

71. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 147.
72. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 148.
73. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 258.
74. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 258–59. See Derek Walcott's poem "Laventille," from *The Castaway and Other Poems* (1965) included in *Collected Poems 1948–1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1986), 85–88. Here the poet explores the "amnesiac blow" that the survivors of the slave trade suffered (88).
75. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 149.
76. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 150. "Chabine," is another nod to Walcott who, in "The Star-Apple Kingdom," the poem that Díaz quotes in the epigraph of his novel, names his protagonist Chabine. This character is of mixed cultural background: "I'm just a nigger who loved the sea, / I had a sound colonial education, / I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I'm nobody or I am a nation."
77. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 151.
78. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 149.
79. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 144.
80. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 144.
81. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 144.
82. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 144.
83. We know that the Gangster wants Beli in great part only as a diversion from his troubled, violent life (124–25). As Yunior writes, there is "a pretty solid argument to be made that La Inca was right; the Gangster was simply an old chulo preying on Beli's naïveté" (126).
84. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 148.
85. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 150–51.
86. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 151.
87. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 298.
88. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 330–31.
89. Walter Mosley, blurb for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.
90. Junot Díaz, interview with Evelyn Ch'ien, July 26, 2002. Printed in Ch'ien, *Weird English*, 218.
91. Armando Celayo and David Shook, "In Darkness We Meet: A Conversation with Junot Díaz," *World Literature Today* 82, no. 2 (March–April 2008): 17.
92. Díaz, in Celayo and Shook, "In Darkness We Meet: A Conversation with Junot Díaz," 17.

11. A Planetary Warning? The Multilayered Caribbean Zombie in "Monstro"

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Apocalypse is a darkness that gives us light.
—Junot Díaz, "Apocalypse"

The ubiquitous nature of the zombie figure is symptomatic of socioenvironmental decomposure. Born from slavery, these creatures unconsciously emerge as a "comment on the disruption of an economy" that signals unprecedented global changes.¹ If they are traditionally found at the intersection of doom and hope, of pandemonium and adaptation, zombie monsters surface textually as signifiers recasting the past to illuminate present circumstances that portend future chaos. Underneath their supposed misunderstood appearance, these "othered" beings function as symbols for social commentary. Junot Díaz's short story "Monstro" (2012) possesses, at the base of its criticism, an eerie quintessential globalization model that foretells the end results of neoliberal capitalism. This Caribbean sci-fi journey is, in essence, a futuristic account of an unimaginably prosperous sugar island, turned darkly decadent, whose only hope is found in an allegorical signifier—that is, the legend of the living dead. This being will most likely

become the epicenter of his humorous satire, one which Díaz is developing, he says, into his next novel.

In the Afro-futurist Antillean setting of “Monstro,” the narrator, an unnamed ivy league Dominican student, “chas[es] after a girl.”² While he agonizes over her, he tells in analepsis that a cataclysm erupted with the appearance in Haiti of a disease. At the root of the story is Díaz’s critical dialectic on race, with the illness appearing as a “negrura” (“blackness”) that “makes Haitians darker.”³ As this infection progresses, it morphs the “viktims” into zombie-like creatures in a predicted future where the precariat live amid a naturally degraded, socially unjust society.⁴ The infected soon become lethal, termed “The Possessed.”⁵ In order to contain the violence, a presumably futuristic nuclear warhead is dropped by a Western “Joint Chief of Staff,” rendering the world “white.”⁶ The blast only serves to further reveal the ultimate transformation of the monsters into Caribbean-cannibalistic-Caliban creatures that will forever threaten the delicate thread of human existence.

The apocalypse of “Monstro” is a literary subversion that enables the evolution of the zombie figure from a plantation to racialized subject, to a victim of neoliberal policies, and ultimately a signifier of decolonial resistance. This chapter analyzes the development of the zombie while uncovering the variegated symbolic levels of Díaz’s zombies. Although apocalypse manias are commonplace in our day and age, what is less evident to readers is the appearance of a giant monster leading to earth’s extinction. Indeed, we must only look to the title, “Monstro” (phonetic for *monstruo* in Spanish), to reflect on its Latin root *monere*, which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means to warn and to instruct. It will be crucial then to question what specifically Díaz is warning us about with a Caribbean-incepted zombie and its developing transformations. The claim I make is that their evolution mirrors the historical progression of capital-based societies, insofar as they inherit westernized structures of power and have now entered an unsustainable era of production. On the one hand, I analyze how these monster-creatures can be read as symbols that underscore a commentary on past transatlantic economies (and ever-present racism) and current neoliberalization. On the other hand, drawing from the theoretical “monster” posited by Michel Foucault, I read how these paradigms, reused in the literary imaginary, culminate in a decolonial reading, which conveys that the zombie may be a mere illusion meant to be morally and futuristically cautionary. As a result, not only does “Monstro” prompt a meditation on a

vodou-animated creature coated in raciology, but science fiction as a genre facilitates a social critique that translates the persistent and transcendental effects of the colonial apparatus.

In light of Díaz’s renderings of an impossible yet impossibly real tale is the consideration of the Latin American postmodern and Caribbean poetics influencing the story. In terms of a strictly Latin American paradigm, the textual techniques of realism used in the 1960s that preceded his writing were crucially formative. To communicate catastrophes or incredible spectacles, the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier resorted to what he termed *lo real maravilloso*, which the Colombian Nobel laureate Gabriel García Márquez also used stylistically. The postmodern critical frameworks emerging in the second half of the twentieth century resulted in an alternative to journalism or modern realism. These tools adopted a position somewhere between fiction and reality, in which playful yet stern societal criticism was implicit—an elemental tool for Díaz, who now raises narrative up a level with science fiction. With regard to the Caribbean black aesthetic, it is vital to consider the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén and his conception of “blackness” prior to the 1940s Négritude movement. Guillén’s poetics inform the early notion of blackness in Díaz’s Antillean racial critique and thus empower his ideological, decolonial project. Díaz’s predecessors contextualize the hermeneutics of his uprooting of race and space codifications embodied in a transformational zombie.

A final point before I turn to analysis is the following claim: Díaz’s trans-American but also transatlantic story uses former and current impasses of the African diaspora, including the jarring misery of Haiti’s past and present state. Therefore, to ground “Monstro” as a moralizing tale, placed within an Afro-futuristic aesthetic, we must look at how Haiti became for Díaz a devotional space to reflect on anthropogenic catastrophes. Díaz’s journalistic career and intimate experience with the Dominican-Haitian racial conflict compelled him to write his philosophical meditation “Apocalypse” (2010) following the devastation of the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Within this essay, Díaz identified Haiti as a country oppressed by the coloniality of power and never freed from the curse of having been the archetypal plantation. Díaz therefore sees in Haiti a microcosm that causes the reader to reevaluate the fundamental historiography of early and late capital production and its global effects. Emphatic and confrontational, “Apocalypse” becomes a realist prequel to “Monstro” and furnishes us with crucial tools for understanding the futuristic accounts that his short story seeks to foretell.

