‘touch’ with them. This dichotomy is the root of all violence” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 59). Yet, dividing and conquering does not heal the wounds of fear or put an end to vulnerability (e.g., the binary of us versus them). This type of division, or struggle for autonomy, acts as a “boulder” one “keep[s] crashing into” (72). This inability to move forward happens when one is alienated from one’s “mother culture” (42). What is lost is one’s ability to reimagine a space where one’s culture and gender is in a constant state of expansion moving farther away from its origins. Therefore, all people inhabit a place where they’re torn between worlds, they cannot escape nor return (Foss 108). This suggests, “the future depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on the straddling of two or more cultures” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 102). Progression lies in forming a new consciousness that never stops expanding or becoming more than what is lost and what is foreign.

One’s self-identity is built in bridging the vulnerable pieces of “I” and “you” together in a more meaningful way. War is not a way of life: “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once” (100). The split where one lives between multiple and conflicting worlds where they are expected to live on one border or choose between borders is what Anzaldúa calls the life of the mestiza. A mestiza is defined as “the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead” (25). A mestiza is also someone who lives on the Borderlands of colonizer and colonized where their loyalties are divided. The mestiza “is irrevocably tied” to the culture they repress (108).

A man who can “write woman to survive” is notably a grand addition to the study of feminism in literature (Cixous, “The Laugh” 940). Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wonderful Life of*

Oscar Wao enacts the revolutionary belief that an infinite progression lies somewhere on the Borderlands. The bodies of people, cultures, and languages are not autonomous subjects nor rational forms of expression but a blend of many who struggle to survive. By examining the Borderlands within *Oscar Wao*, one can re-imagine how pain and contradiction work to emancipate the reader from the false hope in returning to nostalgia (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 104). This movement away from singularity as perfection into plurality is feminine (Cixous and Clement 85; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 44). Likewise, this movement of plurality can be explored in literature. Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao* is a cultural story mirroring the epic journey of the mestiza moving toward the mother culture. Borderlands are "geographic, cultural, or psychological" and "a vague and undetermined place created by emotional residue" (Foss 106). The narrative, character, and language structures in Díaz's text help create a better understanding of what it means to live as a mestiza on the Borderlands moving onward as a Newly Born Woman.

Masculine Chaos Feminine Liberation

The belief of returning to a state of perfection is an infinite regression (Renshaw 163). Any migration, away from a place of origin enacts the loss of purity of one's subjectivity (164). This stage where man realizes he is not a god, but a copy of a copy creates an anxiety where man must return to the first image of perfect peace: the body of his own untainted image (Cixous, "The Laugh" 947). However, the feminism of Hélène Cixous and Gloria Anzaldúa look at this mirror stage quite differently. For Cixous, woman cannot return to herself since woman's location has been defined and controlled by the logocentrism of the masculine economy (Renshaw 117). Masculinity and femininity must work in forming alliances moving away from death since it is impossible to castrate one without castrating the Other (Irigaray 168). A new consciousness enacting metaphor reaches beyond the binary "to permit the other both their

otherness and their freedom” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 92; Renshaw 120). Metaphor transcends human destruction where the construction of one’s reality is found in happenings and not in hypotheses (Irigaray 192). Unlike the Lacanian mirror, Anzaldúa’s mirror does more than gaze, freeze, and devour a subject (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 64). The mirror gives the mestiza knowledge of the many faces they try to conceal and the many faces they try to bridge together (64-65). The mirror gives insight and knowledge in expanding one’s subjectivity. The more faces one adopts, the more cultures, and the more experiences one gains in liberating themselves; thus, creating a superior being happens in hybridity (Foss 110).

In Western culture, possessing too many faces, in sexuality or in culture, labels one as a traitor or insane (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 44). Likewise, “Catholic and Protestant religions encourage fear and distrust of the body; they encourage a split between the body and the spirit...encourag[ing] us to kill off parts of ourselves” (59). One must kill off the self that is contradictory to one’s cultural ingroup or outgroup’s expectations. For Cixous, woman lives between the Borderlands of masculinity and femininity in which women accept “men’s visions of the feminine as their own” (Morris 15). The only way out of this dominance is to create a bisexual synthesis where masculine and feminine bodies are blurred. Bisexuality removes the guilt of being woman and man’s fear of returning to his lost self (Cixous and Clement 89). In Cixousian terms: “Beware the signifier,” since the signifier, that is a metaphor for the father, points all life back toward man who is logic. The finger that points, which is also man, is god (Cixous, “Sorties” 579). Logically one cannot be a hybrid of both sexes at once since, from a masculine economy, this hybrid suggests madness. Moving away from purity works when one crosses many borders becoming vastly unidentifiable but expansively knowledgeable and empowered (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 99). Cixous believed liberation came from breaking up the

old property crusts becoming “a mutation in human relations” (Cixous, “The Laugh” 945). Breaking up the old crusts for the mestiza means to become inverted from its origins where one leaves home to find themselves (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 38). Each border crossed creates a cross pollination and an endless expansion. The mestiza is a metaphor of one re-discovering or restoring a location that has been buried for the sake of the hierarchy’s survival (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 101). In Cixousian theory the way to liberate one’s subjectivity from a system of hierarchy is to invert it, switch it, and turn it upside down (Cixous and Clement 33).

Diaspora’s Destiny as a Mestiza

Diaspora, as a transnational label, limits the potential of the narrative to move into the future since it creates a one-sided reality where there is pain, oppression, and resistance but no liberation (Foss 108). According to Sarah Casteel, diaspora must regain a new location to fit within the modern world (Casteel 624). The problem with diaspora is it focuses on an oppressor, one who controls the story, rather than focusing on an “elsewhere,” a non-subordinate state revealing a new story (Cixous. “The Laugh” 953). Diasporic narratives fail to move beyond the negative aspects of crossing over into new borders for immigrants who straddle between torn worlds. Likewise, diaspora leaves the narrative torn between two worlds and in a state of contradiction which only explores the first realm within the Borderlands: the pain and not the joy. Diasporic resistance can be synthesized into a hybrid of cultural realities in re-signifying cultural growth and not assimilation. As Casteel asserts, specifically, Caribbean literature needs to be reterritorialized creating “transformative potential in producing alternative images” (Casteel 625). This same discourse runs through the veins of the mestiza: “Lets stop giving energy to only one side of our instinctual nature—negative consciousness” (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 314). Diasporic literature needs a new lens in looking into the stories of immigrants.

Immigrants may have left home or had to leave home, but they can still process a reality where they are allies not traitors of their culture.

The battle between the Borderlands is cosmic not only diasporic (Cixous, “Sorties” 584; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 53). The Borderlands create an infinite progression between one’s self and the multiple crossroads they embrace and endure (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 88). Cultural resistance within the Borderlands does not unpower the unfamiliar or counterattack the oppressor since one’s subjectivity belongs to the ever changing I and the history in which they have been “condemned, [...] exiled, colonized, and burned” (Cixous, “Sorties” 584; Cixous and Clement 72). However, diasporic literature has placed the immigrant into the binary of subject/object in a colonization conundrum state where there is no way out (Casteel 626). Within Díaz’s narrative, the story of a Dominican-American-immigrant-outcast, straddling between two oppositional worlds, who is murdered for being different, can be transformed into a new consciousness utilizing the theoretical lenses of Cixous’s *Newly Born Woman* and Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*. Díaz’s protagonist Oscar Wao, in *Oscar Wao*, struggles to find a unique identity and language while the storyteller, Yunió, struggles to live up to the voice of his beloved friend Oscar. This new horizon illuminates how a masculine writer can mirror, not mimic, two strong feminist theories in embodying the journey of the mestiza through narrative structure, character identity, and language moving onward toward a new horizon.

