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De-Centering the Dictator: Trujillo Narratives and Articulating Resistance in

Angie Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee* and Junot Díaz's

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Kelsy A. Mortensen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

De-Centering the Dictator: Trujillo Narratives and Articulating Resistance in  
Angie Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee* and Junot Díaz's  
*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

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Narratives of resisting the Trujillo regime are so prevalent in Dominican-American literature that it seems Dominican-American authors must write about Trujillo to be deemed authentically Dominican-American. Within these Trujillo narratives there seems to be two main ways to talk about resistance. "The resistance," an organized entity that actively and consciously opposes the Trujillo regime, can be seen in stories like those told about the Mirabal sisters. The other resistance narrates how characters capitalize on opportunities to disrupt business or political functions, thus disrupting the Trujillo machine. This resistance works much like Ben Highmore's explanation of de Certeau's resistance in that "it limits flows and dissipates energies" (104). Characters from the socio-economic lower-class typically use this type of resistance because they are not recognized by nor allowed direct access to the regime. My thesis focuses on the latter type of resistance through my study of Angie Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Both authors narrate instances of unrecognized resistance against Trujillo, but they also articulate modern resistance to economic, racial, and gender pressures, such as materialism and hyper-masculinity, through Trujillo narratives. While these narratives create a space for Dominican-Americans of different gender, class, and race, they also create Trujillo as a marker of Dominican literature, perpetuating the idea of Trujillo as inextricably connected to Dominican identity and obfuscating more complex issues of race and gender in Dominican culture.

Keywords: Angie Cruz, Junot Díaz, Rafael Trujillo, social resistance, Dominican-American

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## Dominican-American Literature and Resistance Narratives

References to the dictator Rafael Trujillo and his despotic thirty permeate Dominican-American fiction. General Rafael Trujillo came into power in 1930 and, as Deborah Pacini Hernandez accurately notes, he “set about to acquire absolute political power” (36). During his reign, thousands were massacred in order to cleanse the Dominican Republic of Haitians; his detractors were imprisoned and tortured or murdered; and Dominicans lived in fear of each other, suspicious that their neighbors were spying on them for the regime. Trujillo controlled everything from the economic system (making himself the richest man on the island) to the production and broadcasting of his favorite music, merengue (Pacini Hernandez 36). While narratives about the Trujillato have existed since the dictator’s demise in 1961, Julia Alvarez’s books *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1995) instigated a tradition of Trujillo trauma narratives within Dominican-American literature.

Since Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies*, which narrates the lives of the Mirabal sisters who were executed for resisting the regime, Dominican-American novels gained popularity in mainstream literature, but so did the subject of Trujillo. As Trenton Hickman notes, it seems that Dominican-American authors are obligated to write at least one novel that includes Trujillo (157). Angie Cruz acknowledges at the back of her novel *Let It Rain Coffee*, “This fiction was inspired by some historical facts, lots of cuentos from people’s lips and from the memory our bodies carry” (291). For Cruz, an inclusion of a Trujillo narrative is only natural because it is part of her history, but others are not so receptive to the idea. It has become such a strong tradition that Junot Díaz complained in an interview, “Because I haven’t written about Trujillo, in the Dominican Republic it’s like ‘Oh, you’re not political’” (qtd. in Hickman 157).

Still, Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* does include Trujillo and, as Díaz implies, the novel is political.

In repeating these narratives—and with a steadily growing canon of literature about Trujillo, these narratives are clearly repeating—the Trujillo regime becomes more than a “historical memory” but bleeds into the realm of “myths of common origins” (Smith 109). Dominican-American authors perpetuate Trujillo's image in a way that reaffirms him as more than a man—as a presence—which further places him in the realm of a mythical figure. Cruz illustrates the lasting presence of Trujillo in a conversation between her main character Don Chan and his son Santo that critiques Trujillo's propaganda. Don Chan sarcastically repeats the propagandist phrase “*We Live in Happiness Thanks to Trujillo,*” and then adds “You think people believed that bullshit?” (27). He clearly holds no fond nostalgia for Trujillo; however, when Santo repeats another propagandist phrase Don Chan responds, “Be careful. You say it too much, even you’ll start believing it” (27). Don Chan may have never believed Trujillo to be a benevolent dictator, but he still retains an apprehension of the extent of Trujillo’s power—enough so that he superstitiously cringes at phrases that support Trujillo, as if Trujillo could regain power from beyond the grave. What Don Chan does not seem to realize is that he perpetuates the idea that Trujillo holding power even after death. In this way, Trujillo's propaganda still works. In trying to ward off an interpretation of the dictator as benevolent, Don Chan legitimizes the fear that Trujillo is more than a man.

Likewise, Díaz's portrayal of Trujillo reinforces him as some sort of mythical force—the embodiment of the fukú, or curse, that haunts Dominicans. Although Díaz talks specifically of “The Fall” for Oscar's family, his connection of the dissolution of the Cabral family with Abelard's imprisonment and the immigration of the family to the Trujillato suggests that Trujillo,

if not a direct causation, is at least the physical manifestation of the origins of both Dominican trauma and diaspora. Through Yunió, Trujillo is called "a high priest" of the curse (2), sharing a bond with the curse so that "[i]f you even thought a bad thing about Trujillo, *fuá*, a hurricane would sweep your family out to sea" (3). He even claims JFK's death and Vietnam were repercussions of U. S. involvement in the assassination of Trujillo (4). Díaz concisely explains Trujillo with "our Sauron," the all-seeing, evil lord from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Granted, Díaz's novel consistently uses mysticism, fantasy, and sci-fi to translate the trauma of events throughout the novel, but presenting Trujillo as the Dominican Sauron and imagining him as inextricably tied to fukú grants him not only power beyond death, but further embeds him as part of Dominican culture—paradoxically giving him the power he sought.