The Racialized (Plantational) Zombie

The opening lines of “Monstro” offer a dialectic on race as an infectious disease spreads in Haiti: “They called it *la negrura*, blackness.”⁷ The disruption and de-centering of Eurocentric racial concepts in “Monstro” is set in the crucial former plantation realm of the Caribbean. Crucial, due first to Díaz’s personal and emotional investment toward identity relations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and second, because the preferred and oft-repeated Caribbean backdrop of Díaz’s fiction is an obvious choice to express the stories of impossibly real colonial effects on theories of race discourse. Alejo Carpentier, in his prologue to *El reino de este mundo* (1949), stated that in fact it was while he was in Haiti that he came “in contact with the quotidian [of] the marvelous real.”⁸ The liberationist exploits of Mackandal, Toussaint Louverture, and Henri Christophe not only drew Cuban authors such as Carpentier to Haiti’s history, they intrigued an entire continent.⁹ The marvelous real (*lo real maravilloso*), as coined by Carpentier, conceived of the Caribbean as a locale where the incidences of colonial contact merge with the fantastic, and the famous line “who is more sci-fi than us [the Caribbean]?” from his prior work *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* points to Díaz’s corroboration of Carpentier’s claim.¹⁰ As if echoing Carpentier, in “Monstro,” the narrator’s friend Alex, upon picking him up from the airport, calls out “welcome to the country of *las maravillas*,” alluding to a palimpsest of meanings surrounding the fantastic conditions of the island shared by two nations.¹¹ Revolutionizing the narrative with humor, Díaz’s active syncretization of genre and colonialism—literature and history—works congruently to reveal the bestiality of empire (old and new). Even though Díaz regrets that science fiction is a genre that “nobody takes seriously,” he explains that it is “best suited to explaining the events of colonialism and its extreme cultural violence.”¹² Not available to Carpentier as a genre in his lifetime *per se*, Díaz takes full advantage of science fiction to weave a narration that is racially charged, arising from the Caribbean plantocracy.

“Monstro” is located in Haiti specifically, as exemplary of *lo real maravilloso*, for two main reasons. First, if the strange disease is rooted in colonialism, then placing the story in Haiti—as one of the first ports of the European arrival of slavery—would be telling of the story’s decolonial argument against racial hierarchies initiated in the Caribbean. Second, it is in Haiti where, during the slave trade and the formation of the Atlantic world,

the realization of the zombie conception fully emerges. The historical arrival of zombification to the New World dislocated Western concepts of order in the colonies. In narrative discourse, this subversion was relayed as a “curse” in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. In “Monstro,” however, Díaz’s zombie makes its appearance in the form of a disease that is both racially selective and racial in and of itself.

In Díaz’s story, recognizable signs in the diseased point to the fact that they are not only developing into another species but, more specifically, zombies. These various symptoms include “low body temperature” fluctuating to “radiant blue” (code for stone dead), “lingering on and on,” “roaming about the camp at odd hours,” “never sleeping,” unintelligibly “shriek[ing] together,” and being described as “bewitched.”¹³ Eventually the dogged strength of “the Possessed” leads to bloodshed. They are “so relentless that they clung onto” escaping victims, having to be “shot off.”¹⁴ In contrast to their popular depiction as relentless, murderous creatures of evil origins, the zombies of “Monstro” are the inevitable products of capitalism. They come into existence when an individual is “transformed purely into alienated labour power . . . and made to serve as someone else’s privatized means of production.”¹⁵ The most ancient form of industrialization’s means of production in the Americas is slavery, and zombies are a byproduct of slave-trade commerce. Zombies therefore are conceived of as an Atlantic world, trans-American phenomenon.

During the plantocracy in the Caribbean, the success of the large-scale transatlantic slave trade was due to the acquisition of inexpensive labor to produce a desired commodity. If the Caribbean was the empire of sugar production, Haiti—then Saint-Domingue—was its capital. In the seventeenth century and the eighteenth, this “pearl of the Antilles” also became the principal receptor of African slaves. Imported into the New World market, the slaves also introduced their cultural artifacts, reacting to the despicable treatment of the French plantations. Their spiritual practices generated a syncretic resistance in the form of voodooism (vodun, or voodoo), once practiced in Dahomey (today the Republic of Benin). This spiritual buttress found its home in Haiti, as did the conception of the zombie as a derivative element of vodun. A zombie, as it was conceived in Benin, was an individual arrested while crossing from life to death. On the plantation, to commit suicide was to risk being kidnapped by a spiritual presence and turned into a walking automaton without agency. This was a deep source of anguish for slaves seeking to escape a life of bondage—even if it meant

through death. The underlying hindrance was that to become a zombie, one would continue being a slave even after death.¹⁶ Since that time, the living dead have evolved into a mainstay of popular culture, but the zombie's original source in the Americas was the plantation.

Unbeknownst to mainstream culture, the zombie "arose from the mixture of old African religious beliefs and the pain of slavery."¹⁷ Since zombies are connected to New World slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, they are also racialized symbols of plantational labor. In fact, the literary critic Saidiya Hartman metaphorically argued that "the human pulse stops at the gate of the barracoon," referencing how a zombie was code for a slave who upon being "uprooted" became an "earmark of the dead man."¹⁸ In other words, perceptions of nonwhite identity in the colonial era became synonymous with a person's "unnatural death."¹⁹ Slaves were not participating citizens in society; they were the opposite, and as subjects without agency their skin color signaled their status. For Díaz, then, if the living dead are a politicized statement on the interruption of an ill-functioning system, they may also be the archetype for a discourse on race. Analyzed from a certain vantage point, Díaz's indelible sarcasm recognizes New World plantation history.

Transporting the reader to the locale of slavery with the zombie figure, "Monstro" meditates on the "coloniality of power," a term chiefly advanced by Aníbal Quijano.²⁰ The power exerted over the Caribbean, as a laboratory for empire, presumes in Quijano's words a "codification of the differences between conquerors"—those who would exert such power—"and the conquered in the idea of 'race.'"²¹ In these specified spaces, the idea of race supposed innate differences justifying a natural "inferiority."²² As if to illustrate the historical discourse on racial hierarchy constructions, "Monstro" comments on slavery's indelible mark, which "hardened into" a "color line."²³ In Díaz's Bildungsroman, the opening lines, "They say it came from Africa screaming in the voices of the enslaved," refer to both the transatlantic slave trade and a colonial curse that eventually lead to the crystallization of racism.²⁴ Díaz's choice to focus on Haiti reels in the history of the island as both the birthplace of voodooism and that of the plantocracy, which led to the internalization of race differences. This "color complex" produced the acceptance of terms such as *blanqueamiento* ("racial whitening") that would enable the achievement, or preservation, of a higher-class status.²⁵ The term is visibly one of those products of colonialism "Monstro" localizes and dislodges.

Juxtaposed with the internalization of *blanqueamiento*, then, is *negrura*. Evidently aware of his predecessors in the so-called *negrista* movement, Díaz construes in his zombie story a concept of "darkness" the way the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén reimagined blackness.²⁶ By harnessing blackness, a term that endured a negative connotation before and during Guillén's lifetime, Guillén destabilized its meaning at the beginning of the twentieth century. He employed the vernacular Cuban *chotismo* to underscore the repressive culture toward the black Cuban, all while introducing colloquial black speech into modernity's poetics. In what is arguably his most famous poem, "Negro bembón," the poetic voice asks, "Why do you get angry when they call you black *bembón* / if your mouth is holy?"²⁷ The word *bembón* ("thick-lipped") was a racial slur used in an intentionally deprecating way but in his poem, Guillén materializes the term *bembón* and, with it, the race complex by pointing to the effects of slavery on the very idea of blackness.

Far from eliminating Caribbean racial intolerance as Guillén would have hoped, discriminatory attitudes have persisted.²⁸ In Díaz's context, this is particularly true when it comes to relations between Haiti and Díaz's native Dominican Republic.²⁹ With almost caustic humor at its disposal, "Monstro" takes *negrura*—the opposite of *blanqueamiento*—a bold step further. Díaz's convocation of *negrura* can be described as audacious because of the way it mocks blackness as a disease: "At first Negroes thought it funny. A disease that could make a Haitian blacker? It was the joke of the year. Everybody in our sector accusing everybody else of having it. You couldn't display a blemish or catch some sun on the street because then the jokes would start."³⁰ The comment on epidemic (and epidermal) blackness here is analogous with Guillén's "black condition" in "Negro bembón." Like the normalizing effect on blackness that Guillén championed for *modernismo*, the narrator's playful raciological assertion should be read as a condemnation of the internalized logic of finding blackness to be conceived of as a "condition" in the first place.