When Two Feminine Theoretical Lenses Collide

Writing woman is not necessarily attached to the sex of a writer. James Joyce and Franz Kafka wrote woman by writing against phallogocentric values (Varino 293). Joyce wrote about overcoming the establishments of language in *Finnigan’s Wake* while Kafka questioned the entablments exploitation of one’s body in “The Metamorphosis.” When one writes woman, the

frame of the “discourse [is] to antagonize, unsettle and resist patriarchal heterosexism” (294). Writing woman requires one to write with both hands thus forming an alliance. This “metaphor articulates a double difference” and a shared reality with the mestiza (299). Cixous’s jouissance is a real universe enacting imagination through desire and is, “concerned with the myriad possibilities of the self and of subjectivity and in reaching the core of ‘being’ by doubling its meanings in writing” (302). Where there is contradiction and plurality there is “fire” and “transformation” (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 246). Cixous shares with Anzaldúa the same struggle between her own borderlands of being an alien to the country she was born and an outsider to the country she was perceived to come from. Cixous was born in Algeria and raised in a Jewish home (Cixous and Clement 72). In Anzalduaian terms Cixous’s body is the curse and the cure; she is the colonizer and the colonized. Cixous’s discourse reimagines the conflict between her torn worlds:

I side with those who are injured, trespassed upon, colonized. I am (not) Arab. Who am I? Am I “doing” French history. I am a Jewish woman. In which ghetto was I penned up during your wars and your revolutions? I want to fight. What is my name? I want to change life. Who is this “I”? (71)

The beauty behind living on the Borderlands begins with learning to construct a plural body. The more questions one has of their identity the more expansive their identity becomes. Anzaldúa lived this same struggle of questioning her identity. She was born in Texas, raised to be a heterosexual woman, but she was a lesbian with Mexican and African roots. Anzaldúa remembers a time being called a traitor when she spoke Spanish around Whites who felt she was rejecting her American heritage. Yet, when she spoke Spanish it was judged as “a mutilation of Spanish” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 77). Moreover, her Mexican culture taught her that her body

was for marriage and reproduction; and the only way to escape this route was to become a nun (39). By being lesbian Anzaldúa was labeled as a sexually confused deviant. She remembers suffering until one day realizing:

What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better. But I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of the *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within. (41)

These prejudices against Anzaldúa created a battlefield of “psychic unrest” where ambivalence and pain turned her body into an artist; a person who can create life out of death (95).

Both theorists share the same struggle toward nurturing plurality. Cixous’s feminine guilt within the masculine economy pairs nicely with Anzaldúa’s pain of the mestiza living in-between the Borderlands. This is the same structure in which Díaz’s narrative combats when Oscar is trying to find a love between two hostile environments: American and Dominican Republic. The movement of creating a new consciousness requires an act of love. One cannot annihilate any part of their borders or body in becoming liberated. The goal of transforming is to reach a bisexual state in Cixous’s work and a mestiza in Anzaldúa’s work. The feminine body is “inclined toward bisexuality,” in her desires, since she has not “been trained to aim for glorious phallic monosexuality” (Cixous and Clement 83; Irigaray 56). A mestiza-bisexual body goes through pain and ambivalence in becoming. Oscar begins to live again when he recovers the femininity, he broke in two at the age of seven. By breaking the feminine into two separate locations, using the phallogentric value of machismo, his life becomes dormant until the start of his new life, a hybrid, a mulato, returns this love in forming a new alliance. Anzaldúa’s theory moves the text beyond its diasporic beginnings in addressing the pain of crossing into alien

borders, the ambiguity of moving between borders, and the transformation of living within both borders at once in forming a new consciousness.

The Structure of the Narrative as Newly Born Mestiza

Most of the past research has explored Díaz's text as a misogynistic dictator (Sáez 522; Sepulveda 15). Elena Sáez argues how the character Yuniór acts as a dictator when re-writing Oscar's private stories stolen from Oscar's diary. She elaborates how Yuniór's authorship mirrors the historical dictatorship of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. Diasporic male identity cannot "escape the influence of the nation-state" (Sáez 526). Colonialism alongside the dictatorship of Trujillo was the true speaker behind the text leaving the narrative in the hands of an oppressor and not of a friend. According to Sáez, Yuniór manipulates Oscar's story; thus, reverberating the axiom of history being written by the victors (523). This suggests Díaz constructed a narrative to fool his reader into thinking Yuniór was a sympathetic friend and not an oppressor re-writing history (533). Oscar Wao losing his virginity in the end stabilizes the myth of Dominican homogeneity and the fear of homosexuality (534). Although a reader may believe it was Oscar's massive weight and nerdiness that deterred the females from being sexually attracted to Oscar, it was Oscar's tears and sentimentality that cursed him into being rejected by the female population (536). Yuniór creates a fantasy girl, a prostitute named Ybon, to perpetuate the dominant rhetoric of Dominican masculinity, machismo, and its inscription on woman's body. For Sáez, Yuniór's story was motivated by Oscar's resistance to be like Yuniór. Yuniór uses aggression and ultimatums to get Oscar to comply. Yuniór states:

Here I was, going the fuck out of my way to help this fucking idiot out, and he was pissing it back in my face. Took this shit real personal. Three days straight I badgered him about the running and he kept saying, I'd rather not, I'd rather not. (Díaz 178)

In the end, Yuniór's machismo works to bind Oscar back to the masculine frame. However, Oscar's "queer" body is a third "consciousness" since he rejects machismo telling Yuniór, "It's not going to work" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 101-102; Díaz 178). The type of man Oscar wants to be cannot be recovered through machismo. Oscar's feminine sentimentality illuminates Yuniór's own *Borderlands* of choosing to either be a victim of machismo or be responsible for change (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 42). Yuniór's exposed queerness enacts an ambiguous war between his masculine and feminine selves (Cixous and Clement 109). After Oscar's death, Yuniór, for five years, dreams about Oscar. Oscar, who wears a "wrathful mask," with flashing eyes and a generous smile posits contradiction while propelling Yuniór to write and to be strong (Díaz 325). Yuniór is not re-writing Oscar's story to control the narrative or to hide Oscar's shame; he is being inspired, through dreams, to connect with Oscar's journey. Yuniór is changed by Oscar's repeated refusals to become masculinized. Yuniór states "from Oscar. I'm a new man, you see, a new man, a new man" (326). However, Sáez argues the whole reason for creating a true story about Oscar was to erase the queer within Oscar's subjectivity by reinstating the myth of the untouchable machismo (Sáez 541).