The problem of perpetuation is not new to scholarship about Dominican-American literature<sup>1</sup>. Richard Patterson recognizes that authors like Edwidge Danticat, Julia Alvarez, and Mario Vargas Llosa resurrect Trujillo in their narratives, but that they do so to denounce Trujillo so that he "will live on forever as the Goat" (234-35). He sees these authors keeping Trujillo alive to revise Trujillo's power, so that Trujillo is no longer god but devil. Perhaps Patterson is suggesting that demonizing a force allows one to have power over it, but fifty years after Trujillo's reign this demonization is less productive because it keeps Trujillo and his ideals in the conversation. Gloria Anzaldúa addresses the issue of continuous reaction in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*: "A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed. . . . All reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority . . . it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life" (78). She goes on to call for a movement past reaction that favors more possibilities of defining oneself than as opposed to a set of ideas (78-



80). There's no longer a question of whether or not Trujillo was benevolent—we know he was not—but a question of why we bother to continue talking about him. While the demonization of Trujillo may have been productive at one time, continuing to keep Trujillo alive as any kind of force perpetuates a struggle with no victor. Trujillo, as a man, will not return to reclaim the Dominican Republic; however, the continual resurrection of his ideals, even if it means to reject them, requires Dominican-Americans to define themselves against Trujillo, or worse as “ten million trujillos” (Díaz 324). Perpetuating him as “goat” does not minimize his power, but re-categorizes it as tyrannical. Certainly, recognizing that Trujillo was oppressive was necessary to destroy the association he tried to create with divinity, but granting him immortality and seeing him as inextricably tied to Dominican culture, even in a negative sense, serves the same purpose he sought in his propagandist merengues. Either way, he is a central fixture in Dominican culture.

However, I would contend that Dominican-American literature can and, in fact, is trying to move past Trujillo, but this can only happen if his importance with new authors and in scholarship is minimized. The new wave of Dominican-American authors like Junot Díaz and Angie Cruz include Trujillo narratives in a way that focuses on how different social classes once resisted the Trujillo regime. Still, Cruz and Díaz narrate these past resistances in order to articulate resistance against social issues plaguing Dominican-Americans today such as cultural beliefs that perpetuate violence between genders and a modern global capitalism that marginalizes and exploits immigrants and third-world workers, rather than to deconstruct Trujillo's power.

The focus on resistance in Dominican-American fiction does not begin with Díaz and Cruz. Starting with Alvarez, Dominican-American authors discuss resistance in two distinct

ways. The first type of resistance is “the Resistance,” an organized entity that actively and consciously opposes the Trujillo regime. Alvarez's novel about the Mirabal sisters—Patria, Dedé, Minerva, and María Teresa—who worked as part of an underground organization to bring down Trujillo's regime until three of the sisters were murdered in 1960 exemplify “the Resistance.” Primarily middle or upper-class characters participate in “the Resistance” because the upper-class has access to and is recognized by the regime. Alvarez can portray the Mirabal sisters as pivotal to the downfall of Trujillo because they were part of the social class that dealt with Trujillo the person and were recognized as people, thus enabling their resistance to be recognized by the regime. This recognition both endangers and empowers the upper-class. On the one hand, being recognized means that the regime is watching for any indication that the individual is willing to undermine Trujillo's authority; on the other hand, recognition can also be read as the regime deeming these individuals as a threat and such close attention allows for the higher-class individuals to make a statement of defiance. For example, Abelard, Díaz's higher-class character and the cause of the Cabral's family downfall, hides his beautiful daughter from Trujillo, constantly worrying that her absence from social settings will be seen as defiance. Still, when Abelard gets an invitation that explicitly asks for her presence, he defies Trujillo's will by choosing to leave her home and thus protecting her from Trujillo's advances (211-33), an act of resistance that Trujillo both recognizes and punishes.

Although there are some instances of lower-class characters wanting to participate in “the Resistance,” they are limited as to how and when this type of resistance can take place, leading them to participate in the second type of resistance. For example, in *Let It Rain Coffee*, Cruz frequently refers to the Invisible Ones which is a group of campesinos that unites to look after the welfare of their community. Don Chan sees this group as revolutionary, but their distance

from Trujillo and the Balaguer government affects the way that Don Chan and his revolutionary group, the Invisible Ones, are able to resist. Cruz's Invisible Ones only know Trujillo through the violence he's enacted against them, making him more of a force than a man. So while Minerva shows defiance by literally slapping Trujillo (Alvarez 100), Don Chan and the Invisible Ones can only dream of such direct confrontation. The closest the group comes to defying Trujillo himself is by Don Chan sneaking into what he thinks is Trujillo's palace to steal an object. This simple and ultimately meaningless act makes Don Chan a hero in his village because "to steal a souvenir from under the president's nose was a death sentence, as far as [the villagers] were concerned" (36). The villagers' physical separation from Trujillo, instead of allowing the villagers more freedom to conspire against the regime, actually works to restrict how they can participate in "the Resistance" because they cannot confront a physical, mortal being. Thus, the lower-class characters in both Díaz's and Cruz's work must find different means of resisting the regime by disrupting the social machine that the Trujillato controls.

This second type of resistance found in Dominican-American novels, which Cruz and Díaz seem to use the most, narrates how characters capitalize on opportunities to break up business or political functions, thus disrupting the Trujillo machine. It more typically applies to the lower-class because they are not allowed the same recognition as the upper-class. This phenomenon is best explained by Michel de Certeau's theory of "everyday practices." In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau claims ordinary people resist being reduced to cogs in a social machine by disrupting it through what he calls "everyday practices." De Certeau gives a complicated explanation of how ordinary people are "everyman" and "nobody"; however, a more functional definition would be the weak, who belong marginalized groups forced to work within a system governed by the strong (xvii). To put it in more concrete terms, ordinary people

are those who do not have the power or "means to challenge" their oppressor (xiii). For Díaz, the ordinary man encompasses those who cannot enjoy Dominican summers: "the poor, the dark, the jobless, the sick, the Haitian, their children, the bateys, the kids that certain Canadian, American, German, and Italian tourists love to rape" (272). While de Certeau interchanges the term "weak" with "ordinary man" that does not mean that these marginalized groups are passive victims, but rather that their resistance takes another form.

