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BOOK FORUM

Writing Gone Wao

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Abstract

In this essay, "Writing Gone Wao," I begin by reiterating my own sense of the book's (*Junot Díaz: On the Half-Life of Love*, Duke UP, 2022) priorities. I then turn to the probing and generous responses by Glenda Carpio, Mónica González García, Gerald Torres, Marina De Chiara, and Ato Quayson to my work. I conclude by examining Díaz's recent writings published after my book appeared, including his complex, erudite Substack series "StoryWorlds with Junot Díaz," and his short story, "The Ghosts of Gloria Lara" (*The New Yorker*, 2023), where he explores dramatic issues of decolonial love and the political unconscious.

Keywords: Junot Díaz; the half-life of love; Speculative Realism; Latinx literature; Coloniality; Americanity; *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; Substack, "StoryWorlds With Junot Díaz"; "The Ghosts of Gloria Lara"

It is an honor and a privilege to read these erudite, insightful essays responding to my book's investigations. Written by Glenda Carpio, Marina De Chiara, Mónica González García, Ato Quayson, and Gerald Torres—five masterful intellectuals from Italy, Chile, and the United States, five figures whose work in postcolonial and decolonial literary and critical race studies, continue to inspire—these writings model the kind of judicious, critical, cultural, and literary engagement I had in mind when I first undertook my book on Díaz's fiction and speculative realist world-making.

In my book, *Junot Díaz: On the Half-Life of Love* (Duke UP, 2022), I sought to continue my career-long exploration of trans-americanity by turning to the work of one of the most influential postcontemporary Latinx writers of the twenty-first century. By attending to the decolonial half-life of love explored throughout his fiction I aimed to grapple with the forces shaping migration, trauma, the history of coloniality in the Américas, and anthropogenic climate change, disaster, and diasporic invisibility.

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In the book's first section, I offered a chronology of Díaz's early life in Santo Domingo, D.R. and Parlin, N.J., his intellectual formations, and later his activism (with the Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat) on behalf of Haitians suffering human rights abuses in the Dominican Republic. In the book's early chapters I also offered an account of Díaz's crucial reading of J.R. R. Tolkien as a modernist writer examining power, coloniality (the logic of colonialism), and enslavement, seeing *historias especulativas* and fantasy as spaces where new possibilities can be imagined. I was intrigued by the literary and philosophical ways in which Díaz grappled with and created his own and his characters' distinct social imaginaries—by the manner in which "everyday people" imagined their social imaginaries … "in images, histories, poetry, and legends."[1] This was crucially important groundwork for me; in the remainder of my book, I argued that Díaz's 2008 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* was a foundational example of speculative—and decolonial—fiction. I then examined Díaz's short stories or cuentos from his Cornell University MFA thesis, "Negocios," through the collections of short stories *Drown* and *This is How You Lose Her.* I relied in these chapters on a decolonial theoretical approach based on the concept of the coloniality of power, a theory most associated with the historical sociological work of the Peruvian Aníbal Quijano.

In the book's novella-length chapter, "Becoming Oscar Wao," I offered an investigation of the genesis, birth, and development of decolonial aesthetics in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, from its initial form as a short story published in *The New Yorker* in 2000, to its culmination as a novel 7 years later. Díaz's story of Oscar de León's cultural identity, I argued, is a matter of "being" and "becoming"—a story recounted by his Rutgers University roommate Yunior de Las Casas and Lola de Léon, Oscar's sister, who, as the primary narrators pieced together the proliferating fragments of Oscar's brief and wondrous life and death to produce "a unified portrait." But Oscar's story remained largely unfinished. Or better, it remains *unending*, as its triply iterated DC Comics—informed finalities suggest; it is a making and remaking by Díaz's narrators, who have stakes in Oscar's future and legacy. To highlight this process—as Díaz does—to focus on one's becoming as Stuart Hall suggests in his magisterial essay "Diaspora and Identity"—is to emphasize discontinuity as a hallmark of identity formation (Hall, "Diaspora and Identity"). Díaz uses Oscar's cultural identity of "being," I suggested, to explain why the first kind of Dominican identity is necessary but why the second one, "becoming,"—is truer to Oscar's decolonial condition.[2] Briefly, in this chapter, I focused on Oscar's tragic flourishing, pain and possibility; I followed the fragmented, redacted interpretations of Oscar's historia, tracking the play of history and power indexed by Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* At the same time, I turned to Díaz's theory of the fukú americanus or americanity; and I highlighted how, as explained in the novel, the fukú originated in colonial modernity with