Jennifer Vargas, switches the narrative around, asserting Yuniór as a counter-dictatorship in authoring Oscar's narrative. The term dictate gets a new definition as one who "collects, writes down, and reshapes a plethora of oral stories that have been recounted to him" (Vargas 8). Vargas claims a counter-dictatorship in writing is an act of resistance to overthrow the past ills of oppression and inequality (26). Vargas's counter dictatorship is limited since it subverts itself to a "reactive" state, moving inward, and not a transformative state, moving outward (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 100). For instance, the subject removes one border to save another; and removal is not the work of the mestiza. According to Vargas, Oscar's narrative lies

on a continuum between the curse and cure. The mestiza doesn't stay locked between binary settlements. This means "self/other" introduces a third body of "both/and" synthesis (e.g., a plus one or shared reality) (Renshaw 171; Irigaray 149). Vargas asserts "Neither author nor narrator can produce a story that lays claim to full and complete meaning because doing so would produce a dictatorial story" (Vargas 26). This brings the reader back to the master/slave narrative since it neglects a third element or an alliance (Irigaray 148). Writing as "elsewhere" and performing myth draws from one's own fluids moving out from the narrative supporting blood for blood (Luke 100; Cixous and Clement 71; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 92). The mestiza must uproot this binary thinking that leads to death (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 102). Borderlands are not meant to become mutual, balanced, or reconciled.

Translating the Newly Born Mestiza on the Horizon

Fremio Sepulveda sheds light on Oscar's unique Borderlands of being Afro-Dominican who was robbed of an authentic identity. Sepulveda argues how Oscar's association with comic books, scholarly-talk, and his love for science fiction enacts a resistance against imperialism but it leads him back into adopting the values of the hierarchy (Sepulveda 31). Creating a double consciousness supports the binary of acculturation not liberation. This means the American identity Oscar engages in through comic books and fantasy is the discourse of the oppressor. Yuniors feels guilty for not being a true friend to Oscar; he is motivated by guilt and by Oscar's ghost (30). However, Sepulveda is aware of the contradictions within Díaz's text where Oscar and Lola "write a narrative of their lives positioning them as creators, as agents rather than victims" (29). For Anzaldúa posits mythos as spirit-knowledge in transcending the binary realms "to bring us to the end of rape, of violence, or war" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 102). The use of fantasy and comic books moves beyond the Westernized version of "juvenile and escapist fluff"

(Mandala 9). Fantasy, the oldest storytelling form, embraces difference and interconnectedness in regard to gender, secularism, and nuclear war (11-12, 7). Oscar's love for J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* aided in Oscar becoming stronger. Although lonely and isolated, writing fantasy empowers Oscar; he "stretch[es] [his] psyche horizontally and vertically" and faces his own challenges through engaging in myth (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 101). Yuniors states "[Oscar] finally showed some backbone, hence some pride, and although it hurt, it also felt motherfucking good" (Díaz 33). Likewise, "fantasy [*The Lord of the Rings*] becomes a means for Yuniors of reconnecting with a genuine way of being Dominican, just as Oscar does" (Lanzendörfer 137). Stories hold shamanistic powers where both worlds bleed into each other (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 275). Like Oscar, Anzaldúa believed in the liberating power of fantasy and science fiction:

I used reading to switch out of both worlds. I'd escape into the world of the text. I immersed myself into reading—not just serious stuff, like philosophy, psychology, history, mythology, fiction, and poetry, but also into junk reading: westerns, mysteries, fantasies, science fiction, gothics, spy thrillers...all popular genres. (Now I am coping much better.) (104)

Stories are teachers enacting "the world of the spirit, and these worlds are just as real as the physical reality" (105). Sepulveda asserts how Díaz wanted to create a book in which represented his struggles as an immigrant facing a new culture and a new language (Sepulveda 18). Díaz wanted the reader to feel and experience the emotive energies when cultures clash and collide. For Anzaldúa, the *Borderlands* are a dangerous place; and, an emotional journey where one cannot reject their past to move forward (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 42). However, Sepulveda notes, Oscar's struggle between Afro-Dominican and American culture subverts him into a racialized space of black versus white. Oscar's dark skin makes him the enemy of both

Dominican Republic and the United States where Oscar is “excluded from belonging to either” (Sepulveda 21). Forming a “double consciousness” with anything that does not embrace “indigenous perspective” in a Fanonian realm moves the subject back into white culture and not into a new culture (Sepulveda 21; Black 399). In the end, one’s subjectivity is caught between two cultures creating a colonized person not a free agent.

The Narrative as Splitting the Devine Feminine

During Oscar’s golden age, at seven years old, he splits the image of woman into two. When Oscar makes the decision of choosing Maritza over Olga a series of painful events are unleashed on his subjectivity and the subjectivity of both women. Historically, the splitting of woman has been done before. Pre-Spanish rule took the Aztec symbol of the goddess la Virgen de Guadalupe, to whom the Catholics and Christians recognized as the Virgin Mary and severed her from her origins of being a goddess of war and contradiction into an unsexed mother of altruism and purity (Stern 2). The Virgin Mary, recognized in Mexican culture, as Guadalupe “is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquers and the conquered” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 52). When the New World collided with the Aztec world, they shared some of the same images of Mary being a life giver or supporter. However, their treatment and interpretation of these symbols differed (Granziera 264). Parallel with Anzaldúa, Patrizia Granziera states:

Mary’s association with flowers, gardens, trees and water made her compatible with the Nahua's [the pre-Hispanic/Aztec and Maya] views of sacred power. When the Spanish invaders suppressed the Nahuas' public religion and offered the cult of their mostly venerated 'Immaculate Virgin' in exchange, Mary became the most important sacred female available for indigenous adaptation. (269)

This suggests the Aztec's merged their goddesses, the main goddess Coatlicue, with the images brought to them from Spain. Likewise, indigenous people influenced Spain's perception of Guadalupe as the black Madonna. She is black as the earth and clear as the water "walking in two worlds" (Estes 2250). For the Aztecs she was the goddess who, "determine[d] man's destiny" (Granziera 254).

Oscar splits the image of woman into two separate pieces of virgin/whore and angel/monster. Choosing one woman over another ends the golden age where Oscar is unlucky-in-love with any woman until the age of twenty-eight. In the book of Oscar, it states: "In those blessed days of his youth, Oscar was something of a Casanova. One of those preschool loverboys who was always trying to kiss the girls" (Díaz 11). At seven years old Oscar is too young to be a playboy. Being referenced at seven as a boy whose phallus magnetized "havoc" across the Dominican Republic is quite a hyperbole. Yet, seven is the age of reason in Catholicism; and Catholicism is connected to a very special woman: La Virgen de Guadalupe. In Mexican culture, "Guadalupe can be strong or weak, neither or both, depending on what "project" she undertakes and how she is constructed by specific cultures and societies" (Stern 2). She is also known as a "mixed alliance" where she is the vehicle in which "all marginalized people may enter back into mainstream society and not be subjected to hide in the shadows" (4). Masculine dominance "drove the powerful female deities underground by giving them monstrous attributes...substituting male deities in their place" (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 49). Nevertheless, cultural fragments of Mary, shifting between the Borderlands, have preserved her as a strong icon (Stern 5). This cultural collision of the many faces of the Virgin Mary created a greater image that continues to be modified or re-defined across different cultures.