When Frantz Fanon published *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) as an outcry against the lamentable, internalized black complex, he pinpointed the existence of an apparent "state of being a negro."³¹ This for Fanon was prototypical to the black man and was a "disaster," he says, due to "the fact that he was once enslaved."³² At the core of Díaz's usually sarcastic humor while taking on important, sensitive issues such as race is a wishful hope to end that state and to see blackness as one would whiteness: not as a complex or condition at all. Playing off the idea of *blanqueamiento* is that of

blackness. This condition, while rooted in colonialism, is still prevalent in the Dominican Republic, where “European and indigenous heritages have been celebrated at the expense of an African past.”³³ The state’s policies that still affect the black population, which Díaz follows, are cemented in colonialism’s ideology of *blanqueamiento* and *negrura*. Assertive and ironic, the mockery compels the reader to confront racism frontally. A decolonial reading of the *negrura* in “Monstro” would aim at erasing the color line as if this would dilute with it the lateral divisions between Díaz’s homeland and its famed resilient neighbor.

Blackness as a condition, however, is inextricably tied to modern-era economics, a factor crucial to Díaz’s short story. Not only is the racialized disease making an individual “blacker,” it is also a selective one: it chooses “the poorest of the poor.”³⁴ Inevitably, what surfaces in the narration is a comment on the paradigms of race and class merging. As the British cultural critic Paul Gilroy explains, blackness and its unoccupied place in modernity are tied to the paradigm of economic exclusion. The rigorous and systematic intellectual in Díaz then wedges the root causes of African American (in the continental sense) marginalization into the neoliberal apparatus—a system from which the new zombie emerges.

The Neoliberal Apparatus and Its New Zombie

In his essay “Apocalypse,” Díaz points to the origins of the devastating earthquake in Haiti as forces that were just as much political and economic as they were natural. Starting with the plantation system, he explains, this economic frame would foretell our present “zombie stage of capitalism,” prototypically displayed in Haiti. Within this modified economic system, a new signifier of the living dead surfaces. Díaz’s new zombie then becomes a reflection of how slave-based economic structures developed into a neoliberal notion of the free market. According to Immanuel Wallerstein and Pierre Bourdieu, neoliberalism emerged in 1989, on the basis of deregulation and privatization leading to a significant decrease of government participation in the state’s economy.³⁵ The only way of ratifying the system would be to pursue modifications for a new social order in a collective manner. However, far from being ratified, these policies are globally affecting the proletariat disproportionately and creating what Díaz terms “the new zombie.”³⁶

The consequences of a flawed economic system, which create this new being, are thus adapted into “Monstro.” Since instances of free-market con-

sequences are vast in the story, I delineate the four main elements as follows: the disappearance of social benefits such as employment and health care, class disparity and immigration, ecological disaster, and untreatable diseases. These instances seem realistic while reading them in fiction, due to Díaz’s narratological technique of incorporating the future within the present. In other words, while “Monstro” is set fifty to eighty years from now, it is simultaneously reining in present and real concerns affecting the reader’s actuality.

When the narrator explains that he is joining his mother in the Dominican Republic, it is due to the dearth of summer employment in what is presumably the United States: “I wouldn’t have come to the Island that summer if I’d been able to nab a job or a summer internship, but the droughts that year and the General Economic Collapse meant nobody was nabbing shit.”³⁷ The use of upper case, a play of words that echoes the Great Depression, patently conveys that an economic stagnation period, while treated with humor, is a very menacing and realistic prospect. The actual fears of disappearing social benefits are another one of the reader’s realistic and actual concerns conveyed in the story (projected into the distant future) and in our current reality. When the narrator’s mother is consumed with an unprecedentedly treatable disease, she flees the North due to unaffordable health-care costs:

No chance she was going to be taken care of back North. Not with what you had to pay for medicines, or what the cheapest nurses charged . . . Say what you want, but family on the Island was still more reliable for heavy shit, like, say, dying than in the North. . . . Medicine was cheaper, too, with the flying territory in Haina, its Chinese factories pumping out pharma like it was romo, growing organ sheets by the mile, and for somebody as sick as my mother with only rental income to live off, that was what made sense.³⁸

A journalist, Díaz is clearly drawing from the reader’s real situation in this passage. So when Díaz re-creates a setting in his story similar to that of “medical tourism” to perform otherwise costly surgeries abroad, he is leveraging real press stories with fiction.³⁹

“Monstro” is also a comment on the neoliberal policies that enable the corporate domain to benefit, resulting in a face-to-face collision of class differences. Without a doubt, racial issues in the Dominican Republic derive from deep roots, as I have established. And yet, class differences exacerbate

the already racially charged atmosphere. In "Monstro," the truly destitute are Haitians: "Only poor Haitian types getting fucked up," "our poor east-coast neighbors, those who are also getting sick," "viktimas who had nine kinds of ill already in them."⁴⁰ But the characters within the Dominican Republic are not often racialized. The narrator, in fact, never identifies himself racially or ethnically. Rather, the descriptions of the characters fall on categories of class status.

Contrasted with the narrator's unfortunate economic status is his wealthy Brown University classmate Alex. They may both be "ivy leaguers" but Alex, the narrator insists, is "a prince": "Alex was more than just a rico, he was royalty; a fucking V—, son of the wealthiest, most priv'ed up family on the Island."⁴¹ As the narrator sees the stark difference between himself and Alex ("him prince, me prole") in telling about an attempt at ransom when Alex got kidnapped in Mexico, it is revealed that his father had an obviously profitable business overseas: "He used to live in Mexico, where the old man had a company."⁴² The peripheral comment on Alex's father could be read as an allusion to NAFTA's aftermath. Since Mexico, after the free-trade agreements, became a receptor of U.S. companies seeking inexpensive labor and the reduction of tariffs, it would be logical to assume that these policies made Alex's father wealthy. The kidnapping of Alex in Mexico would point not only to his extreme affluence but also to the well-known corruption that ensured the signing of NAFTA laws.

Even less acknowledged perhaps is the sense that Alex lives a trans-American reality due to immigration. A Dominican, Alex has lived in three regions within the Americas (the Caribbean, the United States, and Mexico). Adding to the trans-American dimension is that his mother flies to "Miami every week just to shop and fuck this Senegalese lawyer."⁴³ Here, Díaz inserts not only Caribbean contemporary diaspora movements, he is also disorientating the common threshold of perception of immigration. This time, the immigration of the Senegalese lawyer points to a different hemispheric Americanness and trans-Americanness: it is also transatlantic, much like the plantation zombie discussed earlier. Thus, the relations of trans-Americans on the Western hemisphere are affected by a new kind of African diaspora, one that is of a new economic status. It is only in this world where Alex's mother's relationship takes place. With these examples of geographic mobility that dislocate categories of identity, Díaz has indeed become a "new kind of US/Latino writer," projecting an entirely different notion of "American."⁴⁴

While immigration may be part of globalization trends, degradation of the environment is another common concern of Caribbean intellectuals. In this respect, ecocriticism seeded in Caribbean literature emerged under the notion that in order to fill in the voids of the human record, natural history had to be considered. Nature, as an undeniable presence, not only witnessed extermination, destruction, and subjugation but suffered it as well. Veritably, the Caribbean as a whole has not been offered any relief in its past, much less in its present, as multibillion-dollar corporations have further left their mark on the ecosystem. In this regard, the Martinican thinker Édouard Glissant, whose works represented a new ecoliterary concern, lamented that the Caribbean is an "abused earth, where blood breaks through as a cry."⁴⁵ While Díaz never claimed to be part of the ecocritical movement, the setting in "Monstro" noticeably evokes environmental concerns. Keeping with Díaz's ironic tone when faced with grave matters, the narrator expresses delight when he excitedly announces he will "take in some of that ole-time climate change."⁴⁶ Not only does the narrator comment sarcastically about the heat produced by global warming, the parallel story about the developing epidemics afflicting "the infected" also claims marine life: "Coral reefs might have been adios in the ocean floor but they were alive and well on the arms and backs and heads of the infected."⁴⁷ It is as if, within the space of "Monstro," natural resources are being substituted for strange morphological diseases.