[1] See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2003), 23.

[2] See "Becoming Oscar Wao," in *José David Saldívar's Junot Díaz: On the Half-Life of Love* (Duke University Press, 2022), 100.

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Almirante Colón and was then carried into the present by homegrown figures such as Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina and Ronald Reagan.

In the second half of my book, my perspective shifts: I move from exploring how Díaz composed his work to examining how his short stories and novel generated and managed narrative tension and wonder. Indeed, Díaz's capacity to maintain narrative tension in his fiction while eliding predictability and eschewing familiar modes of emplotment shapes and prompts the refractions and reflections in his historias. More often, suspense in Díaz's narratives arises from the uncertainty about the particular kind of historia that is being told. Díaz's short stories in "Negocios," *Drown*, and *This is How You Lose Her*, I argued, seem to be concerned with what the Argentine theorist and short story writer Ricardo Piglia calls a "secret story," but they rarely unveil it unequivocally at the story's end as the classic story does.[3] In other words, Piglia's central thesis is that "A short story [*cuento*] always tells two stories [*historias*] (Piglia, 63). In the classic short story, there is a "visible" story in whose "interstices" [intersticios] a "secret" story is encoded. The two stories are governed by different "systems of causalities" or logics. In his long epic and tragic novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Díaz's creation of narrative tension is decentralized. His novel depends more on flashes into the very everyday lives of his everyday people.

In my book's coda, I focused on Díaz's "outbreak," end-of-the-world science fiction short story "Monstro," published in *The New Yorker* (2012). Here, Díaz situates the D.R. and the diasporic Dominican American forsaking of Haitian "La Negrura" or blackness within an SF framework. Its speculative realist and decolonial aesthetics, I argue, not only unsettles the ways in which Dominicans and Dominican Americans think about race and racial formations, but also how in Díaz's hands, his short story "Monstro" readapts what literary and cultural critic Sarah Quesada calls "a subtle connection to an African heritage."[4] As I suggest, Díaz's virtuosity as a writer grappling with SF as the literature of "cognitive estrangement" helps him to spectacularly reverse the concept of La Negrura, a virus that infects the inhabitants of Port-au-Prince, Santo Domingo, and Hispaniola's borderlands. For its "viktims" who morph into forty-foot-tall zombies, blackness becomes a sign of a conscious desire to life and struggle, a force of solidarity that springs forth in the face of racist oppression. Liberation, in "Monstro," I argue, thus rests on the construction of the consciousness of the infected Haitians, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. If "La Negrura" or blackness was itself a product of a social and technological regime linked to what Díaz calls "vulture capitalism," it was invented to signify a fury of brutalities and depredations in the trans-Mediterranean Black Atlantic. But Díaz reverses this signification of "La Negrura" by his sea-changing reversals in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Now, before I turn to Díaz's most recent writings—his richly textured Substack posts in "StoryWorlds with Junot Díaz" and his short story "The Ghosts of Gloria Lara," published in *The New Yorker* in October 2023, writings that appeared

[3] See Ricardo Piglia, "Theses on the Short Story," *New Left Review* 70 (2011): 63–66.

[4] See Sarah M. Quesada's, *The African Heritage of Latinx and Caribbean Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 63–75.