Olga becomes the mockery of the New Jersey high school yelling out “NATAS” in class (Díaz 17). She thirsts for milk, the milk-fat that rises to the top, while her breasts become “floppy and terrifying” (17). She loses her subjectivity to inscribe her destiny and drinks “151 straight out of the bottle” (17). This thirst for milk is found in “The Laugh of the Medusa” where milk is the metaphor of woman’s ink; her bodily fluids (Cixous, “The Laugh” 944). The white ink is simultaneously voiceless and invisible; filling in the gaps while being rebellious and nourishing (Cixous and Clement 93, 127). Robbed of this nutrient, Olga becomes a monstrous figure, New Jersey High School’s troll, rejected by the phallus. Her body is judged as large, smelly, and unattractive. However, Maritza turns into the abused whore of the neighborhood who is forever under Oscar’s teenage gaze. Maritza’s body is consumed and exploited by older men. From Oscar’s bedroom, Maritza’s story is this: “See Maritza: French-kissing on the front stoop of her house, getting in or out of some roughneck’s ride, being pushed down onto the sidewalk” (Díaz 18). Instead of owning her body, Maritza loses her ability to give meaning to her body. Thus, Olga becomes man’s nightmare while her counterpart, Maritza, is exploited as a lustful whore.

According to Amy Remensnyder, historically, the Virgin Mary is one of the great shape shifters (Remensnyder 195). Remensnyder believes one must study the Virgin Mary in the context of Christianity and European political history and not as a goddess of the divine feminine (196). Historicizing Mary mimics the realm of the phallus where knowledge is based on the disciplinary values of purity and not alterity. The masculine hierarchy split the feminine power to subdue it killing woman into art (Gilbert and Gubar 596). This suggest man’s history is real while women’s history is unreal (Cixous and Clement 6). In *Woman Earth and Spirit*, “there [are] no intellectual answers” in healing the masculine and feminine divide (Luke 4). Both must struggle to create new images and new myths “without rejecting the perennial truth of the

feminine way” (4). Oscar experiences this unreal universe during feminine recovery where “he broke through the plane of unconsciousness and in the universe of the Real” (Díaz 302).

Woman’s image is lost in masculine history and recovering woman’s body through myth may get one closer in expanding one’s horizon. According to Cixous, the phallus placed woman into this virgin/whore status to rob woman of her power. A woman who has influence over man’s subjectivity is called a monster or a Medusa (Cixous, “The Laugh” 947). The problem with the phallus is that it has placed woman against woman; using women to keep other women down (942). Maritza becomes the mouth of the phallus becoming jealous of Olga telling Oscar she does not like to share (Díaz 14). Women fight against themselves to gain power in an economy that uses their bodies for supporting the habitus and the capital (Cixous, “The Laugh” 941). Recovering the feminine marks one as insane, incestuous, and monstrous (951). Olga who is screaming outward for milk may sound nonsensical until one understands the milk is her power in taking back her body.

When Oscar chooses Maritza over Olga, Maritza dumps Oscar (Díaz 16). She dumps him to uphold the values of machismo through annihilation. His mother, Beli is so angry with this split she tells Oscar to use aggression to restore order. Yet, Oscar is not aggressive in this pursuit since he wants them all together and not torn apart. Maritza becomes empowered by the split since she believes she has won the war. However, splitting the trio dismantles the power of three. Alliances are very powerful and are marked by difference (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 145). Within an alliance “intimacy issues, trust issues, relapse of trust, intensely emotional issues” cannot be ignored and must be acknowledged to move forward (146). From this split, Oscar emerges as an overweight nerd having “no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle, no rap, no G. And most damning of all: no looks” who is socially rejected by his cultural and social circles (Díaz

20). His love for comic books and anime set him apart from both Dominican and American cultures. From the beginning to the end, Oscar works to recover his lost femininity. To survive hyper machismo, Oscar turns to outlets that distinguish him as a plural body. He also turns toward comic books enacting the power of his imagination. His sister, Lola, tries to get him involved in activities that will place him back into the heteronormative circle; but he keeps moving toward the one thing equal to his quest for love: writing.

Structure of Identity

Tim Lanzendörfer argues how the allusion of metaphors found in fantasy are a double-edged sword in understanding Caribbean identity. Fantasy helps to explore Caribbean diaspora, but it fails to explain the deeper brutalities of Trujillo's thirty-year rule (Lanzendörfer 127-128). The historical violence of the Trujillo regime put a racialized rift between Dominican and Haitian. The light-skinned Dominicans were identified as a higher breed of Dominican while the dark-skinned Dominicans were perceived as a lower breed of Haitian. Today, ninety percent of Dominicans see themselves as "Indio" and not African; they adhere to the kingly Spanish roots as their origin (*Haiti & Dominican* 00:47:24-00:46:26). Oscar, who is Afro-Dominican, grapples between the culture he has lost and the culture he adopts. Oscar's nerdiness for science fiction and comic books is rejected by his primary Dominican culture as a "foreign import" while American culture rejects his love for science fiction and fantasy as a juvenile pursuit (Bautista 44). Yunior claims "The white kids looked at his black skin and his afro and treated him with inhuman cheeriness. The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads" (Díaz 49). Sarah Eudy argues how Oscar's body represents a diasporic voice of "otherness" in which echoes white imperialism against black bodies (Eudy 98). Black bodies are dispossessed of their subjectivity within the text. Moreover, Bautista believes the text's

ambiguity represents the inescapable violence on one's past where each character cannot move forward (Bautista 48-49). The realm of fantasy as an escape is cynical, dark, and hopeless (46). However, engaging in the realm of fantasy and science fiction enacts a new location that is shamanistic: the dream world. These genres are not a "separate" reality existing in Westernization since "[i]t all filters through from one world to another, from one mode of consciousness to another" (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 106).

Within Díaz's text the masculine origins are removed. Oscar lacks a father to return to. The reader never learns Oscar's father's name thus the father cannot be identified. The only information Oscar and Lola have of their father was that he disappeared; it is almost as though the father never existed since he is nameless and faceless (Díaz 209). This removal of the father is an inversion of the phallus where Oscar is now "cunt-born" not penis-born (Cixous and Clement 91). This suggests the written and living stories of the Cabral and de Leon family are being handed down from woman to woman not man to man.

Oscar is an adult virgin who is labeled as a queer by his social group. For Yunió, Oscar is an embarrassment to his gender concluding with the Dominican hierarchal value of "no Dominican male has ever died a virgin" (Díaz 174). Oscar's body signifies a lack of power and aggression where he is given the name "Oscar Wao" after the homosexual poet Oscar Wilde. Virginity is a feminine staple of passivity which signifies the masculine fear of homosexuality (Cixous, "Sorties" 581). This queer body was one Oscar was in love with; a body he could not "blame" or reject (Díaz 50) Yunió writes: "Fool [Oscar] never got mad when we gave him shit. Just sat there with a confused grin on his face" (181). Even in pain and alienation, Oscar likes his new name. Likewise, Oscar's dorm hall is under masculine surveillance. The dorm he lives is called "Demarest Homo Hall," while Dominican classmates call Oscar "Domo" which is a

replacement word for homo (Díaz 170, 180). These references expand his queer location. Yet, a queer location for Anzaldúa “propels the soul to do its work” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 68).

Despite that Yuniór states this acceptance was a tragedy: “Made a brother feel bad. A couple times after the others left, I’d say, You know we was just kidding, right, Wao?” (Díaz 181).

