***Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* & Literary Criticism**

**Direct Excerpts from critical articles about the novel**

**For your assigned excerpt:**

1. **Identify the authors’ main argument about BWL.**
2. **Consider which critical approach(es) the author is using in each of these excerpts. Choose two critical approaches that you see in the excerpt. Give an example of how the author is using each critical approach.**
3. **To what extent do you agree with this author’s interpretation of BWL? Is there anything you would add or change about their analysis?**

**Casielles-Suarez, Eugenia. “Radical Code Switching in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.” Bulletin of Hispanic Studies 90:4 (May 2013), 475.**

I would like to propose, however, that Díaz’s use of Spanish in The Brief

Wondrous Life … goes beyond gratifying the bilingual reader and approaches

radical bilingualism, although in a different way, which I will call ‘radical hybridism’.

Rather than include whole paragraphs in Spanish, which a monolingual

reader could simply skip, or offer a neat kind of code alternation, as in (3),

where the switch occurs at phrase boundaries, the quantity and quality of the

Spanish words and phrases which are constantly inserted in English sentences

create hybrid phrases with the result that rather than alternating with English,

Spanish becomes part of English.

….

Given the constant movement between the languages that all these examples

show, this text would qualify as ‘radical bilingualism’. However, as we consider

in more detail in the next part of this article using Muysken’s typology of codeswitching,

Díaz’s technique is very different from the type of sustained alternation

used in other radical bilingual texts and it results in a highly hybrid text

where there is a much more intimate connection between English and Spanish.

…….

In an interview quoted in Ch’ien (2004), Junot Díaz says:

For me allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics

or quotations marks a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority

language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside

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my head. So why treat it like one? Why ‘other’ it? Why de-normalize it? By keeping

Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers

of the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming

Spanish and Spanish is transforming English. (Ch’ien 2004: 204)

**Patteson, Richard. “Textual Territory and Narrative Power in Junot**

**Díaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao”**

**ariel: a review of international english literature**

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In numerous discussions of The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao conducted

during interviews and public appearances, Junot Díaz has repeatedly

suggested and even stated outright that readers should consider the

relationship between authority exercised in the world at large and that of

a story’s narrator. “Isn’t storytelling,” he asks, “the desire to put everything

about the world in your power?” (Díaz, “Junot Díaz Redefines Macho”).

Although he claims his intention is to draw attention to “the dangers

of the single voice” (Díaz, “The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao:

Questions for Junot Diaz”), Díaz, following the practice of many writers

who discuss their books publicly, continues to exemplify that voice

by attempting to shape how the novel is read. He insists that “Yunior’s

telling of this story and his unspoken motivations for it are at the heart

of the novel” (Díaz, “Junot Díaz Redefines Macho”), but it might also be

said that the interviews, and Díaz’s unspoken motivations for them, are

equally central. An author’s compulsion to control does not necessarily

end with publication. Like his narrator Yunior (and perhaps like all narrators),

Díaz is torn between the competing needs to challenge authority

and to exercise it. The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao attempts to

acknowledge and incorporate this internal struggle; it incorporates the

struggle’s most paradoxical feature, the notion that the act of telling is

itself an exercise of power, into the deepest design of the novel.

**Weese, Katherine. "Tú no Eres Nada de Dominicano": Unnatural Narration and De-Naturalizing Gender Constructs in Junot Díaz's The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao” Journal of Men’s Studies 22.2 (Spring 2014): 89-104**

Our hero was not one of those Dominican cats everybody's always going on abouthe wasn't no home-run hitter or a fly bachatero, not a playboy with a million hots on his jock. And except for one period early in his life, dude never had much luck with the females (how very un-Dominican of him). (Díaz, 2007, p. 11)