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after my book on Díaz was published—I first want to emphasize something particularly rewarding about reading all the essays gathered here in response to my book. Namely: they animate key issues and figures often aligned with ethnic, postcolonial, and decolonial and feminist studies in ways that look forward into the future.

In Glenda Carpio's soulful essay, "Loving Atomically: On Junot Díaz's Migrant Aesthetics," she traces how Díaz in his fiction dramatizes his struggle with the toxicity of "loving [too] atomically" that his fiction continually offers for radical critique. Thus envisaged, his emplotment of heartbreaks and breakups in his fiction "dramatize how migrants lose but still crave the fiction of a stable identity, of belonging to one nation." More specifically, Carpio suggests that Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* focuses on the heartbreaks and breakups of his characters—Yunior, Oscar, Lola, and Belicia—and that these breakups "introject" (post)(de)colonial violence in their most intimate relationships. What I found most persuasive and enlightening in Carpio's essay is the thesis that in Díaz's stories and Oscar Wao, Díaz often works through his alter ego, Yunior de Las Casas in a way that refracts but does not reproduce his own life trajectories.[5] Because his narrative's refractions seem closer to direct reflections, Díaz rejects reductive autoethnographic readings of his fiction. I was also quite persuaded by Carpio's suggestion that Díaz's search for decolonial love operates in his fiction as refractions rather than reflections.

Asserting that my book's formulation of decolonial Americanity as methodology points to the significance of coalition among disparate literary, social, and intellectual movements in the Southern Cone, Mónica González García also asks readers of my book not to stop grappling with the possibility of such coalitions that make up the decolonial literature of the Américas but instead to imagine what it might entail. As a model of comparative literature, she offers brief but insightful readings of Díaz's fiction and Peruvian José María Arguedas' foundational novel, *Los ríos profundos* [*Dark Rivers*](1958). In her essay, González García argues that the roots of Díaz's critique of dictatorships in the D.R. "can also be found over the darker sides of the geographies of the Western Hemisphere" as well as in the stories of modernity-coloniality of the Southern Cone and its inhabitants. She ends by addressing my book's call to see Díaz's speculative world-making as having much in common with Arguedas' fiction set in Cusco "where structural inequalities and the suffering of human beings—as Arguedas once articulated—become unbearable." Central to both Díaz and Arguedas' world-making, she concludes, are decolonial American chronotopes which scramble familiar historical constellations "to reveal how brutally the coloniality of power, race, and gender have penetrated the societies and expanded in time." In his adventurous essay, "El Otro Lado," Critical Race Theorist and Professor of Law, Gerald Torres likewise interprets Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as a long meditation on the legacies of Quijano's theory of the coloniality of power. But he also reads it as a novel grappling with the legacy of Marx's critique

[5] See Glenda R. Carpio's theory of refractions in Díaz's fiction in *Migrant Aesthetics: Contemporary Fiction, Global Migration, and the Limits of Empathy* (Columbia University Press, 2023), 160–164.

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of the "nightmare" of capitalism. Using Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as his starting point, Torres suggests that coloniality's "enduring and persuasive effects on societies, cultures, and knowledge systems" was also an effect of the colonial powers "imposing their epistemologies and worldviews as the standard. Indigenous ways of knowing were dismissed, repressed, or characterized as generally inferior." Torres concludes his reading of Díaz's fiction by insisting that Díaz's work dramatizes "these structures of dominance as part of colonial power, hegemony even in post-colonial societies... This persistence exists even in societies like the U.S. that do not think of themselves as colonial powers."

What Torres illustrates provocatively in "El Otro Lado" is that wrestling with Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, will continue to open new lines of inquiry not only for literary and cultural studies but also for critical theories of law. By way of example, Torres notes that the U.S. Supreme Court seemed ready to grapple with what legal scholars call the Insular Cases.[6] Most legal commentators, including Torres, think that it is past time to do so.