Although Yuniór acts as though he is teasing Oscar, he reiterates the masculine discourse as proper by re-applying “Wao” as Oscar’s name. Yuniór is trying to shame Oscar out of his queer body. However, Oscar answers to this new name since it marks him as a writer. He sees the potential of this new identity as being translated into many identities. Coming to a Halloween party and being mistaken for either Dr. Who or the poet Oscar Wilde enacts the value of shapeshifting called “nagual” in Anzaldúaian terms (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 211). The mestiza gains more knowledge through shifting, like Oscar, who has “suffered more injustices and have survived” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 107). Crossing over into alien borders is painful; yet, it is more painful to repress these borders than it is to explore these new borders. Anzaldúa shares her own Oscar-like-experience of shape-shifting:

Behind these Glorias are others: Gloria the campesina, Gloria the clerk worker in temp jobs, the unemployed Gloria who subsisted on potatoes, the coming-into-middle class Gloria, Gloria the lesbian, Gloria the ex-campesina are all present. (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 211)

Oscar’s body is so large that it is referenced as cosmic. For instance, a small child designates Oscar as a “planet” being taken for a walk (Díaz 177). Yuniór becomes aware of Oscar’s vastness as impregnable. Oscar cannot lose weight in breakups or in starvation (46). When Oscar moves toward women his weight is stabilized. However, the only time he loses weight is when his body is assaulted by Ybon’s pimp and his henchmen; the brutality of

machismo drains the vastness from his body. During “Project Oscar,” Oscar refuses to finish Yuniór’s fitness program to bed a woman by the end of the college semester. In mid-run Oscar, stops running and tells Yuniór “It’s not going to work” (178). Oscar intuitively knows his desires cannot become manifest in a masculine system. Oscar cannot reach a stage of *jouissance* if he is perpetuating a system that exploits women. This rebellion against Yuniór’s plan sparks a conflict between Yuniór and Oscar in which Yuniór uses aggression. According to Robert Fritz, machismo dictates Yuniór’s shame in retelling Oscar’s story, but it does not silence it (Fritz 206). Fritz asserts, Yuniór is limited in liberating the text since his machismo is too strong. Yuniór doesn’t understand why Oscar will not place his body back into the phallus. Oscar returns to writing and delving into outlets that make him queer to the social norms but give him joy. When Yuniór tries to force Oscar to act like a man, Oscar “astounds” himself (and Yuniór) by “shoving” Yuniór away (Díaz 179). Yuniór almost refuses to feed his masculine aggression but then states, “I remembered myself” (179). Once he remembers he is the norm and Oscar is the deviant he forcibly pushes Oscar into the wall.

Yuniór becomes the uncle of Isis, brother of Lola, and the womb of Oscar’s subjectivity. Yuniór does not have faith in his own hand to continue Oscar’s story but he does have faith in a goddess, whom he believes to be Oscar’s niece Isis, who will breathe life into Oscar’s dead texts. This suggests Lola’s daughter, Isis, the Egyptian goddess who saved the queering body of both her brother/husband Osiris from death will be the one to break the family curse. Isis will be the one to liberate Oscar’s subjectivity from this legacy of violence. When Isis gets older, she will pick up the pen where Oscar left off illuminating how “gender progresses the plot” (Fritz 220). This story moves out from under the curse since the bodies of origin are not perfect linear bodies. For instance, Yuniór becomes Oscar’s shadow and the womb where Oscar’s body of work

germinates. A shadow is not a copy of a copy but another hand picking up the story; it may also be an inversion (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 38). This movement of the shadow enacts an infinite progression re-positioning Yuniór into the brother/lover mythos of Isis. Yuniór professes he was Lola's shadow during intercourse. When Yuniór is removed from the status of an aggressive lover to a brother both subjects, Lola and Yuniór, become newly born. Both Yuniór and Lola have a relationship where they can laugh and love each other without the pressure and limitations of the phallus. Isis becoming the heir of Oscar's subjectivity erases the phallogocentric and heteronormative economy of dictatorship. This story of Isis comes from the Greek mythos of a woman giving birth to her brother/husband's child. Isis took the fragments of Osiris, who was her brother/lover and created a child from death (Ziolkowski 144). With her mother's legs and her uncle's eyes, the mixture of brother and sister, this new body will emancipate the future from the past. When Isis grows up, she will: "[Spoken by Yuniór] come and he will show her the family secrets and the family vault" (Díaz 329). Yuniór is the womb of Oscar's written legacy where Yuniór preserves Oscar's body "against fire, against earthquake, against almost anything" (329). This monument of memories, photographs, and written words will undo "death's work by willing the togetherness of one-another, infinitely charged with a ceaseless exchange of one with another" (Cixous, "Sorties" 583).

The curse on the de Leon family is not how the postcolonial world infiltrated the cultural borders but how the postcolonial realm infiltrated the divine feminine sphere making fragments of the feminine. According to Granziera, a myriad of cultures see and experience Mary differently (Granziera 261). Pre-Spanish Mary was a warrior and the symbolic realm of "three" (Stern 3; Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 52, 68). Historically, la Virgen de Guadalupe held three positions of power contradictive to logocentrism. Mary was the image of a warrior who fought

for her people possessing both male and female sexes and was of mixed blood (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 52-53). The Virgin Mary, also known as Coatlicue, stands on the serpent's back while clutching a serpent's tail (Granziera 254). Mary is like the Medusa where she has snakes in her hair like vegetation. Her body is "cyclic, like the process of germination" (254). Her image enacts plurality in which she is a "mosaic" of scars and tears (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 88). She is the mestiza, the surviving symbol of difference between "the conquerors and the conquered" (52). The cultural feminine fragments of Guadalupe are: Beli, Lola, and La Inca. This suggests Oscar's mother, Beli, is the uncensored power of the rebellion, Oscar's sister is fluidity and restlessness of wanting to escape, and Oscar's grandmother is the feminine spirit of prayer and meditation. These multiple Borderlands of the mestiza stress how "we are not alone in the struggle" (Foss 119).

Oscar's mother represents the rebellion of woman to whom Yuniór distinguishes as the child of the apocalypse. The apocalypse employs the love that breaks down borders (Renshaw 177). Guadalupe, who has her foot on the serpent, is an apocalyptic symbol (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 69). In a masculine economy, "everything" cannot exist in one; everything cannot exist in "zero"; thus, references of ground zero are feminine locations (Cixous, "August" 21). Oscar's mother enacts the fight for a pragmatic love without shame or guilt. At thirteen years old, Beli shocks the nuns at her school revealing she was engaged in a sexual relationship with another classmate. She cannot be molded or broken by modesty. She is resurrected three times in the text moving from an enslaved orphan, a beaten-beyond-recognition pregnant woman, to a neglected domestic with two fatherless children. Yuniór re-tells the stories of Beli's passionate affairs where she scares men. She is a love-warrior who is "stubborn as the Laws of the Universe

themselves” (Díaz 102). Her first meeting with the Gangster, within the de Leon files, plays out like this:

When the baller twisted her arm, she went from zero to violence in under .2 seconds. [...] Threw her drink, her glass, and then her purse at him—if there had been a baby nearby, she would have thrown that too. Then let him have it with a stack of cocktail napkins and almost a hundred plastic olive rapiers, and when those were done dancing on the tile she unleashed one of the great Street Fighter chain attacks of all time. (115)

This type of feminine fire enacts the power of “intense vulnerability”; she is not afraid to let herself go into the unknown (Cixous and Clement 95). Her tales of love end in dissolution but she never loses her fire. She holds no shame for hard work and labor since she was a “criada” (servant) as a child. She grew up as an orphan who learned to become independent. The Gangster worships Beli’s darkness; he worships the dark parts of her body calling her “mi negrita” (Díaz 127). Darkness is where germination happens and it is also woman’s original location (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 71). Beli demands the Gangster stay true to his declaration of love since she is the “soul blade” cutting “the edge of love” (Cixous, “August” 29). However, La Inca, Beli’s guardian, and aunt, reminds Beli the Gangster is a false prophet. Although, La Inca, is the sound mind of virtue and spirituality, her niece, Beli, is the wild woman of action and pursuit.