The disappearance of the coral reefs and extreme warming producing "zoonotics by the pound" will nevertheless give way to the development of Díaz's new zombie. When insatiable heat generates erosion and alters the vegetation ("Everybody blamed the heat. Blamed the Calentazo. Shit, a hundred straight days over 105°"), a disease emerges.⁴⁸ Díaz's shrewd humor reveals itself ever more pointedly when this outbreak morphs the racialized zombie into a new being, although the disease itself is unquestionably bizarre: "A black mold-fungus-blast that came on like a splotch and then slowly just started taking you over, tunneling right through you— though as it turned out it wasn't a mold-fungus-blast at all. It was something else. Something new."⁴⁹ This ailment, like the narrator's mother's "rupture virus," points to a world so infected it cannot contain its epidemics.⁵⁰ And mother earth, "Monstro" seems to imply, can no longer heal its natural surroundings.

Inevitably, the diseased will turn into zombies within a world not too far removed from our present circumstances. Turning again to his revelations

in “Apocalypse,” Díaz’s futuristic stage here ceaselessly points to neoliberal policies that form the context in the narration: “In order to power the explosion of the super-rich and the ultra-rich, middle classes are being forced to fail, working classes are being re-proletarianized, and the poorest are being pushed beyond the grim limits of subsistence, into a kind of sepulchral half-life, perfect targets for any ‘natural disaster’ that just happens to wander by.”⁵¹ Díaz succinctly summarizes the elemental features that compose neoliberalism. Diagnosing disasters as natural insofar as they are weather-related, Díaz postulates that the devastation of precarious nations is rather the “explosion of the super-rich.” This means that a hurricane-prone state’s poorest, such as the ones in Haiti, become significantly vulnerable where the working class turns *infrahuman*. In “Monstro,” Díaz’s “poorest,” or those who begin living a “sepulchral half-life,” become the new zombie and continue being disregarded like the plantation slave in the colonial era.

In “Monstro,” the disease marks a stark socioeconomic imbalance when the outbreak does not alarm authorities, because they discern that it selectively affects the downtrodden: “In the end this one didn’t cause too much panic because it seemed to hit only the sickest of the sick . . . You literally had to be falling to pieces for it to grab you.”⁵² Here we are reminded of Díaz’s typically unsympathetic dark humor, used to effectively pinpoint instances of society’s cruelest stances on race and class in the face of disaster. In the story, when it is evident the disease only afflicts poor Haitians, the narrator reports that there is “no real margin in that,” as if recalling the unfortunate after-effect of Hurricane Katrina that Díaz reminded us of in “Apocalypse.”

Haiti has traditionally been a standing beacon of black resistance, but the island is also considered to be the poorest country in the western hemisphere.⁵³ Affected by the neoliberal policies set into motion within our last century, as “Apocalypse” explains, foreign investments fueling dictatorships have altered the self-sustenance of the citizenry, a sector that has visibly veered into oblivion in Haiti’s ill-fated democracy.⁵⁴ In “Monstro,” Henri Casimir, one of the infected patients who was once a minister, has been reduced to “carting sewage.”⁵⁵ In the case of the narrator, his unemployment causes him to meaninglessly wander about the Dominican Republic—his class status and nationality being the only means by which he differs from the jobless Haitians across the national border. In the context of the story, “Monstro” seems to suggest that if the zombie prior to the industrial revolution was a metaphor for unending labor as a slave, in the twenty-first century

it is a victim of the opposite. In “Apocalypse,” Díaz writes, “In the old days, a zombie was a figure whose life and work had been captured by magical means. Old zombies were expected to work around the clock with no relief. The new zombie cannot expect work of any kind—the new zombie just waits around to die.”⁵⁶ In Díaz’s words, this new, subjugated other becomes symptomatic with mechanisms of power that disfavor the precariat. With a 40.4 percent unemployment rate and 78 percent of the population under the poverty line in Haiti, the emergence of the new zombie in “Monstro”’s fictitious plot is congruent with these facts.⁵⁷

Both examples in the story point to governing entities’ overlooking the proletariat. Therefore if “zombie tales dramatize the strangeness of what has become real,” for Díaz, an admitted fan of William Gibson, the use of zombification—for both the economy and the victim it produces—becomes an effective testament to a failed democratic system.⁵⁸ The jobless and the poor, some now sickened by disease, are the new zombies, without any hope of sustenance available to them amid a decaying world. Nevertheless, the disease these subverted neoliberal subjects possess in “Monstro” will ultimately make them subversive. The ultimate goal here, as it were, is to connect the genre of the fantastic to theories of decoloniality. The new zombies in “Monstro” become the operating principle for reading resistance within Díaz’s decolonial project. In Díaz’s fabricated narrative, the coloniality of the subaltern zombies is first understood in reference to their blackness and later their socioeconomic status. A new point of referentiality will be drawn in terms of their behavior within the context of their signification (as a “signifier,” that is). Ultimately, we will be led to question their etymological (and epistemological) significance, and thus existence in “Monstro,” especially considering the zombie’s context within the Caribbean.

The Decolonial Zombie

In “Monstro,” the connections between disease and poverty are emphasized in the behaviors that start shaping what the infected person will become. Later in the story, after the diseased display zombie-like qualities, they “abruptly stopped communicating.”⁵⁹ Recalling the postcolonial debates in which subalterns may possess neither a voice nor a worldview that would position them within traditional Western frameworks, “Monstro” borrows threads from this logic.

When the victims become speechless, they are not only othered (for they were already), they literally refuse to speak. While speechlessness adds to their subaltern position, the phase in which the zombies stop speaking is deemed “the Silence” period: “And stranger shit was in the offing: eight months into the epidemic all infected viktims, even the healthiest, abruptly stopped communicating. Just went silent. Nothing abnormal in their bloodwork or in the balance of the infection. They just stopped speaking—friends, family, doctors, strangers, it didn’t matter. No stimuli of any form could get them to speak, either. Watched everything and everyone, clearly understood commands and information—but they refused to say anything.”⁶⁰ Their cognizance of everyone participating as part of a civilization clashes with their “refusal” to speak, a factor that is resonant with a subversive resistance. Added to the unnerving effect of the zombies’ apparent muteness is the signifier of their silence itself: these are othered subjects that, for no apparent reason, stop communicating. This silence nevertheless is what places them in a position of unprecedented authority. However, it is a moment feared by society’s uninfected: it is a cataclysmic moment—the calm before the storm. The case of epidemic insomnia that threatens the social order of civilization in Gabriel García Márquez’s *Cien años de soledad* [*One Hundred Years of Solitude*] (1967) is an appropriate comparison for understanding the subalternity of Díaz’s zombies’ silence and the significance of their resistance in the context of Latin American colonization.