In declining to review the case of Fitisemanu v. United States, which, as Torres explains elsewhere, would have determined whether residents of the territory of American Samoa would have American citizenship, the Supreme Court declined to reassess the grounds on which the Insular Cases rest.[7] What Díaz's method in his fiction would counsel, Torres suggests, "is to understand the distinctions between the various people who are subject to the rules of the insular cases." Moreover, he would counsel us, to do what Torres calls the "hard work" of critique. The people in the Insular territories should be the agents of their own future.

Meanwhile, Marina De Chiara and Ato Quayson in their tour de force essays address the power of the adolescent picaresque and tragic forms in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and his short stories. In De Chiara's nuanced, innovative "An Adolescent Explosive Crossing," she sees Díaz's focus on the character spaces of Yunior de Las Casas and Oscar De León as a way for him to "trace a personal reconnaissance of the psycho-geographical territory" in which they move in Santo Domingo, D.R. and Central New Jersey. Following the feminist and psychoanalytical work on the theory of the novel by Julia Kristeva, De Chiara not only offers a wonderful way of examining the figures of Yunior and Oscar as adolescents that shape the overall form of the novel's "openness" to all possibilities that is not yet completely formed but as symbolizing the novel's very

[6] The Insular Cases are usually considered to include only the original six opinions issued concerning territories acquired through the 1898 Treaty of Paris. However, others have expanded the list to include *De Lima v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 1 (1901); *Goetze v. United States*, 182 U.S. 221 (1901); *Dooley v. United States*, 182 U.S. 222 (1901); *Armstrong v. United States*, 182 U.S. 243 (1901*Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901); *Huus v. New York and Porto Rico Steamship Co.*, 182 U.S. 392 (1901); *Dooley v. United States*, 183 U.S. 151 (1901); *Fourteen Diamond Rings v. United States*, 183 U.S. 176 (1901); and *Hawaii v. Mankichi*, 190 U.S. 197 (1903). Professor Pedro Malavet has written that while many experts include cases from 1903 to 1979, most scholars limit the number of cases in the list to the original six. See *America's Colony: The Political and Cultural Conflict Between the United States and Puerto Rico* (2004).

[7] See Gerald Torres' "Coatlicue, Nepantla, and Conocimeinto," *Michigan Law Revie*w.

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open psychic direction, what she calls "the transitional quality of adolescence." De Chiara thus sees Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as a novel centrally about the psychologicalization of Yunior and Oscar's trauma (as well of the novel's many minoritized characters such as Lola and the young Belicia), beginning with the articulation of adolescence as a psychoanalytical as well as a literary category. She then analyzes the way a novel like Díaz's constructs the problem of a subject's interiority in adolescence to young adulthood, a state, she suggests is often marked by confidence and vulnerability. If De Chiara emphasizes the "positioning" of Yunior and Oscar as adolescents, she also asks us to examine Díaz's "postcolonial" and "gendered" adolescent "economy of writing." She concludes that the open "polyphony" of Díaz's novel—its ambivalences, desires, and its doses of trauma and sadomasochism—owes much to its very open-adolescent structure, where Díaz gracefully moves from the metonymic object of desire to the metaphorical object of decolonial love.

With Díaz's pícaros Yunior and Oscar, awakened by adolescence, they reproduce not only the dramaturgy of adolescent fantasies but also the inscription of a postcolonial political unconscious content that blossoms throughout the novel. Briefly, De Chiara examines the relation between novelistic writing and Díaz's representing the experiences of adolescence as "an open structure." It is this blend of the postcolonial literary condition with the feminist psychoanalytic condition that she writes about. "It is the boundless freedom of adolescence," she concludes, that "long span of time, the *half-life* before adulthood, which has always been the feverish period of falling in love and *intimacy*." Like the very porous, incomplete fluid semiotic system without boundaries that is the novel, decolonial love, she suggests, for Díaz's characters is "always" a writing about adolescent phantasmatic desire, and, as such, Díaz and his characters Yunior and Oscar—who are aspiring writers in their own right throughout *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*—are always producing a (post)(de)colonial "love-intoxicated writing."