While Beli is the fire of the beast, La Inca is the path into writing. For instance, Oscar finds himself able to write more when he is living under his aunt La Inca (e.g., the phonology and morphology of the English word *ink*). Both Beli and La Inca create, for Oscar, a “state of psychic unrest” (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 95). Between both women he shifts from building a wall to letting it fall (96). According to Cixous, “[o]n one side there is the mother[’s] belly” and on the other side is the mother’s milk (Cixous and Clement 103). Both women are an alliance in

their differences where Beli respects risk taking while La Inca respects meditation. Where Beli raises her hand to discipline her children, La Inca does not raise a hand at all. Yuniór writes: “[La Inca] was incapable of punishing the girl physically. Call it a hitch in the universe, call it mental illness, but La Inca just couldn’t do it” (Díaz 102). La Inca, who is the heart of feminine fragments, works to heal the family who is torn. Her role is shamanistic since she is the one who shares the family stories to Oscar and Lola. Unlike Beli, La Inca is, *la Llorona*, the Virgin who weeps for the suffering. According to Cixous, tears are weapons of the Newly Born; the weapons of liberation (Cixous and Clement 35). In a masculine economy tears are perceived as wasteful or “hysterical” since they are not seminal (33). When Beli is abducted La Inca creates a prayer chain so vast that “the Devil himself has to avoid the Sur for months afterwards” (Díaz 145). Moreover, when Beli, La Inca, and Lola are mixed together, they are the many faces of one woman. These feminine fragments highlight “multiple metaphors, images, and perspectives” of the *mestiza* (Foss 124).

Lola represents the legs of feminine resistance in that they are witchy and restless. For Cixous, “divine is to be found in escaping” (Renshaw 169). Lola rebels as a young woman to escape her monstrous mother Beli and does not look back; her progression is forward (Cixous and Clement 94). Beli rages against Oscar’s queerness and Lola’s resistance to authority. Lola feels “witchy” when she goes against her mother. Yuniór describes Lola as a mare or a horse. A mare is the metaphor of escaping confinement and escaping definition (Renshaw 178). Like her mother, Lola longs for an elsewhere like “Japan or Goa” (Díaz 207). Her love influences Yuniór to take care of Oscar. Yuniór sees her as the “*ciguapa* of [his] dreams” (327). The mythical design of a *ciguapa* is how her face faces forward while her feet are turned in the opposite direction (e.g., illuminating the process of coming and going at the same time). It is hard to

separate the two narrators, Lola and Yuniór, when they both love Oscar. Yuniór is conscious of not using his masculine instincts to kiss Lola or to symbolically keep her tied to the bed (Cixous and Clement 66). This suggests Yuniór is aware that Lola is different from other women. Lola's journey is outward where she studies abroad in Spain and wants to teach in Japan. Within all three fragments, Beli is the driving force between them all since she enacts pain and ambivalence within the family identity. Beli's pain pushes Lola to move outward.

The identity of a mestiza emerges between Oscar and a middle-aged prostitute Ybon. Within Yuniór's writings, Ybon is "golden," golden like corn, and a mixture of dark and light, making her a mulatto like the Virgin Mary (Stern 1). Likewise, Oscar sees Ybon in a dream as an "Aslan-type-figure" where she becomes a hybrid of both sexes (Díaz 302). When Oscar tries to commit suicide the image of a Golden Mongoose intervenes to catch his attention with "eyes that reached through you, not so much in judgment or reproach but for something far scarier" (190). These eyes are the mestiza's mirror the mirror that shows one's underbelly and exposes one's hell (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 64). Anzaldúa asserts how depression moves the mestiza to hit rock bottom to face Coatlicue, the Virgin Mary, before crossing: "I don't want to see what's behind *Coatlicue's* eyes, her hollow sockets. I can't confront her face to face; I must take small sips of her face through the corners of my eyes, chip away at the ice a silver at a time" (70). This mongoose enacts one of Coatlicue's forms and saves Oscar. Oscar is at the train tracks, another symbol of the crossroads, where he jumps off a bridge and is saved by a divide. Ybon being the symbol of gold, another form of Coatlicue, places her as "eternal rebirth" not to be mistaken for eternal life (Luke 68). The love of the Other is a state of rebirth and not a state of immortality.

Ybon's subjectivity enacts the image of la Virgen de Guadalupe, the sign of three women in one, the golden mother who feeds those who are the prophets and dreamers (Estes 1048).

When Oscar is beaten by the Capitan's henchmen for dating Ybon; she comes to visit on the third day—a type of resurrection (Díaz 304). Oscar's love for her is cosmic in that “he loved her more than the Universe and it wasn't something he could shake” (316). Oscar is told repeatedly by several family members to stop chasing this whore, a “semiretired puta,” in Santo Domingo who is connected to the Island's dictator Trujillo (279). However, Oscar cannot see his life moving forward without Ybon since she was the only woman who showed interest in what Oscar was reading or writing (280). Her interest in writing is unique like Oscar's journey. The shelves in Ybon's house are on astrology and healing. Her favorite author, Paulo Coelho, is a Brazilian writer who wrote *The Alchemist* that was a story about a man who must complete his journey to the Egyptian pyramids. The sign of the pyramids echoes the love triangle that marked the beginning of Oscar's golden age. The pyramids in which Oscar severed in the beginning is finally being rebuilt when he begins his journey with Ybon. Thus, Ybon is more than a middle-aged puta but a woman “who existed partially in another dimension” (282).

If this love for Ybon was strictly related to sex, Oscar would have joined his cousins instead of declining their many invitations in visiting the whorehouses. For cosmic reasons unknown to Oscar, Ybon becomes a life and death mission for him. Yunion writes, how Oscar sees Ybon as “the start of his *real* life” (279). Oscar's sees Ybon as the one who will break the curse. Ybon marks the part of his life between the curse and the cure which is the Borderlands for the mestiza. Oscar left home to find home. Anzaldúa calls this stage, *nepantla*, the serpent's bite, where one crosses “the barbed wired fence in a hostile ‘paradise’” (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 180). Thus, Oscar will risk his life to love Ybon since loving her is also the cure. When Lola asks Oscar to explain the reason for risking his life for Ybon, Oscar tells Lola “she didn't understand what was at stake” (Díaz 319). This love of the Other is Oscar's way of moving towards the

écriture feminine. For instance, the puta and the virgin are a longstanding mythos attached to woman's body. This need to bring those two bodies together is a very dangerous task. The phallogocentric economy builds the habitus around woman's torn identity. This suggests women are either one or the other; they cannot straddle two locations at the same time. For Oscar, Ybon is not a cheap whore. He helped her reclaim her parts by teaching her to not speak negatively against her body stating, "You and cheap do not compute, Ybon" (319). He didn't see her as a whore even though she was a prostitute. He desired to kiss the places where the Capitan violated her. Any discourse against her body was healed through Oscar's discourse of woman. The Capitan, a police officer, is more of a pimp than a boyfriend. He controls the sale and distribution of Ybon's body (316). The Capitan exploits her body to make the homeland stronger.