In García Márquez’s fabricated town of Macondo, an apocalyptic amnesia plague threatens to erase civilization’s language. The townspeople start inscribing names onto things so as to not forget their use. The loss of civilization’s artifact, a normative sense of spoken or written discourse, may lead to silence. The zombies in “Monstro,” like the Macondians, are also faced with breaking from this “human” element.⁶¹ From the point of view of the uninfected, however, the zombie’s reticence to speak, like Macondo’s loss of memory, also implies a threat—even if it is a silent one. In our global day and age, the threat of planetary obliteration—biological weapons, nuclear wars, and the like—are menacing fears vis-à-vis our distrustful economy and certainly add to the paranoia about earth’s end. But if all were to fall silent, the paranoia would be exponentially worse. Díaz’s futuristic neoliberal-ridden planet contains zombies who were initially just a strange nuisance congregated in an avoided quarantine zone. Yet, the fear they effect when their silence interrupts the quotidian alter their former position as subalterns.

The period of silence in “Monstro” and townspeople’s dementia in *Cien años de soledad* are thus apocalyptic moments in which civilization might lose its “social composure.”⁶² Yet in both texts, these changes are instigated by an outside agent. In the novel, it is the character of Rebecca who reaches the Buendía clan moments before the amnesia outbreak takes place. Rebecca is continually referred to as an “other” (“did not ascribe to a Buendía name,” “ate dirt,” “only reacted to the sounds of a clock”).⁶³ And whether coincidental or not, the oddity of her presence as an other leads to both the knowledge of the outside world and the menacing elimination of Macondo’s memory.⁶⁴ Similarly, in “Monstro,” it is the arrival of a disease whose symptoms change over time. Because in “Monstro” the disease was initially racialized, leading then to silence, the disease points to the presence of creatures resisting the structure of a Macondo-like civilization (like Rebecca refusing a Buendía name).

The threat of these new diseases—outside agents—can be read similarly to the threat of European epidemics wiping out an entire Carib population. Yet Díaz’s zombies and García Márquez’s Rebecca are not the power structure agents themselves that are destructive. Rather, they are the result of an act of resistance. When they confront colonial and neocolonial structures of power, they create an effect. In the case of Macondo, it is widespread amnesia and eventually Macondo’s disappearance. In Díaz’s “Monstro,” it is the displaying of outright zombie behavior. Where García Márquez’s Macondo and Díaz’s Haiti differ in terms of their resistant agent is that, while Rebecca embraces solitude and confinement until old age, the zombies in “Monstro” do the complete opposite.

The effects of solitude (and solidarity) thus vary in both texts. In *Cien años de soledad*, solitude is crystalized upon the arrival of an adolescent slave in Macondo; the onset of dementia immediately follows. The mulata child is indebted to her grandmother for burning down her house and is forced into prostitution to pay off her debt. Adapted later in 1978 into a novella, the story of the mulata gestures toward the effects of solitude and slavery that García Márquez weaves into *Cien años de soledad*. The understanding of racialized slavery in Latin America that we take from this passage makes the brief comparison between this novel and Díaz’s “Monstro” a compelling one: solitude remains a consequence of slavery’s tragedy in both García Márquez’s and Díaz’s texts. Yet, the way these narratives assess solitude varies.

In *Cien años de soledad*, when young Aureliano enters the mulata’s shed, “63 men had been through the room.”⁶⁵ Their presence is felt in sheets

“weigh[ing] like a canvas,” and upon turning the mattress, “sweat came out of it from the other side.”⁶⁶ The magical realist exaggeration sternly criticizes the tragedy of child prostitution, but what is crucial is Aureliano’s inability to affect the girl’s misfortune. Upon leaving the room, he feels “terribly alone.”⁶⁷ Unable to liberate her, he throws himself into solitude, agonizing over his incompetence. While slavery’s imprint is a common heritage shared among those in the Caribbean region, the inability to abolish modern (and old) forms of slavery, as observed in Aureliano’s character, abound in Díaz’s Haiti. It is as if “Monstro”’s unruly and unequal world owes its misfortune—indirectly but assuredly—to the slave trade. In “Monstro,” the narrator’s impossible love pursuit, Misty, has also been sexually abused by a family member. A victim of incest, the narrator comments, “she was as much of a loner as I was.”⁶⁸ Interesting to the legacy of slavery, solitude in these stories is tolerated in the same spaces where, historically, the plantation precluded solidarity among slaves.

One of the driving forces behind Latin American narratives of the mid-twentieth century was precisely a call for unity against solitude. In *Cien años de soledad*, the critique underlined in the novel is that of an unattainable solidarity among the Buendía clan that leads to their inevitable extinction. In the case of “Monstro,” solitude lingers around the narrator and his human equals, but not among the zombies. Historical theories of Latin American solitude function as a subtext in “Monstro” where Díaz places it at the center of narration, as the infected deconstruct it to reveal an ultimate moral lesson right before total chaos erupts.

After the period of devastating silence, the infected gather silently in a church-like community. The chants that ensue are more horrifying than the preceding quietness: “The entire infected population simultaneously le[t] out a bizarre shriek—two, three times a day. Starting together, ending together.”⁶⁹ Neither the narrator nor the doctors possess any explanation as to how, without apparent prior communication, the infected chant in unison. The shrieking is so unbearable that “no uninfected could stand to hear it.”⁷⁰ In other words, the subaltern, while initially not speaking and then emitting an unendurable unified chant, is once again marking its difference. In this vein, rather than seeing these contemporary zombies as a form of escapism, “Monstro” privileges them as decolonial signifiers and attempts to draw an example of solidarity.

Similar to the eerie solitude conjured in Macondo, “Monstro”’s zombies develop a stance on isolation vis-à-vis the “un-infected.” This isolation

from the healthy creates within the group of infected a kind of family. The claim here is that the behaviors that isolate the diseased from the general public but unite them within their own sphere can also be read within a decolonial thread if we consider the following passage: “Doctors began reporting a curious change in the behavior of infected patients—they wanted to be together, in close proximity, all the time. They no longer tolerated being separated from other infected, started coming together in the main quarantine zone just outside Champ de Mars. All the victims seemed to succumb to the ingathering compulsion.”⁷¹ Indeed, what do we make of the fact that the infected—poor, suffering, diseased—cannot stand to be without each other? If we consider the idea that these beings are joining together against adversity, we might concede that what is at work here is a decolonial clan in the making.

The clan has formed a new community, but to contextualize this solidarity further we should again consider Haiti as “Monstro”’s stage. In Haiti, not only did the population’s ancestors suffer as slaves, they are also enduring a faulty economy and a plethora of disease.⁷² In “Monstro,” the infected merely tolerated pain, which is characterized by bearing “nine kinds of ill already.”⁷³ In this respect, the clan’s “compulsion to stay together” becomes similar to that of the gathering of slaves in *palenques* during the plantation era.

The kinship development between different ethnic populations of slaves on certain plantations, and the subsequent escape of some into marooned societies, are well documented.⁷⁴ The formation of these communities was essential for slaves, and planters sought to undo them to preclude revolts. Separated from their families or linguistic and ethnic groups, some found a home in these *palenques*, *quilombos*, or clans.⁷⁵ The solitude these slaves could not endure is similar to the kind the zombies find dreadful in “Monstro.” In fact, the zombies cannot stand this solitude physically: when attempting to separate the infected from each other, the narrator reports that “they went batshit, trying everything they could to break free, to return.”⁷⁶ I stress return here because it takes us to the beginning of this chapter, in which we recall that the slaves’ anguish in becoming zombies was the inability to return to the African west coast. In the case of “Monstro,” instead of seeking a homeland, the infected pursue their developed family, similar to that of the slaves forming a new community in the New World.