Finally, Ato Quayson in his stunning essay, "Fukú and the Tragic Intertext: *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," addresses Díaz's novel as offering what he sees as a series of tragic morphologies. Moreover, he offers us a critical practice of reading by which to oscillate between the tragic tradition, from Aristotle to Fanon to Nussbaum, to Díaz's postcolonial text, by paying equal attention to both in terms of their expression and their "material-historical" condition—qualities, he believes, that are inherent to the traditions of tragedy and postcoloniality. His central focus is on impediments to what he calls "the ethical choice-making" in Díaz's character system of minor characters, Abelard and Belicia. For Díaz's characters, especially the Cabral Leóns, Quayson suggests that "the real tragedy is not that of simply laboring under the fukú [a curse placed on the Cabral León family by Trujillo's great violence and torture] but the fact of being human in an unideal and violent world, and thus, in the words of Donne's "Death be not proud," of being "slave to fate, chance, king's and desperate men."

Quayson thus closely reads Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as an "intertext," interleafing Greek tragedies such as Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, for "in Sophocles' play the source of the protagonist's tragedy is extremely difficult to establish without constant anticipation of alternative explanations, much like

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what Yunior wants to suggest for Abelard and his clan." Quayson also points to Díaz's references in the novel to Aeschylus's House of Atreus and *The Oresteia* in the sections of the novel in which Díaz deals with the tragedies of Abelard. But at the same time, Quayson suggests that if we think of Díaz's novel as his animating methods for establishing what he calls "the interleafing" and as "interconnectivity,"[8] we can see Díaz's interleafing and interconnecting with what he recently alluded to in one of his "StoryWorlds with Junot Díaz" posts in which he discusses the importance of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* as models for his concept of decolonial love. It goes without saying that Quayson never reads Díaz's ambitious and magisterial novel as illustrative of some exclusive regional or enclave mentality; instead, he shows how the novel illuminates what he calls "ethico-aesthetics," not just misery and suffering, but the many questions which have been present in traditions of tragedy from Aristotle to Fanon. It is "this expanded view" of ethico-aesthetics and of the "ethical choice" as Aristotle established in the *Ethics* as an aspect of *eudaimonia*—virtue, happiness, and also as flourishing—that Quayson argues that "Díaz illustrates so cogently in his novel. When the teenage Belicia falls in love with The Gangster, she acquires a new sense of flourishing." To understand Sophocles or Aeschylus, I imagine Quayson telling his students, read Junot Díaz.

I. Coda: Going *beyond* Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.*

As a way of concluding, I find it necessary to provide a way of going *beyond* Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* By this I do not mean going *past* his novel—a novel that, in a *New York Time*s poll (2024), writers and critics from around the world named Díaz's novel as one of the top eleven novels of the twenty-first century—but instead looking to writings Díaz has completed very recently and connecting them to his broader imaginative project.

After my book on Díaz was published, Díaz released a series of over one hundred posts entitled "StoryWorlds With Junot Díaz," on Substack, a website that allows writers, journalists, and other content creators to publish their posts and earn money from subscribers. Over the past year, Díaz has written over one hundred posts. Through "StoryWorlds With Junot Díaz," Díaz has shared what he describes as "un chin about myself y un chon" about how he sees "the art of writing." He wanted to differentiate his Substack posts from the "nuts and bolts" creative writing advice that he often offers in his creative writing seminars at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, instead offering "something a little more philosophical,"—what I interpret to mean an array of lenses and maps that aspiring writers could glean as needed. In recent months, I have read Díaz's writings, which have covered everything from what he calls the "Fundamentals of Story"—including "Character and Conflict" "Character Space," and "Blocking time and Consequentiality"—to posts about "Creating Characters of Color" and

[8] See the Conclusion to Ato Quayson's *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), 301–302.