A Language Moving Beyond Diaspora

Ana Rodríguez explores how Yuniór's discourse, gossiping, works to subvert cultural dominance. It was not fuku that took down a terminator Trujillo but gossip (Rodríguez 69). The retelling of Oscar's story is another form of gossip "transgressing the boundaries between public and private" (56). This suggests the most powerful weapons are the discourses people secretly engage in with each other. The mestiza, like gossip, works as an activist to form alliances "immersing" and "traversing from one to another" (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 141). The complexities found in the chain of gossip is that it strengthens a regime's hold over a marginalized group while giving strength to those networks of people who have been silenced. That is why Oscar's grandfather's signature was destroyed along with his rebellious writings. His words were a body of resistance against the Trujillo regime. Written down or spoken in private, the discursive attributes of gossip will have the strongest influence on subverting dominance while creating change. People who are powerless in creating change will turn to gossiping to

form safe and private alliances while breaking off from those to whom they do not agree with or trust (Rodríguez 58). Yuniór's gossip paints a lustful reputation of Trujillo juxtaposed to a sympathetic and respectful Oscar de Leon (61). Yuniór, at times, questions whether he speaks the truth or not when relating Oscar's story to the reader (63). He tells the reader Oscar's success in finding Ybon is based on whether one believes (Díaz 285). Yuniór is not worried if he is believable since allowing discrepancy or doubt within his narrative enacts ambiguity. Stories that are built in contradiction transform the narrative. Yuniór is not the only voice of contradiction. La Inca remembers Oscar meeting Ybon at a cabaret his cousins dragged him to (289). Unreliable narrators disrupt the master narrative exploring how stories cross-pollinate and breed with other tongues. The mestiza "problematizes" the narrative of "we-are-right/they-are-wrong" (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 209). After Trujillo was assassinated in 1961, the people of the Dominican Republic were slowly regaining their voice. Those who lived in fear of speaking out against the regime were able to unearth their tongues after the threat was gone. According to Vargas, Yuniór's discursive counter-wordplay changes Trujillo's democracy into a "culocracy" and morphs democrat into "culocrat" (Vargas 13). Likewise, Oscar's character who is un-Dominican works as a resistance to Trujillo's transgenerational influence on Oscar and his family. The fact that one is reading a book about a nerd who is unlike the unlikeable Trujillo creates a space where Oscar is loved for his resistance to conform (18).

Maria Lauret's synthesis of language comes close to the definition of what a cosmic language embodies. Díaz's goal was for one to experience the way in which language captivates, confuses, and frustrates the reader (Lauret 501). The origins of fuku and zafa are not directly from the Dominican Republic and may or may not be traced back to Africa or back to Díaz's "invention" (Lauret 497). For the mestiza, language has many faces, too. When Ana tells her

abusive boyfriend Manny that Oscar is a writer Manny questions Oscar's ability to create "snort[ing]. What would you have to write about?" (Díaz 43). Manny's discourse is monosexual—it does not move farther than his phallus. Manny believes Oscar lacks seminal power to erect a discourse since Oscar's body lacks masculine prowess to seduce women (Grosz 199-200). Oscar explains his type of writing embodies difference stating, "I'm into more speculative genres" (Díaz 43). This suggests a speculative genre as a language moving horizontal and vertical; possible dimensions that cannot be accessed by the patriarchy (Irigaray 205). A speculative genre crossbreeds or juggles between science fiction, horror, fantasy, creating new mutants and superpowers. This juggling between cultures is where hybridization can bridge differences together (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 134). Oscar's love of the speculative genres speaks of Oscar's secret and rebellious language against machismo (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 77). Science fiction and fantasy are the mestiza's tools of the rebellion in which new species are formed (224). According to Susan Mandala, science fiction "[p]rior to the 1960s" until the 1980s was an exilic genre (Mandala 3). It had no home in the halls of academia nor friend in the genre of serious-written-pursuits since it lived on the "border of the irrational" (3). Science fiction and fantasy reject "the status of standard English" by creating mythic and futuristic worlds where the alien is the normative discourse (39). Genre enacts a history of non-subordinate discourse that allows for differences to be seen and not repressed (Irigaray 147). Non-subordinate discourse is found in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* where Tolkien created a secret language between him and his cousins (Higgins 51). At a young age "Tolkien was interested in inventing languages that included elements of phono-semantics and sound symbolism" (40). Manny senses Oscar's language is different and responds aggressively and dismissively toward Oscar. Speculative genre creates an economy of difference forming alliances that are "never-

exhaustively-revealable” (Irigaray 149). Manny is threatened by Oscar’s difference stating, “I just hope you ain’t trying to chisel in on my girl, guy” (Díaz 44).

Bastardized jargon is nothing more than living in-between discomfort, confusion, and pain. According to Rachel Norman, code switching is used to exist between two cultures: the language of the oppressor and the language of one’s homeland (Norman 44). Díaz utilizes code switching to make the American reader “feel” like an outsider (44). Díaz’s jargon works against assimilation since there are many hard to understand referents and hard to comprehend language blends (45). Díaz also introduces the reader to the racialization of Africans in the Dominican Republic through language (Sepulveda 18). Colonial racialization has stripped blackness in communicating difference (Shohat and Stam 19). Yet, Díaz introduces the reader to the many faces of Dominican skin color utilizing sarcasm and humor. Ybon is referenced as “one whiteskinned relative away from jaba” (Díaz 279). The word “jaba” is defined as a crate or a bag. However, the word “jaba” is a pejorative word in Dominican slang referring to one’s skin color as yellow (bright yellow). This may suggest Ybon is denotatively one white relative away from being labeled a black person or connotatively one relative away from being *Star War’s* icon Jabba the Hut who was originally a yellow walrus. This reference to skin color as slang expands on how Oscar’s mother is labeled the inferior “*black black*” compared to “kongoblack, shangoback, kaliblack, zapotebblack and rekhablack” (248). This new language of plurality code switches between Mexican-black, Hollywood-black, and indigenous-black. All these differences expand the identity of black as a “scapegoat,” as a “forerunner,” and as a new person (Anzaldúa, *Borderlands* 216).

The mestiza code-switches as a way of creating art out of language. Oscar’s body within the narrative “code switches” with Yunior’s body. Oscar’s voice is present within the text even

though Yunior is the one who is telling the story. There is an artful pattern within the text where Oscar and Yunior's voices are both present: nerd and jock. Yunior, who has adopted Oscar's love for Dungeons and Dragons, a role-playing game modeling the discourse of Greek mythology, code switches from "furies" to evil "bitches" while infusing the Dominican discourse of "plantano" with the comic book imagery of "Doc Savage" (Díaz 27). Moreover, Yunior's language infuses with Oscar's language in terms like: Ghetto nerd, dwarf-motherfucking-star, and vertiginous body heat. Oscar's virginal body cannot bridge with women whose discourse is framed by the "masochism" of courtly love (Zizek 108). For instance, Ana's discourse is immersed around Manny's "anatomical enormity" (Díaz 42). She will not leave Manny even when Manny beats her because she loves him (44). Discourse continues onward with Yunior and Lola who share the narrative. For instance, the chapter following Yunior's chapter begins with remembering a time when their mother hollered at them to come into the bathroom to feel a lump on their mother's breasts which are "[o]ne of the wonders of the world. The only ones you've seen that are bigger are in nudie magazines" (51). At first, the reader is not expecting this voice to not be Yunior's voice. This storyteller goes through a metamorphosis several times switching back to Yunior and then back to Lola where the reader becomes more tolerant toward ambiguity as the narrative progresses. Both voices reach a divine state of jouissance becoming bisexual where "this person be a she and a he and a s(he) and a (s)he and a herhim and a himher" (Cixous, "August" 17). Blurring the lines between genders is the state where love is born (Cixous, "Sorties" 583).