According to de Certeau, when people are forced to work within a system, they will use the system for different means than for what it was intended. The difference between "the Resistance" and resistance is a difference between what de Certeau calls "strategies" and "tactics." A "strategy" is "possible when a subject of will and power . . . can be isolated from an 'environment.' A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations that are distinct from it" (xix). In other words, in order to have strategy, the individual or group must own a place that makes them distinct from whatever system they try to oppose. "The Resistance" might be deemed as strategic in that those who are part of the resistance are formally recognized by the Trujillo regime as separate from the regime and thus as opposing it. A "tactic," on the other hand, does not have a place because it "cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality" (xix). "Tactics" are thus necessary for individuals or groups who are not recognized as separate from the system, but rather are seen as cogs in the social machine. Their purpose in using tactics is to create a resistance, as Ben Highmore explains, that "limits flows and dissipates energies" (104). It is tempting to see this resistance, which I'll refer to as tactical resistance, as a metaphorical wrench in the machine, but this resistance is even more subversive and subtle. Rather, tactical resistance is more like parts of the

machine working on alternative or oppositional purposes. A prime example of this resistance that de Certeau explicates is called “la perruque.” According to de Certeau, “*La perruque* is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer” and “the worker who indulges in *la perruque* actually diverts time (not goods, since he uses only scraps) from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit” (25). Tactical resistance may or may not be noticed by the social machine, but it does keep the machine from working as efficiently as possible and consequently breaks away from the restrictions of the machine in these temporary moments of freedom.

The idea that resistance can be hidden in everyday acts is not new to Dominican and Dominican-American studies. Julie A. Sellers, Paul Austerlitz, and Deborah Pacini Hernandez, three scholars of Dominican music, explored the implications of Trujillo using merengue, a popular dance and musical form inextricably connected to Dominican culture, to insinuate himself into Dominican culture. In 1936, Trujillo had merengue decreed as the national music of the Dominican Republic (Sellers 93). Sellers, Austerlitz and Pacini Hernandez all point out that a significant amount of the merengue produced during Trujillo’s rule was propaganda, praising his benevolence and the glory he had brought to the Dominican Republic. Merengue had enough of a root within Dominican culture that Trujillo could use it to propagate himself to all Dominicans. By controlling the production of merengue so that the songs praised him or his government, Trujillo insinuated himself as part of the culture and united Dominicans under his authority. However, Dominicans did not let Trujillo's control over the production and even the broadcasting of merengue deny them cultural ownership over merengue. How some Dominicans received Trujillo's propagandist music exemplifies the idea of tactical resistance. Since boycotting the official songs may not have been an option for anyone who wanted to live,

Austerlitz explains that Dominicans under the regime could separate the propaganda of the songs from their aesthetic quality (61). Quoting a person “who had expressed deference to Trujillo,” Austerlitz writes, “People do not hear the merengue ‘San Cristóbal’ as a Trujilloist merengue. Rather, they think of its beauty” (62). Trujillo could control the production of the song, but not how Dominicans received it. After Trujillo’s death, merengue became a popular forum to criticize the dictator. The critique of Trujillo through his favorite music demonstrates the people regaining control of their culture. Instead of rejecting the musical form and thus reacting against Trujillo, many Dominican musicians after Trujillo became part the *nueva canción* movement which Mark Mattern claims began in Chile as “a dual project of roots recovery and social criticism” (qtd. in Sellers 142). The Dominican side of *nueva canción*, also known as “Convite,” used merengue as a medium for social, cultural and political critique, holding a music festival in 1974 to challenge the corrupt political system that kept Joaquín Balaguer, a man closely associated with Trujillo, in presidency for eight years (Sellers 142). Thus, what many Dominicans did was maintain their own idea of merengue and by representation, Dominican culture, until that form could be used against the Trujillato.

As Dominican-American novelists have tried to represent the lower-class, especially under the Trujillo regime, descriptions of tactical resistance have become more common place. There are several instances in Díaz's collection of short stories, *Drown*, of tactical resistance such as a mover who passes judgment on snobby customers by messing up their bathroom. However, in terms of narrating a history of resistance, Cruz's account of the “Invisible Ones” effectively illustrates the dynamics of tactical resistance to the Trujillato by describing the small hindrances the villagers cause their employers. After Trujillo's downfall, the nation is still run by his cronies

like Balaguer, who do not recognize nor allow the Invisible Ones direct access to the government and the changes taking place, so they find other ways to protest:

And while the Invisible Ones scrubbed floors, poured drinks, chauffeured cars, trimmed gardens, shined shoes, painted walls, and more, they were taking notes, making maps, plans of streets and important estates. For what, they weren't sure, but Don Chan insisted they stayed alert and learn everything they could in preparation. . . . Women were not sleeping with married men, in solidarity with other women; men were not talking to their friends who beat their wives, employers who abused their workers were finding centipedes in their shoes. Employer's gas tanks were emptied in the middle of the night, their electricity lines were being tapped into, their clothes were being burned with irons by workers. (61)

Because they lack the means to openly resist the government, they must sabotage the system that supports it. Like the tactical resistance de Certeau describes, the Invisible Ones continue to do their work but are searching for opportunities to disrupt the system by disrupting daily functions. Granted, it is highly unlikely that the government even recognizes this rebellion. Most of what the Invisible Ones do only causes recognizable inconvenience to their employers but their actions do not seem to drastically affect the system as a whole. In discussing dominant, residual, and emergent hegemonies, Raymond Williams explains that "there is always, though in varying degrees, practical consciousness, in specific relationships, specific skills, specific perceptions, that is unquestionably social and that" the dominant hegemony, in this case the remnants of the Trujillato, "neglects, excludes, represses, or simply fails to recognize" (125). Basically, no dominating system can control everything. Some may argue then, that the Invisible Ones are

allowed their perceived resistance because the regime chooses to ignore them, thus making their resistance insignificant. However, the Trujillato, if it did not try to outright control everyday occurrences, at least used those occurrences to its advantage. As Lauren Derby argues, Trujillo's power was measured as much by his sexual conquests as it was by his dominance over other men and that this spectacle of his sexuality "brought him respect and was a key element in his legitimacy" (1113). Thus, it is significant that the Invisible Ones reject ideas of sexuality that encompasses Trujillismo when "[w]omen were not sleeping with married men, in solidarity with other women" (Cruz 61). This act alone undermines Trujillo's method of control and asserts a new value into the system that given enough time and opportunities will reshape the system. After all, the existence of both residual and emergent hegemonies suggests that systems do change, but that these changes are gradual—almost imperceptible—but, as Williams argues, emergent culture “is in effect pre-emergence, active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named” (126). Thus, the subversive ideas, values, and practices expressed in everyday practices could be seen as more effective than “the Resistance” because the dominant culture does not recognize it, but all the while, these practices are wearing down the mechanisms of the system by creating disturbances to the flow of work or practiced values.