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"How the Fantastic Four Will Save Your Novel." My favorites posts, however, have been his insightful reflections on what he calls the "Lost Homeworlds of Octavia Butler and Toni Morrison" and on the birth of "Decolonial Love," a genealogy of decolonial love that he gleaned by closely reading the complete novels by Toni Morrison and Arundhati Roy.

Through this Substack series, Díaz also offers short, anti-memoirs or auto-historias, including "Father Furioso," a piece focused on his father, who he describes as "a truly messed up dude," shipwrecked by the Dominican Republic's "1965 Civil War." In that post, Díaz meditates on why it took him years before he finally "understood who it was he was fighting" against: "My father," "my [older] brother, and most of all," Díaz, himself. Díaz also offers a portrait of his mother entitled "Mother Unknown." Here, Díaz recalls how, during his summers away from his undergraduate studies at Rutgers University, he worked at the local "steel mill" named Raritan Steel Mill, on Elm Street. Díaz recalls "en pocas palabras, a tough draining job." Because he did not own a car, his commute involved taking an hour-long bus ride to work from Sayreville to Perth Amboy, then a 45-minute walk from the bus stop to his apartment building London Terrace in Parlin. But as Díaz tells us, he is not sharing this to give readers an ethnographic tour of Central New Jersey. "Seems," he remembers, his mother who had "a bullshit paying assembly line job in South River (opposite direction from Perth Amboy)" always "arrived at the bus stop ten minutes" before Díaz. "For a few weeks that steel mill summer," he concludes, "I caught up to her and we walked together. 1.7 miles in total, up through Sayreville and then across Route 9 and then at last the covered landfill and we were home." After reading Díaz's post, I wrote to him in the Storyworlds' comment section, mentioning that the reflection captured what I called in my book "Junot Díaz Country." Díaz replied, simply, "JD, you ain't lying."

One of the central heartlands of Díaz's fictional world is Central New Jersey, Parlin's landfill, where the real and intensely imaginary London Terrace apartments are located. When I first visited Junot Díaz Country during one of my initial ethnographic-like research visits to Diaz's home in Parlin, he had emailed me and insisted that I stand behind one of the London Terrace basement apartments, look out in the direction of the now closed landfill, and imagine it on fire. This is the apocalyptic, Hieronymus Bosch-like Parlin, N.J. world Díaz woke up to every morning: "A toxic landfill on fire," he wrote.

Díaz's latest short story, "The Ghosts of Gloria Lara,"(*New Yorker*, 2023) is set in Parlin's London Terrace and features characters readers of his fiction will recognize—Yunior de Las Casas, Virta, his mother, and Rafa, his brother, who is dying from cancer. Here, the Piglia model of the short story that I discussed earlier in the essay (and, in more detail in my book), can bring an aspect of Díaz's originality into focus. How, again, does he write two stories in one? Stories that do not ever resolve the tension between the cuento's visible and secret story. The visible story begins in 1980; Yunior is 11 years old, and the political atmosphere he is steeped in is palpable. Yunior is bonding with his mother, listening to his father's short-wave radio, and listening to the patriarch respond aloud to what he's reading in the Spanish newspapers. Yunior's father—as we know—is a rabid supporter of the D.R.'s multiple right-wing regimes. As the story unfolds, we also

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learn that Virta's brother was a radical leftist who was killed in the D.R., shortly after the family had emigrated to the United States.