The mestiza's untamed tongue is the language of fire. This language of fire is expansive since it places into "the air in the future of what has not yet appeared" and plays with "the danger of a new flowering devoid of protection" (Irigaray 214). The mestiza throws themselves out

there without any calculations or hypotheses. The “[v]oice-cry” enacts a complex mobility since it is pleasurable and painful at the same time (Cixous and Clement 94). The first time Oscar is taken into the cane fields he moves inward toward lack thinking of all the things he will never do whereas the second time he is taken into the cane fields he moves outward toward love (Díaz 297). When he is about to die he invokes the names of “all the women he had ever loved—Olga, Maritza, Ana, Jenni, Nataly, and all the other ones whose names he’d never known—and of course to Ybon” (321). Before Oscar commands his own death, he mourns for the Capitan’s henchmen, Grod and Grundy, who are placed within the hierarchy. Oscar does not physically weep but employs the value of weeping for the children of violence stating, “if they killed him they would probably feel nothing and their children would probably feel nothing either, not until they were old and weak” (321). The henchmen’s lack of empathy toward the Other will lead to the death of their own offspring. If the face of violence is the only face these henchmen adhere to then no other face will matter (Butler, *Precarious Life* 135; Thiem 140). The love of the Other seeks the other’s face; seeks to see and know face. This response to change grows from ambivalence, conflict, and vulnerability with the other (Thiem 141). However, the jealous Capitan and the henchmen racialize Oscar as a black Other. No bridges exist today in the Dominican Republic where the island is split between Spanish and Haitian. The Haitian side was the “first black colony to free themselves” and they were the first free black nation in the world (*Haiti & Dominican Republic* 00:28:01-00:27:54). How did they do it; how did they survive? Professor Louis Lesley Marcelin of the National School for the Arts in Haiti states “because we are descendants of so many places in Africa everything Africa had to offer, we inherited” (00:26:14-00:25:48). They restored their culture by embracing all the worlds that came in and out of their island.

Oscar gives the racist henchmen a face in his final message stating “they would *sense* him waiting for them on the other side and over there he wouldn’t be no fatboy or dork...over there he’d be a hero, an avenger” (Díaz 321-322, emphasis added). Commanding his own death, he tells the men he will haunt them. Man will not be able to return to himself since he will be forever haunted by his refusal to move beyond the frame of war isolating himself from his own *femmanity* (Renshaw 176). By undoing death, Oscar commands the men to “fire” reaching outward into a space where he is unprotected and exposed (Cixous, “Sorties” 583). Oscar had finally crossed over into *jouissance* into a new body where machismo could not define him. Ybon and Oscar are two halves not two wholes where “eros never stops traveling, vast astral space” (584). The pain and ambiguity of Oscar knowing himself had disappeared when he was in a state of divine love with Ybon where they started “dreaming the same dreams and saying the same words” (Díaz 321). They began to form an alliance sharing a language without borders. Oscar speaks to the combatants with much faith in this new love stating, “anything you can dream...you can be” (322).

Calling it Life vs. the Curse

In an interview, Díaz asserts “if women aint part of the team we are in some serious trouble” (“Junot Díaz” 00:04:03-00:04:07). The narrative, character, and language structures in *Oscar Wao* move away from the curse of diaspora into the cure of the *mestiza*. This new consciousness breaks free from the repressed values of nostalgia—the voice of “authoritarianism, violence and scarcity” (Irigaray 206). Every border Oscar crossed created more dissonance and pain; but every border crossed evoked a deeper knowledge and awareness to survive. Yunion creates a monument of Oscar’s newly born subjectivity to begin a new life with love. For Díaz, the most influential people in his life were his sisters. As Díaz claims, “for all its historical stuff

for all its nerd stuff, the entire book is about a family trying to find love” (“Junot Díaz” 00:02:52-00:02:59).

Oscar’s voice was not silenced “The Cosmos DNA” made it to Lola and Yunion; all they have to do, like Oscar, is listen (Díaz 333, 307). Eight months after Oscar died, Yunion received a package from Oscar which included unfinished manuscripts, letters revealing Oscar’s last twenty-seven days with Ybon, and a teaser-manuscript never to be delivered: making the story’s denouement endless. Oscar’s final farewell was a state of *jouissance* since the fear of pain and of death were removed. Díaz’s text subverts *machismo* creating a character whose main goal was to restore the divine love of the Other. Oscar reveals to Ybon the two torn worlds he existed on were both “home” (318). Oscar’s curse was being torn from his femininity; Oscar’s cure was his final days in feminine recovery. The final frontier of the *mestiza* is endless:

We are all wounded, but we can connect through the wound that’s alienated us from others. When the wound forms a *cicatriz*, the scar can become a bridge linking people who have been split apart. What happened may not have been in our individual control, but how we react to it and what we do about it is. (Anzaldúa, *The Reader* 313)

When a consciousness is created the *mestiza* will keep dreaming up other worlds (34). Oscar, Olga, and Maritza move onward in the ancient stories of Sumerian culture. The story of Inanna, her half-sister Ereshkigal, and her lover Dumuzi and their fight to create a love where they share between themselves half of heaven and half of hell. All three are bound in an endless circle of germination where woman’s body moves into the sun while man’s body moves into the dark and around again. The reason why Oscar told Lola there was more at stake was because half of himself was responsible, vulnerable, and accountable to the other half he must restore. This recovery reveals the unlimited possibilities of synthesis “exist[ing] just beyond the last lines”

(Cixous, "August" 31). Oscar takes on half of hell for Ybon knowing his part is not to rule over her body but to create an alliance.

Yunior recovers one of Oscar's final messages in the *Watchmen* comic entitled "A Stronger Loving World" where three circles are penned around the chapter's title (Díaz 331). In the final chapter, the Watchmen, who are a superior extraterrestrial species, wanted to unite the people of New York with a lie to protect them from the truth. However, withholding knowledge enacts a system of hierarchy and not love. Protecting the people of New York from themselves is another way of replacing one border for another. Rorschach, out of all the Watchmen was different; he believed in not censoring knowledge. He refused to support the mantra: Better to keep faith alive in the Watchmen than to create fear against the Watchmen. His resistance was his voice in becoming a new insurgent seeing knowledge as empowerment not death. Murdered by an ally, Rorschach fades into the dark depths. Rorschach's truth was not silenced since he had left hidden another manuscript, like Oscar, circulating within the postal service's veins, for another person, like Yunior, to find. A stronger and loving world must expand this definition of love before it becomes so pure that it becomes extinct.

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