### **Storytelling as Resistance**

In Cruz's novel, the Invisible Ones actively and consciously find ways to subvert the system; however, de Certeau, Cruz, and Díaz are interested in another, less conscious tactical resistance: storytelling. Díaz and Cruz both recognize a relationship between stories and oppression, but question how effective stories are in overthrowing dictators or changing tyrannical social systems.



Cruz seems to pay particular attention to how stories are a political function for the lower-class, or, as de Certeau would call them, “everyday people.” Every one of Cruz's characters tells a story, but Don Chan becomes the most memorable storyteller in *Let It Rain Coffee* because his stories are most directly linked towards a recognizable resistance. Already a well-known storyteller in his own village, Don Chan must live up to his own claims of invisibility by sneaking into Trujillo's palace. Of course, he then shares his story with his village about sneaking into the palace, leading to the creation of the Invisible Ones (36-41). He becomes well-known for his storytelling, but he is in danger even after Trujillo's death, so people begin to call him a medicine man “to explain the crowds that sometimes gathered in the small town park filled with processions for saints and dances for palo” (65). While the title of medicine man is meant as a cover, Don Chan and others begin to see it as the truth: “So popular had the parties of Los Llanos become, high government officials and television celebrities called on him to cure their ailments. Don Chan cured everything from bleeding rectums to impotence” (65). Don Chan's power lies in his ability to tell stories. It is how he can persuade people, move them to start a resistance, and even to give counsel to important figures despite his humble upbringings. But even as Cruz points to his power through storytelling, there is a critique of the veracity of his stories. After all, Don Chan is not truly a medicine man and, as he later finds out, he did not even sneak into Trujillo's palace but into a random mansion. While his stories do have power, they only have power so long as his listeners believe that he is actually a medicine man or that he went to Trujillo's palace. Don Chan does not mind fooling the rich fools who seek his medical guidance; however, when he discovers that his Trujillo story is not true, he fears that he has led “the Invisible Ones into a war that could never be won” (176). Don Chan led young men and women into fighting against the U.S. occupation, but his faith in their goal is shaken because the

origin story of the group did not actually happen. Through Don Chan, Cruz seems to suggest that stories are powerful because they shape how one views the world, but Cruz also questions what happens when those stories are removed from reality. For Don Chan, the disproof of his story led him to question the whole plausibility of his resistance. His story still had the power to move the villagers to open rebellion, but Don Chan fears the consequences for a power he now sees as unfounded.

However, de Certeau would disagree that veracity is necessary to enact resistance through stories. The very action of telling a story, regardless of its content, disrupts the social machine because it is escaping the present to a non-descript past, breaking up linearity. De Certeau claims that a story “is a detour by the way of a past . . . made in order to take advantage of an occasion and to modify an equilibrium by taking it by surprise” (79). In other words, storytelling is a useful tactic because it breaks up the linearity of time and can be told to give the teller control of a situation whenever the opportunity arises. Additionally, de Certeau writes, “[I]n narration, it is no longer a question of approaching a ‘reality’ . . . as closely as possible and making the text acceptable through the ‘real’ that it exhibits. On the contrary, narrated history creates a fictional space. It moves away from the ‘real’—or rather it pretends to escape present circumstances” (79). For de Certeau, the removal from reality is exactly what makes stories a part of tactical resistance because it allows tellers and listeners to escape the confines of the social machine—a narrative expression of “la perruque” that uses the ideas of the present to create or recreate a time and place that belongs to the participants of the storytelling. This tactic of resistance may have insufficient impact by traditional Marxist standards, but it proves to be more consequential than a resistance that is more akin to cultural resiliency—a resistance

theorists like Homi Bhabha would describe (206-09). These breaks from the social machine that tactical resistance facilitates accumulate and gradually reshape its system.

Through the narrator Yunior, Díaz examines the need and power of telling stories. Díaz's treatment of stories, especially their importance for marginalized people like the nerd, Oscar, or the poor of the Dominican Republic, displays ambivalence towards storytelling. In the middle of the novel, Yunior breaks away from Oscar and his sister's storyline to talk about the fukú placed upon the family. In short, Oscar's mother was the third daughter of a wealthy intellectual, but her father never saw her because he was thrown into jail for supposedly telling a joke about the Trujillo regime. After that, her mother died, her sisters disappeared or were found dead, and she became a malcriada, a servant girl in the campesino. There are a few suspicions about what was behind the family's down fall, but many believe Trujillo put a fukú on the family because Abelard would not introduce his eldest daughter to Trujillo (243). As Yunior points out, "The Girl Trujillo Wanted" is a common story for Dominicans to tell: "There's one of these bellaco tales in almost everybody's hometown. It's one of those easy stories because in essence *it explains it all*. Trujillo took your houses, your properties, put your pops and your moms in jail? Well, it was because he wanted to fuck the beautiful daughter of the house! And your family wouldn't let him!" (244). Yunior seems skeptical of any story that attempts to provide an explanation. His description of how nearly everyone knows a story about some family doomed because they would not sacrifice their daughter's honor to Trujillo suggests that these are merely sensationalized tales to make people feel better.

Yunior, however, still places some importance on stories so long as those stories do not attempt to explain. Rather, he favors stories that acknowledge an inability to give closure, but point to possibilities and lost knowledge. He teases the reader, and sometimes teases himself,

with the promise of lost or untold stories. For instance, while Yunior talks about the most accepted version of why Oscar's family was cursed, he cannot help but introduce an alternative, more mysterious story of why the Cabral family became cursed because the holes in the narrative allow for more possibilities. He gives the warning, “if you're looking for a full story, I don't have it. Oscar searched for it too, in his last days, and it's not certain whether he found it either” (243). According to Yunior, Abelard, Oscar's grandfather, was writing a book when Trujillo had him arrested. This book “was an exposé of the supernatural roots of the Trujillo regime! A book about the Dark Powers of the President, a book in which Abelard argued that the tales the common people told about the president—that he was supernatural, that he was not human—may in some ways have been *true*” (245). And of course, this book has been lost. Yunior claims it's just a story, “the kind of shit only a nerd could love” (246), but notes strange coincidences like how even after Abelard was in jail, Trujillo did not pursue Abelard's daughter, and that all of Abelard's books were destroyed: “Not one single example of his handwriting remains” (246). Yunior seems to be more generous towards this alternative story, but still acknowledges, “The Girl Trujillo Wanted might be trite as far as foundation myths go but at least it's something you can really believe in, no? Something real” (246). It is clear that the story behind Abelard's book—this irretrievable knowledge—is a seductive one to Yunior. He may be critical of stories that try to explain it all, but he still desires an explanation and ultimately does not blame others for clinging to a story that seems to give one.