Also reminiscent of colonial slavery are the in-unison shrieks of the zombies. In “Monstro,” “the phenomenon that became known as the Chorus”

recalls the cases of vodun bewitchment of the plantation era.⁷⁷ Indeed, the unintelligible chants the zombies produce are the same ones Casimir starts emitting, for which his wife claims he is “bewitched.”⁷⁸ The narrator of “Monstro” further discloses the “widespread rumors that the infected were devils” and that there had been “reports” indicating that even “relatives attempt[ed] to set their infected family members on fire.”⁷⁹ Such accounts, however, are rooted in history, since during the plantocracy, witchcraft trials (and consequentially the burning or lynching of those “bewitched”) were accounted for in the Inquisition records in the Americas, dating back to the sixteenth century and the seventeenth.⁸⁰ During these times, “devil acts” were synonymous with slaves’ spiritual practices, including vodun, safeguarded by palenques and quilombos but deeply feared by planters. A result of this fear was the outlawing of spiritual practices.⁸¹

In the case of “Monstro,” the rumored zombie-turned-devil conjures up the plantational zombie to reflect on voodooism as a feared product of the plantation system. Díaz’s fiction relies on this history, since witchcraft was believed to have originated in zombie black magic. Casimir’s “bewitchment” is articulated as his “tramping about without destination” and as his being drawn to the chants.⁸² Nevertheless, his aversion to Dr. DeGraff’s attempt to remove him from the other infected, resulting in the patient’s “exploding” and “bounding” himself “out the car,” make apparent his need for proximity to the other infected.⁸³ For the outside world, Casimir is bewitched; yet, like the others within the quarantine zone, he is also part of a new palenque-like clan that cannot (and will not) stand to be apart. Díaz therefore seems to be playing with the allusion to, and illusion of, the decolonial nature of the Caribbean, as the zombies remain racialized via the trope of slavery.

The idealized imagery of a harmonious zombie clan, alas, cannot last forever. The story ends with a sense of urgency, when the innocent infected-turned-lethal are violently attacked. While the narrator recounts his unconsummated desire and ill-fated love attempt amid destruction, Haiti is leveled as foreign governments attempt to contain the aggressive diseased: “The Detonation Event—no one knows what else to call it—turned the entire world white. Three full seconds. Triggered a quake that was felt all across the Island.”⁸⁴ While I will come back to the use of word *white* here, I want to point out first that Díaz’s positioning of a world seized by fright is reminiscent of Haiti’s real, historical earthquake. It would be a superficial reading to readily dismiss the story’s outcome as evidence of merely mis-

chievous satire at the expense of an impoverished nation. Instead, it may be more fruitful to consider this imagery in the context of the story in particular and of Díaz’s stance on racial geopolitics in general. In this context, what might this new apocalypse in “Monstro” actually reveal, as the etymology of the word implies?

Instead of ending “Monstro” with the real apocalypse he so masterfully covered in his essay published in 2010, Díaz turns to science fiction when the zenith of tension is that of the infected fully morphing into man-eating zombies. When the narrator describes a Polaroid that is found amid the debris, it shows that the possessed are now “forty-foot-tall cannibal motherfuckers running loose on the Island.”⁸⁵ The anthropophagic nature of the infected is coated in biblical meaning. On the back of the same rescued photograph, scripture is quoted: “Numbers 11:18. Who shall give us flesh to eat?”⁸⁶ The apparition of the cannibal seems foretold in his essay “Apocalypse,” where Díaz presages that we will be “picked off by the hundreds of thousands by ‘natural disasters’ justified as ‘acts of god.’”⁸⁷

The passage regarding cannibalism cited in the story is one of many accounts contained in the Bible. While cannibalism was witnessed during European wars, religiously it was also conceived as a biblical sign of the coming of Armageddon. Obviously when it comes to colonialism, evangelization played a role in empire; thus, in Christianity, cannibalism was deemed barbaric. Anthropophagy, like race, was a means by which colonization was justified in the Americas. But the Caribbean was named after “cannibalism.” The term was associated with the Antillean islands when, lost in translation, the first explorers inferred that the “carib” (referring to the inhabitants of Cuba and Saint-Domingue) were societies that ate human flesh.⁸⁸ Cannibalistic accounts in the Americas may have been refuted back in the sixteenth century but the difference between a “cannibal” and a “carib” was not distinguished until 1796, after the Caribbean had already been named.⁸⁹ The Caribbean region was therefore conceived on account of refracted European fears.

Similar to the fukú curse in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* that ceaselessly resurfaces, in “Monstro” the fear of anthropophagy does so exponentially. Within Díaz’s context of globalization, “Monstro”’s man-eating creatures make a comeback in a globalized McOndo super-size manner. In this regard, though the caribs were wiped out during colonization, they seem to reappear as colonialists’ worst nightmare. Dangerous creatures, they are not deterred by “point[ing] a gauss-gun at them” and are

“only stopped when they [are] killed.”⁹⁰ When these born-again caribs re-surface—as if coming back from the dead, or claiming their land—Díaz’s short story comes full circle. It is as if “Monstro” is ending a chapter of Antillean colonialism with the return of the new carib. But if “Monstro” achieves closure, it does so only to start over again: in the story, the “a soon-to-be-iconic Polaroid” marks the return of the Carib-Cannibal as the emergence of what the narrator calls a “Class 2” creature.⁹¹ The Caribbean region might have been taken over by a new transculturated phenomenon, but the reader hopes it does not lead to forms of futuristic colonization. Considering Díaz’s tendency toward playful irony, however, this may well be his intention.

If moralizing apocalyptic tales focusing on power struggle require a monster, the use of a symbolic monster in this decolonial context is not new. In Latin America, the critical interpretation of the foundational Ariel (1900), written by the Uruguayan essayist José Enrique Rodó—taken from Shakespeare’s revered *The Tempest* (1611)—was that the monster Caliban represented an invasive nineteenth-century imperialistic nation. Later, the groundbreaking essay “Calibán” (1971), by the Cuban intellectual Roberto Fernández Retamar, also based on *The Tempest*, rejects Rodó’s fundamental premise, and instead utilizes the subjugated islander of Caliban to embody Latin America as the subaltern other.

Just as Caliban was for Rodó and Fernández Retamar a transatlantic, cross-cultural reconfiguration of Shakespeare’s character, Shakespeare’s Caliban came to life at the intersection of the halting Renaissance and the colonization of the Americas. Therefore Shakespeare’s Caliban projected a Europe attempting to figure out the limits of its colonial power. Caliban as a decolonial subject, however, calls attention to the act of resistance. In the colonial imaginary, conflict arose when resistance was “only in the presence of, or at a close remove from, absolute power.”⁹² Within a decolonial sphere, for Fernández Retamar as for Díaz, a monster-like figure such as Caliban or a carib-turned-cannibal-turned-Caliban is emblematic of this resistance, and points to the limits of hegemonic dominance. More important, the symbol of Caliban as a monster effectively reveals the origin of that confrontation. Like *The Tempest*, “Monstro” causes us to reevaluate our hereditary spaces of power while testing their limits. While neoliberalism is a failing system in “Monstro,” the story also suggests through the trope of the monster that the Americas are interconnected, which is why Haiti’s lessons are not exclusively for its own sake. As Díaz postulates in “Apoca-

lypse,” Haiti’s devastation was part of the “larger trend of global inequality” that will lead to “the transformation of our planet into a Haiti.”⁹³ In other words, “Monstro” teaches us that, if Caliban was Latin America, today Haiti is all of us.

