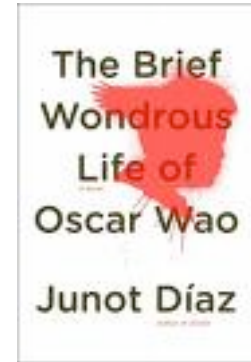


Place was never something I took for granted, not when I had two geographies in my heart. I take special pleasure in naming things as well as I can, since all I was taught as a kid was to give things false names. Or to give them no name at all. I find these public/private discussions repressive whether they're being generated from within our community or without. How in the world can anyone form an authentic self when there are so many damn rules about how one should act in the world? Us writers, we're just throwing words up into the wind, hoping that they will carry, and someone, somewhere, sometime, will have a use for them.
Junot Díaz



Junot Díaz (born 31 December 1968 in Santo Domingo) is a contemporary Dominican-American writer and associate professor of writing at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He moved to the United States with his parents at age six, settling in New Jersey. Central to Díaz's work is the duality of the immigrant experience.

Life

Díaz was born in Villa Juana, a barrio in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He was the third child in a family of five. Throughout most of his early childhood he lived with his mother and grandparents while his father worked in the United States. Díaz immigrated to Parlin, New Jersey in December, 1974, where he was re-united with his father.

He attended Madison Park Elementary and was a voracious reader, often walking four miles in order to borrow books from his public library. His father, Rafael, abandoned the family in the mid-80s; within months Díaz's oldest brother was diagnosed with leukemia and the family was plunged into a period of severe poverty. In this time Díaz became fascinated with apocalyptic films and books, especially the work of John Christopher, the original Planet of the Apes films and the BBC mini-series Edge of Darkness. Díaz graduated from Cedar Ridge High School in Old Bridge, New Jersey, in 1987.

He attended Kean College in Union, New Jersey for one year before transferring and ultimately completing his BA at Rutgers College in 1992, majoring in English; there he was involved in a creative-writing living-learning residence hall and in various student organizations and was exposed to the authors who would motivate him into becoming a writer: Toni Morrison and Sandra Cisneros. He worked his way through college: delivering pool tables, washing dishes, pumping gas and working at Raritan River Steel.

After graduating from Rutgers he was employed at Rutgers University Press as an editorial assistant. He earned his MFA from Cornell University in Ithaca, New York in 1995, where he wrote most of his first collection. Díaz is active in Dominican community, the fiction editor for the Boston Review, and a founding member of the Voices of Writing Workshop, a writing workshop focused on writers of color.

Work

Junot Diaz is best known for his two major works: the short story collection Drown (1996) and the novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007). Both were published to critical acclaim. His fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine which listed him as one of the 20 top writers for the 21st century. He has also been published in *Story*, *The Paris Review*, and in the anthologies Best American Short Stories four times (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000), and *African Voices*.

He has received a Eugene McDermott Award, a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, a Lila Acheson Wallace Readers Digest Award, the 2002 Pen/Malamud Award, the 2003 US-Japan Creative Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, a fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University and the Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He won the 2007 Sargant First Novel Prize and was selected as one of the 39 most important Latin American writers under the age of 39 by the Bogotá Book Capital of World and the Hay Festival. In September of 2007, Miramax acquired the rights for a film adaptation of The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.

The stories in Drown focus on the teenage narrator's impoverished, fatherless youth in the Dominican Republic and his struggle adapting to his new life in New Jersey. Díaz also published a Spanish translation of Drown, entitled Negocios. The arrival of his novel, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, in 2007 prompted a minor re-appraisal of Diaz's earlier work. His first book Drown was now being widely recognized as an important landmark in contemporary literature—ten years after publication.

Díaz's first novel, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao was released in September 2007. (An excerpt from the novel had appeared previously in *The New Yorker*'s 2007 Summer Fiction issue.) In an unusually favorable review, the *New York Times* critic Michiko Kakutani characterized Díaz's writing in the novel as a sort of streetwise brand of Spanglish that even the most monolingual reader can easily inhale: lots of flash words and razzle-dazzle talk, lots of body language on the sentences, lots of David Foster Wallace-esque footnotes and asides. And he conjures with seemingly effortless aplomb the two worlds his characters inhabit: the Dominican Republic, the ghost-haunted motherland that shapes their nightmares and their dreams; and America (a.k.a. New Jersey), the land of freedom and hope and not-so-shiny possibilities that they've fled to as part of the great Dominican diaspora.

"The Brief Wondrous life of Oscar Wao" was awarded the Sargent First Novel Prize and was selected by *Time* and *New York Magazine* as the best novel of 2007. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Village Voice*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *New Statesman*, *Washington Post* and *Publishers Weekly* also placed the novel on their Best of 2007 lists. A poll by National Book Critics Circle ranked The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao as the most recommended novel by their members. On March 6, 2008, it won the National Book Critics Circle Award.

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