However, his intrigue with untold stories exposes a problem with solutions that are perpetually out of reach. Near the end of the novel, after Oscar is killed by gangsters, Yunior reflects on Oscar's last letter sent to his sister and a package that never came. Oscar writes that the package “contains everything I've written on this journey. Everything I think you will need.

You'll understand when you read my conclusions. (It's the cure to what ails us, he scribbled in the margins. The Cosmo DNA)" (333). While, the mystery behind the Cabral curse is nothing compared to the loss Yuniór feels in the death of Oscar and the disappearance of this supposed solution, Yuniór does not hint at searching for this package as he did for the story about Abelard's book. At this point, it seems that it is only natural that Oscar would die and that his writing would be lost when he was on the verge of some great solution. Oscar's missing package creates the greatest struggle within Yuniór that goes beyond whether or not Oscar really did find a solution. It is a question of whether stories can lead to solutions—that if we continue to tell stories, somehow, some way, someone can gather the knowledge shared to figure out how to solve the problems in the world. Talking about Lola's daughter, Yuniór seems to offer some faith in the continuance in telling stories: "And maybe, just maybe, if she's as smart and as brave as I'm expecting she'll be, she'll take all we've done and all we've learned and add her own insights and she'll put an end to it" (331). However, it would seem that Yuniór is skeptical of passing down stories as if it is a deferral of resistive action because Yuniór only holds this dream when he feels optimistic. When he is not so hopeful, he reads the highlighted panel in Oscar's copy of *Watchmen*:

After the mutant brain has destroyed New York City; after Dr. Manhattan has murdered Rosrschach; after Veidt's plan has succeeded in "saving the world."

Veidt's says: "I did the right thing, didn't I? It all worked out in the end."

And Manhattan, before fading from our Universe, replies: "In the end? Nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends." (331)

All the destructive actions these comic book characters take in order to preserve the world lose meaning when there is no culminating end to justify their actions. Likewise, Yuniór sees futility

in the gathering of knowledge if there is no point at which it leads to a permanent end to tyranny. The problem with putting significance in the stories yet to be told is that it places the solution in the perpetual future. Although Yuniór does not mention stories explicitly, the juxtaposition of his hope that Lola's daughter, the next generation, can make something out of the knowledge of his generation with the quote "Nothing ever ends" (331) shows this false hope in the future. It stands as a discouraging critique in the hope of stories. If the power of stories lies in the accretion of knowledge and understanding, then there would have to be some point when there was enough knowledge to overcome problems of governmental tyranny, economic exploitation, and violent and dysfunctional gender relations. But, if, like Dr. Manhattan claims, there is no end, what is the purpose in telling stories?

While it is tempting to see this question Yuniór's conclusion about stories, it would be a mistake to think that Yuniór has dismissed storytelling as a coping mechanism for oppressed people. This notion does not explain why Yuniór himself has not only written a story, but has also shared and connected various stories about himself and the Cabral's to form an overall narrative. He links writing with a countercurse:

. . . anytime a fukú reared its many heads there was only one way to prevent disaster from coiling around you, only one surefire counterspell that would keep you and your family safe. Not surprisingly, it was a word. A simple word (followed usually by a vigorous crossing of index fingers). Zafa. . . . Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell. (7)

Although Yuniór is still unsure of whether he is completing anything by writing this story, he still writes it. At times, he even hints at the idea that writing stories has helped him turn his life

around, and apparently he believes writing is something that Oscar wanted from him. He relates a recurring dream he has of Oscar with a book: “It takes me awhile before I notice that Oscar's hands are seamless and the book's pages are blank. And that behind his mask his eyes are smiling. *Zafa*” (325). While there are various ways to interpret this dream, the empty book may be an invitation from Oscar for Yuniór to write his story—an invitation to enact the counter-spell, especially since the dream occasionally turns into a threat. Yuniór writes, “Sometimes, though, I look up at him and he has no face and I wake up screaming” (325). The man with no face is a common motif in Díaz's novel that precedes a horrible event—the physical representation of *fukú*. Thus, it seems that Yuniór's fate, whether good or bad, depends on his filling-in the empty pages in order to resist being stripped of his identity and made into a cog in the social machine.

The decision to write Oscar's story, however small an act it may seem, can be seen as tactical resistance. According to de Certeau's theory of “everyday practices,” the act of storytelling or narrating creates a space: the creation and articulation of ways ordinary people can move through a place established by the social machine. Stories do not simply exist; rather, stories “organize walks. They make the journey, before or during the time the feet perform it” (De Certeau 116). De Certeau explicates this by defining “place” and “space”: “A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. . . . A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability” (117). This description might seem vague, but it becomes clearer when compared to space. De Certeau explains, “A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus space is composed of intersections of mobile elements” (117). In other words, space is the various ways one can describe or move

about a place which leads de Certeau to quip, “[s]pace is a practiced place” (117). In telling about a place, one decides which figures are important and how they relate to each other. Thus, a place cannot be described without turning it into a space. For de Certeau, the most interesting idea of space is its instability and its multiplicity: numerous spaces exist within any given place, and any space could change with time, the direction from which one views the place, or with another person's description. While an individual may not be able to escape a place, he or she can dictate how they move about that place, achieving little victories within the system like stealing back some time through stories or using the resources of the system to create an object outside of the purposes of the system, thus creating a space within the place. Following de Certeau's reasoning, what Yuniór accomplishes in writing the story is not an permanent escape from his current circumstances or even control over them, but moments of control and dignity—flashes of victory when he no longer has to pretend to be a hyper-masculine figure, but lets his inner-nerd come through and shows sincere concern towards Oscar that counters the ideals of Trujillismo. While these small victories do not last, the relief they offer for Yuniór and the resistance they present to dominating ideals are all the more significant if, as Dr. Manhattan suggests, there is no end to both governmental and societal oppression.