While the monster (Caliban) signals warning, as its etymology implies, for Foucault, it further reveals “the emergence of difference.”⁹⁴ Far from a Rabelaisian, carnivalesque freak, and more in the sense of “out of normalcy,” a monster is a development of something beyond our comprehension.⁹⁵ Earlier I established that the zombie monster first conveyed its difference when becoming silent and then shrieking out in a choral fashion. Now, the monster’s development leads to its transforming into a symbolic prototype of (and necessary element to) narratives of catastrophe, in order to, in effect, reveal a deeper message. The narrative Díaz weaves in “Monstro” is that of his reality: Haiti—Prospero’s laboratory—and the neoliberal policies weighed down on a nation turned calamity. In “Monstro,” the instructional quality of the monster symbol is that it may uncover deep societal problems, as Díaz admits to staging: “I wanted the story-world to be on the cusp of a catastrophic ecological collapse, a year or so before things really go down the chute for humanity. A world more messed up than ours but equally stubbornly delusional. So caught up in the vampire logic of late capital that it can’t stop eating itself alive.”⁹⁶ The punishment for not possessing better economic discernment, and as if conforming to a sense of universal justice, are the cannibalistic zombies that will literally “eat” the world “alive,” the reason being that their planetary reality does not function as it should and therefore must cease to exist, if only to restart anew.

If human life expires, “Monstro”’s cannibalistic monster will be resilient. This resilience is another quality innate to the monster. Foucault recalls that monsters characteristically wish to “remain in existence” and adjust to the changes of the environment.⁹⁷ After all, the monster emerges “when a natural revolution occurs” such as the global warming of the planet that Díaz stages in “Monstro.”⁹⁸ In this case, as though they are in a process of Darwinian natural selection, Díaz’s zombies evolve and adapt to the natural and unnatural climate of “Monstro”’s inhabitable settings: “A world more messed up than ours.”⁹⁹ While they are feared for their “knotting together” and “coming together,” according to Foucault, a monster is just that: a “solid expanse” or “merely the fragmentary result of a much more tightly knit, much finer continuity.”¹⁰⁰ In other words, they are an evolved species, a prototype of the human, but their ability to form kin makes them

a perfected and naturally developed species habilitated to survive. Far from abnormal, fearsome creatures, they are the ideal artifact to teach humanity a lesson: just as memory is necessary to avoid the calamities endured in our past, in a sense, monsters are also essential as a warning for the future. In a moralizing tale such as “Monstro,” meant to urge a “stubbornly delusional” society from further damaging the planet, monsters signal caution.¹⁰¹

If the monsters that develop in Díaz’s short story appear impossibly unrealistic (if we were to forget for an instant that we are immersed in science fiction), it would be helpful to read the zombies as imaginary. The zombies might therefore act as a Brechtian illusion: the fictional dangers tied into the story reverberate in the reader’s reality, so we might not readily identify with the zombies, but instead acknowledge the degeneracy of our ways. As readers, we discover that the monster’s existence, much like that of Caliban, signals why we are entering a stage of decadence and extinction in the first place. If, in Foucault’s terms, “the monster provides an account, as though in caricature, of the genesis of differences,” these differences are tied to the colonial machine that gave genesis to the fictional chaotic end that “Monstro” proposes.¹⁰² Díaz’s monsters can be read as fictional caricatures, but they indeed reveal a social malaise that can be traced back to the formation of the Americas.

In the story, therefore, if the zombies may be conceived as science fiction caricatures, we may symbolically consider them to be reflections of objects similar to those of the allegory of the cave. The zombies might not be real, but they function as an illusion of the actual real reflected onto walls. This is due to the fact that the representation of reality through the image of a monster is more manageable than reality itself. Otherwise, we would be blinded by the immensity of truth if we walked out of Plato’s cave, which “Monstro” alludes to when DeGraff “burn[s] out the optic nerve [of her] right eye,” attempting to see reality unfolding as the zombies are bombed.¹⁰³ Humor and caricature, after all, while critical here, are much more palatable than the tragic accounts of human life. Since society is reticent to accept the real while “star[ing] into the ruins—bravely, resolutely” as Díaz hopes in “Apocalypse,” science fiction, Díaz concludes, is the next available alternative.

When the nuclear bomb is dropped on the previously “blackened” Haiti, the assault “turned the entire world white.”¹⁰⁴ Similar to the beginning of the story, when Díaz’s narrator dialogizes with race, the ending comes back to the dialectic of black-white opposites. In this case, whiteness as the counterpoint of its binary other is produced by such intense illumination that it

does not reveal clarity. Rather, its brightness is blinding, both literally (for it blinds DeGraff’s eye) and figuratively, as it occludes the distinction of reality. The reinscription of the universal in light, like the dichotomy of blanqueamiento and *negrura*, is thus reversed in “Monstro.” Díaz had conferred that *negrura* was an opportunity to see clearly, when in his essay published in 2010 he stated, “Apocalypse is a darkness that gives us light.” Calling attention to the apocalypse as a means to reveal truths, for “Monstro,” the traditional categories of light and white emphasize occlusion and blindness, whereas darkness and blackness are revelation and truth. The usual understanding of the binary terms, once defined by normative Eurocentric logic, is dislodged, and within the story a new conception of both race and color are veiled. As both the etymological and epistemological meanings of “Monstro” suggest, we are warned against adopting traditional references for the colonially rooted construction of identity.

In the end, however, Díaz’s ambiguity—Who is the narrator? Will the world really come to an end? Where does this strange disease, *la negrura*, come from?—makes “Monstro” aporetic in that there are many unknowns. What we are presented with, then, is a story with multiple layers of meaning and an added component of playfulness typical of Díaz’s genius. In other words, “Monstro” is a fluid ambiguity whose monsters can be read from various angles and vantage points, as this chapter has demonstrated. We may determine that the science fiction narrative mode is, in effect, just as challenging to analytically entertain as genres like realism or modernist prose.

Final Words

When Díaz wrote his post-Haiti earthquake piece, there were residues of hope flickering through his contemplation of the ghastly effects of natural destruction: “Apocalypses,” Díaz wrote, “like the Haitian earthquake are not only catastrophes; they are also opportunities: chances for us to see ourselves, to take responsibility for what we see, to change.”¹⁰⁵ While his meditative essay was indeed hopeful, “Monstro” ends with an analogy of the human race’s neglecting this urgent message. While there might still be hope in the story’s development into a novel, in its short story form the human experience’s extinction is self-caused. The misery the zombie has endured was tolerable no longer. In the story, as in any ideological literary piece, monsters are a “necessity” for making poignant claims about history and therefore are “introduce[ed] into a scheme.”¹⁰⁶ “Monstro” places

at our reach the results of a warning far too clear, yet ignored for far too long. The final point I will make about this story is a certainty: Díaz's zombie represents a resilient being that is ending unjust humanity, figuratively or literally, just as scripture prophesied. Zombies are created by the world and will destroy the world that created them. Affecting the Caribbean initially, the monsters will become a true planetary concern, suggesting the interconnectivity of world history from the crusades, to colonialism, to neoliberalism.

Writing "Monstro" was an earnest, soul-searching revelation for Díaz. It revealed that even after slavery and colonialism ended in our Americas, "the coloniality of power did not."¹⁰⁷ Haiti was for Díaz a window into the future. From "Apocalypse" to "Monstro," with a fearful eye toward the future, Díaz turned from journalistic commentary to science fictionalization. What we make of this outcome can be understood as a fictional tale intended to save the nonfictitious reality. We may cause the destruction of our ways, Díaz infers, but catastrophe stories, whether metaphorical or not, are meant to inspire people to action. While a multivalent symbol, in the end, the zombie monstro is an activist signal of hope. The zombie, then, is not only a Byronic antihero of a moralizing tale. Díaz's monstro is, in this case, both a haunting reminder of our past and a steadfast warning for our future.

Notes

1. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and the Millennial Capitalism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 23.