So begins Junot Díaz's narrator Yunior's introduction of the title character in the novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. Oscar is described as "very un-Dominican" pre- cisely because he does not fit traditional definitions of Caribbean masculinity. This article examines the relationship between the novel's exploration of constructions of Dominican masculinity and the unusual features of the novel's narrative voice. In recent years, there has been a growing interest within the field of narratology in so-called "unnatural narrative"- that is, narrative voice that defies the conventions of the mimetic contract and resists being easily categorized according to traditional theories of narrative. Narrative theorists use the term "natural" not only to describe modes of fictional narration that do obey the mimetic contract, but also to refer to events that take place within a fiction that are consistent with the laws of the natural world. The term "natural" is also used more generally to describe ideologies of gender-indeed, any ideology-insofar as ideologies masquerade as the natural state of affairs, when in fact they are constructs. The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao explores the intersection of these different ways of thinking about "naturalness." Because the narrative voice is so consumed with issues of gender construction, masculinity especially, it becomes important to explore the relationship between the "unnatural" features of Yunior's narration and the novel's relationship to traditional Dominican masculinity. By calling attention to the "unnatural" in the narrative theory categories, I argue, the novel implicitly calls into question the "naturalness" of socially constructed gender roles: it denaturalizes for the reader the ideology that informs Dominican masculinity. ……

In focalizing his first-person narration through the perspective of other characters, Yunior becomes, in effect, a first-person omniscient narrator, a category defined in the world of narratology as "unnatural." According to Richardson (2011), an unnatural narrative develops "new narratological patterns" that depart from the conventions described by classical narratology and that "produce a defamiliarization of the basic elements of narrative" (p. 34, emphasis in original). By self-consciously calling attention to questions of authority and power in the construction of narratives, to the questions of who gets to tell a story, how reliable that voice is, and from whence the voice has gleaned information, Diaz by extension defamiliarizes and de-naturalizes cultural constructions of gender, revealing them to be authored by particular voices with vested interests rather than simply to be the “natural order of things” (Riofrio, 2008, p. 24).

**Mahler, Anne Garland.”The Writer as Superhero: Fighting the**

**Colonial Curse in Junot Díaz's The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao”**

***Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 August 2010, pp. 119-140**

In this way, Dı´az introduces the generational curse of the fuku´ as a metaphor for the perpetuation of colonial powerstructures.

…….

Dı´az approaches the political subtext of the fuku´ by framing his argument within

the allegorical space provided by the superhero genre, incorporating a wealth of comic

book and fantasy references and discussing Dominican history in distinctly supernatural

terms. In this way, he accomplishes what he characterizes as his ‘agenda to write politics without letting the reader think it is political’ (Ce´spedes and Torres-Saillant

2000: 901). Dı´az infuses his novel with events and figures from Dominican history,

blurring the line between reality and fiction and using his narrative to formulate a

political argument that aims to transcend the text itself. His frequent use of footnotes

throughout the novel further intertwines his narrative with actual historical events.

While the footnotes give the appearance of an academic text in which there is a

separation between the content and the historical data that inform it, the footnotes are

written in the voice of the narrator and serve to further integrate Dominican history

into the fantastical fiction created by Dı´az, collapsing the difference between

historiographical and fictional registers by inextricably blending the two

……

Veiling his political agenda in a world of fantasy, Dı´az employs the curse of the fuku´

to represent the perpetuation of colonial hierarchies in the Dominican Republic. The

continuation of this hegemony results, Dı´az claims, from the concealment of the

tyrannical nature of the First World beneath its ostensibly modern image. Thus, Dı´az

constructs his superhero, who creates the zafa – or counterspell – to the evil forces of

the fuku´, as a writer who uses the pen to shed light on the existence of the violent

structures of power that have been concealed. Ultimately, however, what gives the

novel its complexity is that in acknowledging the repressive potential of writing itself,

Dı´az creates a superhero novel that is self-aware, revealing the line separating the hero

and the villain to be ambiguous. I argue, then, that Dı´az promotes a writing that does

not repress its own inherent violence but rather exposes it in order to disarm tyrannical

power of perhaps its most effective weapon: the written word