### **Trujillo Narratives as Resistance to Social Pressures**

While Díaz and Cruz both explore the subversive and reinforcing qualities of storytelling, their novels use Trujillo narratives to articulate how lower-class Dominican immigrants and Dominican-Americans interact with Dominican and American social structures. Cruz, an activist herself, acknowledges the political nature of her writing. In an interview with *Latino Studies* in 2007, Cruz claimed, “I think of [“Ojalá que Llueva Café”]<sup>2</sup> as a political song, a call to the people, a call to the government. What does the pueblo have to do? When is the miracle going to



happen? And I think that [*Let It Rain Coffee*] is about that.” For Cruz, the politics of her novel are not about Trujillo, but how people today can influence their communities for good.

Of course, the tactical resistance of stories does not simply transfer over to novel. In “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” Walter Benjamin laments the dying art of the storyteller which he argues lost its prominence because experience is no longer passed down by word of mouth. The rise of the novel is of no comfort to Benjamin because he argues that storytelling is a social action where the storyteller makes his experience the audience's experience as well (146). There is an interaction between the teller and listener that does not exist between writer and reader. Benjamin argues, “What distinguishes the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor enters into it. . . . The birthplace of the novel is the individual in his isolation, the individual who can no longer speak of his concerns in exemplary fashion, who himself lacks counsel and can give none” (146). De Certeau's own discussion on the role of memory with storytelling points out the difference between stories and novels. He credits storytellers as being able to manipulate a given moment because the situation has activated their memory. Memory is key here because “it constructs itself from events that are independent of it, and it is linked to the expectation that something alien to the present will or must occur. . . . It sustains itself by *believing* in the existence of possibilities and by vigilantly awaiting them, constantly on the watch for their appearance” (87). Thus, stories are successful tactics because they pull from memory which is continuously on the look-out for opportunities to manipulate a situation. And tactical resistance is nothing, if not opportunistic. However, while novels may not be created and told in an opportune moment, de Certeau recognizes them as holding tactical value. In talking about narratives he argues,

Shouldn't we recognize its *scientific* legitimacy by assuming that instead of being a remainder that cannot be, or has not yet been, eliminated from discourse, narrativity has a necessary function in it, and that a *theory of narration is indissociable from a theory of practices, as its condition as well as its production?*

To do that would be to recognize the theoretical value of the novel, which has become the zoo of everyday practices since the establishment of modern science.

(78)

Here de Certeau sees narratives as something that cannot and should not be extracted from theory or science because in accepting narratives as connected to theory, novels play an active role in collecting and sharing tactical practices. Additionally, what De Certeau does not address and what Benjamin's complaint ignores is the fact that novels, especially novels that still hold the weight of cultural categorization (i.e. Dominican-American or Latino/a), are in conversation with each other and their social situation. If Cruz and Díaz had decided not to include Trujillo in their novels, they would know that their audience expected some reference to him, so even his exclusion is a conscious decision. Although the novelist may write in solitude, he or she still draws upon personal and cultural memory and it is from these memories that the author shares experience.

In fact, past novels and cultural memory have enough of an impact in Dominican-American literature that Cruz and Díaz (neither of whom lived during Trujillo's regime) use narratives about Trujillo as a way to discuss resistance against economic, racial, and gender pressures facing Dominican-Americans. There are both personal and cultural reasons for them to do so. Personally, there is a need to write from one's experience. In talking about identity and ethnicity, Stuart Hall points out that ethnicity allows people to position themselves by giving

them a place to recognize similarities and differences between themselves and others. This positioning is important because according Hall "there's no enunciation without positionality" (347). In other words, in order to speak or write anything of importance, Cruz and Díaz have to position themselves in some way. However, there can be no positioning without an understanding of their past (Hall 348). In order to write as Dominican-Americans, Cruz and Díaz have to draw upon the cultural history of both Dominicans and Americans. If the past is essential in establishing a position to write from, then it is not remarkable that Dominican-American authors (or at least those who have positioned themselves as Dominican-American authors like Cruz and Díaz have) draw from the trauma of Trujillo's reign.

For the Dominican Republic's relatively short history as a nation, Trujillo reigned for thirty-one years and after him, his crony Balaguer was president for a total of twenty-three years. The Trujillato reigned for over half a century, making them a significant part of Dominican history, but add to that reign disappearances, propaganda, and genocide and it becomes a difficult era for Dominicans to historicize. Hall goes on to claim, even for people living in their native nation, the past is not an essential thing. For people of a diaspora, like Dominican-Americans, the past is even more complicated:

If you ask my son, who is seventeen and who was born in London, where he comes from, he cannot tell you he comes from Jamaica. Part of his identity is there, but he has to *discover* that identity. He can't just take it out of a suitcase and plop it on the table and say "That's mine." It's not an essence like that. He has to learn to tell himself the story of his past. He has to interrogate his own history, he has to relearn that part of him that has an investment in that culture. . . . So this new kind of ethnicity—emergent ethnicities—has a relationship to the past but it

is a relationship that is partly through memory, partly through narrative, one that has to be recovered. (348)

Having lived most of their lives in the United States, Cruz and Díaz are like Hall's son in that they are not strictly from the Dominican Republic and would most likely be seen as outsiders—Dominican Yorks—in the Dominican Republic yet the nation is still part of their cultural history. So in order to even understand Dominican ethnicity, not to mention write about Dominican-American experience, Cruz and Díaz must draw from the past of the Dominican Republic.

In addition to understanding their own identity, Cruz and Díaz must also attempt to identify with other Dominican-Americans. Hall explains that with postmodernism and transnational identities, people are “reabsorbed into larger communities that overreach and interconnect national identities,” but there is also a tightening of group identities asking ““Are you one of us?”” (343). After all, how can one be Dominican-American without establishing a sense of Dominicanness? Certainly, Cruz and Díaz complicate what it means to be Dominican-American and the effect of the Trujillato on different races, classes, and generations of Dominicans, but they do so by identifying themselves with other Dominican-Americans. Anthony D. Smith explains how one identifies with “ethnic communities” by pointing out two important characteristics: “a set of myths of common origins and descent” and “some common historical memories of things experienced together” (109). In trying to identify themselves as part of Dominican-American culture, Cruz and Díaz rely on the shared "historical memories" of the Trujillato. Both the personal and cultural pulls to situate one's self allows these writers to communicate with other Dominican-Americans and with literature already written about the dictator.