2. Typical of the Afro-futuristic aesthetic is the presence of the concerns of the African diaspora that look at both the causes and origins of diaspora, their effects in present times, and the imagined place of peoples of African extraction in the future. Therefore, it uses three temporalities, which "Monstro" interweaves in the following manner: Díaz recalls the past in its implied provocations of the zombie origin, it is anchored in current times as it takes on neoliberalization of the Americas, and it is contemplative of futuristic reimaginings of a world too obstinate to amend itself, resulting in its own possible annihilation. In a further developed version of this essay, I would like to detail the use of science fiction and Afro-futurism Díaz employs in his stories. Junot Díaz, "Monstro," *The New Yorker*, June 2012.

3. Díaz, "Monstro."

4. Díaz, "Monstro."

5. Díaz, "Monstro."

6. Díaz, "Monstro." While Díaz might not be referring to a particular type of bomb, he might be joining imagery from popular representations of weapons of mass de-

struction. The Joint Chiefs of Staff is assumed to be "Western," since the weapon is carried out of the termed "Southern Command" within Puerto Rico, an island which is still an unincorporated territory of the United States.

7. Díaz, "Monstro."

8. Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 5 (this and all subsequent references to this text are my translation).

9. Consider William Faulkner (1936), Derek Walcott (1949), Ralph Ellison (1941), Pablo Neruda (1950), Aimé Césaire (1961, 1963), and Édouard Glissant (1997), who incorporate the Haitian revolution into their work.

10. Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007), 21.

11. Díaz, "Monstro."

12. Junot Díaz, interview by "American Voices," Johns Hopkins University, August 2013.

13. Díaz, "Monstro."

14. Díaz, "Monstro."

15. Comaroff and Comaroff, "Alien-Nation," 23.

16. Amy Wilentz, "A Zombie Is a Slave Forever," *New York Times*, October 30, 2012.

17. Wilentz, "A Zombie Is a Slave Forever."

18. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 157.

19. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 157.

20. Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1 no. 3 (2000): 533.

21. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 533.

22. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 533.

23. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 5.

24. Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 1.

25. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 72. This and all subsequent references to this text are my translation. Frantz Fanon calls this color complex a *névrose d'abandon*, or an internalized acceptance of one's inferiority vis-à-vis the color line.

26. A movement that started in the Hispanic Caribbean inspired the Harlem Renaissance in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. Though erroneously attributed to white writers, like Luís Palés Matos (a negrista poet), from Puerto Rico, it eventually became known as a movement spearheaded by Nicolás Guillén.

27. Nicolás Guillén, *Sóngoro cosongo, Motivos de son, West Indies LTD., España: Poema en cuatro angustias y una esperanza* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1952), 39 (my translation).

28. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 157.

29. In one of Díaz's recent concerns on his social media, he shares an article pointing to Dominican citizenry revoked to children of Haitians born after 1929; accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-24445661>. Díaz covers these cases carefully and periodically posts cases referring to these issues, such as

the story of Dominican officials welcoming the building of a border wall between the neighboring states, as another example.

30. Díaz, "Monstro."
31. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 13.
32. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 231.
33. David John Howard, *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2001), 1.
34. Díaz, "Monstro."
35. Ljubiša Mitrović, "Bourdieu's Criticism of the Neoliberal Philosophy of Development, the Myth of Mondialization and the New Europe," *Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology Review* 4, no. 1 (2005): 40.
36. Junot Díaz, "Apocalypse," *Boston Review*, May 2011, accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.bostonreview.net/junot-diaz-apocalypse-haiti-earthquake>.
37. Díaz, "Monstro."
38. Díaz, "Monstro."
39. Elisabeth Rosenthal, "The Growing Popularity of Having Surgery Overseas," *New York Times*, August 6, 2013; Walecia Konrad, "Going Abroad to Find Affordable Health Care," *New York Times*, March 20, 2009.
40. Díaz, "Monstro."
41. Díaz, "Monstro."
42. Díaz, "Monstro."
43. Díaz, "Monstro."
44. José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 3.
45. Édouard Glissant, *Les Indes* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1965), 26 (my translation).
46. Díaz, "Monstro."
47. Díaz, "Monstro."
48. Díaz, "Monstro."
49. Díaz, "Monstro."
50. Díaz, "Monstro."
51. Díaz, "Apocalypse."
52. Díaz, "Apocalypse."
53. This resistance is immortalized in Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo*, as I have stated, but also in Victor Hugo's *Bug Jargal* (1826), Pablo Neruda's *Canto general* (1950), Aimé Césaire's *Toussaint Louverture* (1960), and C. L. R. James's *The Black Jacobins* (1963), to name a few.
54. The Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot held at the core of his critique that the peasantry, while crucial for Haiti's development, were virtually ignored by the government. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State against Nation* (New York: Monthly Review, 1990), 116.
55. Díaz, "Monstro."
56. Díaz, "Apocalypse."
57. World Bank, "Haiti," accessed September 2013, data.worldbank.org/country/Haiti.

58. Comaroff and Comaroff, "Alien-Nation," 23.

59. Díaz, "Monstro."

60. Díaz, "Monstro."

61. Díaz, "Monstro."

62. I take the expression *social composure* from Homi Bhabha, who conveys the signifier of silence in the following way: when "the social event encounters the silence of the word," this instance is when the written word, civilization, "may lose its historical composure." Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 26.

63. Gabriel García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1967), 56–62 (this and all subsequent references to this text are my translation).

64. See Brett Levinson's analysis of Rebecca in "Anatomy of the Latin American 'Boom' Novel," *Literary Cultures of Latin America: A Comparative History*, ed. Mario J. Valdés and Djelal Kadir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 345–52.

65. García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad*, 69.

66. García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad*, 70.

67. García Márquez, *Cien años de soledad*, 70.

68. Díaz, "Monstro."

69. Díaz, "Monstro."

70. Díaz, "Monstro."

71. Díaz, "Monstro."

72. World Bank, "Haiti."

73. Díaz, "Monstro."

74. Sidney Wilfred Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), viii.

75. Mintz and Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture*, 26.

76. Díaz, "Monstro" (emphasis added).

77. Díaz, "Monstro."

78. Díaz, "Monstro."

79. Díaz, "Monstro."

80. James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 51.

81. In Jamaica, for instance, Obeah had been criminalized as a "counter-insurgency measure" for fear of slaves' rebellion; accessed April 22, 2014, <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2013/features/in-the-diaspora/03/18/a-legacy-of-emancipation/>.

82. <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2013/features/in-the-diaspora/03/18/a-legacy-of-emancipation/>.

83. <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2013/features/in-the-diaspora/03/18/a-legacy-of-emancipation/>.

84. Díaz, "Monstro."

85. Díaz, "Monstro."

86. Díaz, "Monstro."

87. Díaz, "Apocalypse."

88. Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London: Routledge, 1992), 15.
89. Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*, 15.
90. Díaz, “Monstro.”
91. Díaz, “Monstro.”
92. Roland Greene, “Colonial Becomes Postcolonial,” *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 65 no. 3 (2004): 429.
93. Díaz, “Apocalypse.”
94. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 156–59.
95. In his famous *Essais*, Michel de Montaigne explains in “Des cannibales” (1580) that the term barbarian meant rather, vis-à-vis Greek society, “outside of normalcy”; Michel de Montaigne, *Des Essais* (London: Nouvelles Éditions, 1771), 107.
96. Junot Díaz, interview by Cressida Leyshon, “This Week in Fiction: Junot Díaz,” *The New Yorker*, July 16, 2012, accessed September 10, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2012/07/this-week-in-fiction-junot-diaz-1.html>.
97. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 159.
98. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 153, 155.
99. Díaz, “This Week,” 2012.
100. Díaz, “Monstro”; Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 154.
101. Díaz, “Apocalypse.”
102. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 157.
103. Díaz, “Monstro.”
104. Díaz, “Monstro.”
105. Díaz, “Apocalypse.”
106. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 153.
107. José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), xi.

Part IV

Desiring Decolonization