The cuento continues when Yunior hears on Spanish-language radio that on February 27, 1980, a group of Colombian guerillas affiliated with the M-19 revolutionaries had seized the Dominican Embassy in Bogotá and had taken the attendees hostage. Yunior becomes obsessed with what is happening in Colombia and the leftist guerillas themselves. Later, in 1985, Yunior then turns to his secret story: his family lived next door to a Colombian neighbor in Apartment building 41. Then, a few years later, we learn from Yunior that his neighbor's brother Mr. Wilson, (as his mother formally calls him), joined his brother with his son in London Terrace. This is also the year that Yunior's older brother is being treated (unsuccessfully) for cancer. "1985 was my family's annus horribillis the last year of my brother's life," Yunior adds. While Virta is worried about and distracted by Rafa's life chances, her husband is mostly absent. The short story's secret story thus begins to take shape. Virta becomes close to her neighbor, Mr. Wilson, who once had been a teacher of Latin in Colombia; their blossoming friendship and precious affection for each other becomes the narrative's catalyst. "I don't think my mother had ever talked so much in her life," Yunior notes. In hindsight, he believes "it was some wild Romeo shit."

It is not until the mid-way point of the visible and secret story that readers find out the meaning of the story's title: Gloria Lara de Echeveria was a Colombian politician, who, in 1982, was kidnapped and eventually murdered. In Díaz's short story, investigators discover that a leftist group Mr. Wilson once supported in Colombia was involved. "Por casualidad," Díaz's Yunior writes, Mr. Wilson, "had the misfortune of being caught up in the M-19's seizing the Embassy." Meanwhile, Yunior, ever the family's chronicler, does not learn the full details until many years later after Mr. Wilson has left the London Terrace apartments and the United States. He wonders if Mr. Wilson's brutal tortures by the Colombian government had destroyed the Colombian's sense of self and world. What he recalls and documents is the surreal scene in which Mr. Wilson in a "borracho" (drunken) stupor mistakes Yunior's apartment home for his own. Yunior and a dying Rafa, fearing a burglar, confront the Colombian Wilson, with Yunior waving one of the many guns his father, a former D.R. policeman, had left behind when he abandoned the family. The gun Yunior brandishes unleashes the political unconscious and repressed crimes, tortures, and ghosts in the D.R., Colombia, and London Terrace.

In "The Ghosts of Gloria Lara," then, the "secret story," as Piglia might argue, sinks away before it finally emerges. The logic of "ficciones" in Díaz's short story emerges up to a certain point, then recedes. This strategy prolongs the narrative tension and wonder of the Díaz short story by planting questions in the reader's mind: "So what," "Yunior asks, "was [happening] between" Mr. Wilson and his mother? Rafa thinks the whole thing "was a hoot." "Maybe you can bring my coffin to the wedding," Yunior recalls his brother saying to his mother. Who, or what, was Mr. Wilson for Virta? Why did Mr. Wilson produce such a powerful effect or spell on her? Was he really only "un amigo, nada más," as Virta defends herself to her sons? Díaz keeps us wondering: what happens to love? What kind of story about decolonial love will this be? Is this a Colombian-like love story,

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elegantly fashioned out of the mature love of Mr. Wilson and Virta, who have suffered tremendous loss, grief, and sadness during their lives in Colombia, the D.R., and Central New Jersey? Could this be the high-flown fiery love that resembles cholera in all its symptoms, pain, and melancholia, as the novelist Gabriel García Márquez, an avid supporter of M-19 Colombian revolutionary groups, once dramatized for us in *El Amor en los Tiempos Del Cólera* (1985)?

What these questions make clear, spurred as they are by Díaz's most recent imaginative writings and his body of work as a whole, is that the shape and histories of our world demand fictions that can accommodate the unresolved, the lingering, the radioactive, and ghostlike. Fictions like "The Ghosts of Gloria Lara," "Monstro," *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and the many other narratives mentioned here and in my book in greater detail. I, for one, am eager to see where Díaz's writing goes next. And again, I am grateful that my reflections on his work, encapsulated in *Junot Díaz: On the Half-Life of Love*, have been met here with skillful, intellectually adventurous, and expansive considerations by such masterful scholars.

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