In addition to being a common historical figure among Dominican-Americans, Trujillo acts as a signifier for otherwise faceless oppressive pressures like violence between genders, imperialism, materialism, and the exploitation of immigrant and third-world workers. As Cruz puts it through Don Chan, “When Trujillo was alive, it was easy to discern who the enemy was and gather the people of Los Llanos to spit at the dictatorship” (51). Likewise, it is easier for Dominican-American authors to use Trujillo than directly attack these oppressive pressures because he provides a face for otherwise faceless problems.

For Cruz, telling about the resistance against Trujillo and the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic that put Balaguer into power works as a model for the resistance needed for current issues like the exploitation of Dominican workers. She makes these comparisons by going back and forth between Don Chan's stories of the Invisible Ones with what is happening to the Colón family and even to Don Chan's friend, Miraluz. Despite Miraluz's history as a strong advocator of resistance with the Invisible Ones, she finds herself working at a factory, desperately needing a way to fight against exploitation besides the impotent unions. As Cruz describes it, “If [Miraluz] didn't find a way out of there soon, she'd be another stalk in the cane field, cut, refined, and devoured, with only the cavity as proof of her existence” (222). Miraluz has become sick of her situation, but instead of despairing in it as many of her co-workers have, she refers back to some of the techniques and ideas of the Invisible Ones. She urges her co-workers to slowly save enough money to start their own company, reflecting on how “Don Chan had been right. If they work the factory, they should own the factory. Same concept he had about the land” (229). The stories about the resistance allowed Cruz to show how similar types of resistant could work today. Of course, in this case, Trujillo had little to do with this example except that the Invisible Ones were resisting his reign.

However, Cruz uses Trujillo more directly to represent different issues, especially the ongoing problem of hatred and violence. Throughout *Let It Rain Coffee*, Cruz uses the narratives of Dallas and Bobby to show that Dominican-Americans are also affected by the ideals of Trujillismo. For instance, Bobby's father, Santo, instead of comforting Bobby after he's been mugged, pushes him to fight, telling him that "a machete in the hand of a smart man is more dangerous than a gun in the hand of a stupid man" (55). Santo believes he's strengthening his son just as his father had strengthened him, but in seeing this interaction, all Don Chan can say is "I'm so sorry mijo. . . . What did I do to you?" (56). Don Chan does not direct this to Santo but to Bobby, who is now victim to a violence that began in the Dominican Republic. Later, as Don Chan becomes confused with his surroundings, he again attempts to apologize, except this time he believes he is talking to Santo. He confuses Bobby with Santo and shares a regret in teaching hatred as a reaction to Trujillo. "It' my fault you're so angry," he tells Bobby. "You were just a baby, you see, and I filled your brain with hate. You could barely say your name and I was asking you to say the word perejil. Perejil. Try and say that word, Santito. Try and say the word. See if you could roll your r's or if your tongue betrays you" (160). Here, Don Chan is making reference to the Parsley Massacre that occurred in 1937. Trujillo ordered the execution of thousands of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and in order to see who was Haitian, Dominicans and Haitians alike had to utter the shibboleth "*perejil*," or parsley. The inability to roll one's r's marked one as a French-speaking Haitian and thus meant death. It would seem understandable, then, that Don Chan would want to protect his son, but his sorrow exposes his guilt for even enforcing that mark of difference by teaching it to his son. His guilt alone could be argued as a lingering effect of Trujillo's reign, but then Don Chan continues, "Don't you think he deserves to die, Santo? Shouldn't we pray for his death before we go to bed? And you prayed out

loud before bed, *Diosito, I ask you to take care of Mami and Papi and que se muera Trujillo también*" (160). So it is not only the hatred that Trujillo instigated that Don Chan despises, but also the role Don Chan had in continuing this hatred and violence. He takes the blame for teaching his son to pray for another's death, even if that other person is Trujillo. The problem, then, is not necessarily Trujillo, but the frame of thinking that existed during the Trujillo regime, even with those that resisted him. Don Chan is by no means supporting or even making an attempt to understand Trujillo, but rather realizing the problem of reactionary violence.

Díaz, as well, recognizes a need to use a signifier for unidentifiable or faceless problems, but more explicitly shows the existence of these problems before and after Trujillo. While at times, the faceless man is present whenever something bad happens to the Cabral family, rather blatantly pointing to the fact that terrible things like Oscar's death can and do happen without a single entity to take the blame, Díaz consistently links even mystical issues to Trujillo. He is a constant presence in the novel that is inextricably tied to the fukú. However much Díaz points to Trujillo as the source of Dominicans' problems, and he often does, there is also the idea that Trujillo is merely a symbol of problems that have plagued Dominicans before Trujillo ever existed and that continue to plague them now. With "The Girl Trujillo Wanted," Díaz is able to link Trujillo's consumption of women with an idea of women as commodity that existed in Dominican culture long before Trujillo. While Trujillo's dictatorship may be the blame in that particular type of story, in the footnotes, Yuniór sees a common theme between this story and one told of the leader of the native Taínos, Anacaona:

When Euros started going Hannibal Lecter on the Taínos, they killed Anacaona's husband (which is another story). And like all good warrior-women she tried to rally her people, tried to resist, but the Europeans were the original fukú, no

stopping them. . . . A common story you hear about Anacaona in the DR is that on the eve of her execution she was offered a chance to save herself: all she had to do was marry a Spaniard who was obsessed with her. (See the trend? Trujillo wanted the Mirabal Sisters, and the Spaniard wanted Anacaona.) . . . Anacaona, however, tragically old-school, was reported to have said, “Whitemen, kiss my hurricane ass! And that was the end of Anacaona.” (244)

“The Girl Trujillo Wanted” is not a new story but the most recent iteration of stories told to explain hardship. By linking the Spanish conquest of Hispaniola with “The Girl Trujillo Wanted,” Díaz points out two other issues that Dominicans have to deal with. The first is the colonization of the Taínos. As Yunior claims, “the European were the original fukú”; whether or not this is true, it does point out a traumatic history that existed for Dominicans long before Trujillo. The history becomes more difficult to navigate because Dominicans are not simply oppressed Taínos, but rather descendants of Taínos, Europeans, and Africans, leading to the second issue: viewing women as products to be consumed. The common theme with Anacaona's story and “The Girl Trujillo Wanted” is that there is a male figure that uses violence or threat of violence to obtain women. The European colonization of Hispaniola leads to the complex history of Dominicans who may claim a Taíno mother but a European father, but more importantly, it leads to a cultural view of women as possessions, perpetuating gender violence. Both the issues of racial identity and gender violence were connected to the Trujillo regime, but, as Díaz points out, these issues originated long before Trujillo and have continued even after his death.

Through Yunior, Díaz constantly navigates the problems of cultural identity and the problems of sexually using women to prove manhood. However, the strongest example of how Díaz does this is through the words of Lola after Oscar's death: “Lola swore she would never



return to that terrible country. On one of our last nights as novios she said, ‘Ten million Trujillos is all we are’” (324). It is a relatively short section in which Díaz describes Lola's disgust, but it is preceded by an example of corruption in the Dominican government and followed by Yunior's inability to stay true to Lola despite how much he cared about her. As Yunior says, “One day she called, asked me where I'd been the night before, and when I didn't have a good excuse, she said, Good-bye, Yunior, please take good care of yourself, and for about a year I scromfed strange girls” (324). Lola's quote, rather than placing blame solely on Trujillo for all of Dominicans' and Dominican-Americans' problems, points to a deeper cultural and even human problem. Yunior, despite his best efforts, struggles to treat women as something besides sexual conquests. By this point in the novel, it is clear that this attitude is one that Yunior believes is expected in Dominican-American culture. Trujillo practiced and encouraged this idea of masculinity, but the Trujillo Lola points to is actually a representation of a myriad of issues. He is not simply a stand-in for gender violence but a manifestation of problems ranging from gender violence to colonialism that have plagued Dominican-Americans long before Trujillo even existed and that have persisted since his demise. Thus, Cruz and Díaz narrate stories of resistance against Trujillo as a signifier in order to navigate a way through these issues. Their novels tell about the past in order to understand the source of their current issues, but more importantly to reshape and control their present and future, enacting and articulating a resistance against a social system that seeks to overwhelm them.

However, using Trujillo narratives to articulate resistance becomes problematic when these narratives become *the* way to talk about resistance because it establishes Trujillo as cultural marker—a shibboleth that Dominican-American authors must utter in order to prove their Dominicaness. This shibboleth perpetuates Trujillo as a cultural force, undermining the

purpose of articulation by re-establishing him as an oppressive force and obfuscating the issues of gender violence, imperialism, and exploitation that the narratives were meant to explore by centering him as the source of these problems, rather than as a central symptom of them.

By writing the obligatory Trujillo narrative, Díaz and Cruz may be writing to articulate resistance, but instead have contributed to a growing archive of Trujillo literature. In this way, Trujillo is not only archived in the history of Dominican Republic but in the literature as well. He permeates even the criticism of Dominican-American literature to the extent that it is not a question of if an author will deal with Trujillo's regime, but how. By focusing on Trujillo narratives, we not only put Trujillo at the center of Dominican culture, but we cut off the critical issues the Trujillo narratives were trying to articulate in the first place—such as global capitalism, gender violence, and the exploitation of Dominicans in both the D.R. and the U.S. In addition, we might overlook the issues of other significant Dominican-American novels that downplay Trujillo's influence like Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints* which draws critical attention to U.S. involvement in the political instability of the Dominican Republic and the sexualization of Black Dominicans. I am not asking writers and scholars to overlook or forget the violent history of the Dominican Republic, but to de-center Trujillo as part of that history and as part of Dominican-American literature. Instead writers and scholars should focus on other cultural and historical factors that have influenced Dominican-Americans like the combination of African and European themes in merengue, U.S. occupation at two critical times in Dominican history, the effects of sex tourism, and social relations with Haiti. Writers have already begun to make this move. Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee* draws attention to the U.S.'s role in putting Balaguer into power because they were afraid of Juan Bosch's communist leanings, but little critical attention has been paid to Cruz's novel. Additionally, more attention could be paid to the ways

gender violence and mother/daughter relationships are discussed in Cruz's *Soledad* and Maritza Loida Perez's *Geographies of Home*. In fact, turbulent mother/daughter relationships are portrayed by both male and female writers, which would suggest that it is a common theme in Dominican-American literature and thus worth further study. There are questions of religion, identity in connection with other Latino groups, and materialism that abound in many different novels.

As scholars, we need to recognize and discuss commonalities and differences in Dominican-American literature that go beyond Trujillo. The important thing is that writers and scholars alike need to move past Trujillo because when Trujillo narratives become the only way to articulate resistance for Dominican-Americans and the only way scholars talk about Dominican-American literature then the figure of Trujillo maintains cultural control.

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<sup>1</sup> Adam Lifshey sees well-structured and denunciatory novels like Mario Varga Llosa's *La Fiesta del Chivo* as being less subversive because they limit readerly interpretation and thus do not challenge “the suffocating control of word and person wielded by Trujillo” (436). Because of this, Lifshey favors texts that maybe be more ambivalent about the trujillato (he suggests Juan Bosch's "La mancha indeleble" and Freddy Prestol Castillo's *El Masacre se pasa a pie*), but also allow the reader to form his or her own opinions about the regime: “A text that slips out of discursive control, that offers itself willingly to interpretation, that is self-contradictory and ruptured and uncertain rather than consistent and coherent and comprehensive—this may be the most fundamental disputation of any dictator's dominance over word and thought” (454-55). So for Lifshey, it is not that writing about the trujillato is a problem, but in how these narratives are presented. By denouncing the trujillato, these novels enact a new tyranny that uses the same tool of a singular discourse that Trujillo’s regime used. He suggests that breaking from the dominant

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discourse is an act of subversion which builds off a deeper structural issue: reacting against Trujillo. However, Lifshy is only calling for a new way to study and teach the literature about the Dominican Republic and Trujillo, but he does not address the apparent need Dominican-American authors feel towards writing Trujillo narratives, nor whether literature and scholarship can move past Trujillo

<sup>2</sup> Cruz acknowledges Juan Luis Guerra's song "Ojala Que Llueva Café" as the inspiration for the title of *Let It Rain Coffee*. Additionally, Guerra is known for the politically charged messages in his songs which reflects Cruz's own activism in her work.

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