

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Impact Factor 3.9

Vol. 5 Issue 2 April 2019

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132



HERMENEUTICS OF SPECULATIVE WRITING IN JUNOT DIAZ' *THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO*

Dr. S. Veeralakshmi
Assistant Professor
St. Xavier's College
Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu

Abstract

Hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpretation and explanation of texts. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Diaz uses Speculative writing as one of the narrative techniques. He has made references to various Science fictions and some alien characters. The main characters Yunior and Oscar are familiar with the lavish language created by J.R.R. Tolkien. The dictator of the Dominican Republic, Trujillo is compared to a comic book villain Darkseid, a character much feared for his ability to shoot energy beams from his eyes that unerringly hit their target which is called as Omega Effect. Junot Diaz refers to the descriptions of darkness or blackness in literary works such as *The Tempest*, *Dune*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Dark Knight*, Yunior's numerous allusions to blackness and darkness are understood as metaphors of ill omens, evil, otherness, and even ugliness. Without having a basic understanding of some of the science fictions like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Fantastic Four*, or the apocalyptic movies like *Akira* or *The Planet of the Apes* or *The Watcher*, a reader cannot comprehend the full meaning of the text.

Keywords

Hermeneutics, Speculative Writing, Science Fiction, Omega Effect, Apocalyptic.

Vol. 5 Issue 2 (April 2019)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh



HERMENEUTICS OF SPECULATIVE WRITING IN JUNOT DIAZ' *THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO*

Dr. S. Veeralakshmi

Assistant Professor

St. Xavier's College

Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu

.....

Hermeneutics is the study of the methodological principles of interpretation and explanation of texts. More specifically how we read, understand, apply, and respond to biblical texts. In the contemporary period, Hermeneutics is a methodology that endeavors to understand what person intends to convey by using sharable symbols. Anthony C. Thiselton, a professor of Christian theology at the University of Nottingham defines the term as, "Hermeneutics explores how we read, understand, and handle texts, especially those written in another time or in a context of life different from our own" (1).

Hermeneutics is widely applicable in the reading of classical texts. Generation after generation seeks to reapply the meaning of the author in a classical text to its own milieu. However, this does not imply that the author's meaning has changed. The meaning never changes but the significance of the meaning undergoes historical and cultural changes. Hermeneutics is the science of textual interpretation. It plays a role in postmodern philosophy. Richard E. Palmer, one of America's leading experts in Hermeneutic philosophy defines hermeneutics as follows:

Hermeneutics is the study of understanding, especially the task of understanding texts. Natural science has methods of understanding natural objects; 'works' require a hermeneutic, a 'science' of understanding appropriate to works as works. Certainly the methods of 'scientific analysis' can and should be applied to works, but in doing so the works are treated as silent, natural objects. Insofar as they are objects, they are amenable to scientific methods of interpretation; as works, they call for more subtle the comprehensive modes of understanding. The field of hermeneutics grew up as an effort to describe these latter, more specifically 'historical' and 'humanistic' modes of understanding. (8)

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Diaz uses Speculative writing as one of the narrative techniques. Speculative writing is an umbrella term that encompasses certain elements

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

like supernatural, futuristic or other imaginative themes like science fiction, super hero, utopian, dystopian and fantasy writings. Science Fiction is a genre which defines a fictional world alternative to experiential one. It reflects experiences in reality. This article is committed to a preview of the narrative technique Science fiction writing, which not only provide enrichment to the theme, but also intensify the worth of an artist. The researcher wishes to encompass the investigation of the narrative technique of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in a paradigm constituted by the science fiction writing. It portrays incidents which may happen in future. James Gunn, a Science Fiction theorist defines the genre as follows:

Science fiction is the branch of literature that deals with the effects of change on people in the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places. It often concerns itself with scientific or technological change, and it usually involves matters whose importance is greater than the individual or the community; often civilization or the race itself is in danger. (6)

Science Fiction differs from Science Fantasy which has no scientific background with its mythical and supernatural characters. Brian W. Aldiss highlights the views of Miriam Allen de Ford, an American Science fiction writer as, "Science Fiction deals with improbable possibilities, Fantasy with plausible impossibilities" (qtd. in *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction* 164).

The primary objective of Science Fiction is to make us consider the physical, emotional and psychological effects of futuristic ideas, focusing on the moral and ethical dilemmas pertaining to the real world. Hugo Gernsback, one of the promoters of scientific knowledge coined the term 'Scientifiction' and later modified it as 'Science Fiction' and used for Electrical Experimenter magazine in 1909 and used during 1950s and for paperback novels.

Junot Díaz finds that the comic book and Science Fiction world serve as parallels for the challenges faced by any Dominican-American who suffer from nostalgia. Díaz's affection for Science Fiction genre may be due to his immigration to the States and his early years in the Dominican Republic. During his stay in the Dominican Republic, he is used to reading books of different genres and kungfu movies. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Oscar's interest towards comic book fantasies and sci-fi dreams represent yet another melancholic sign of his profound alienation from his New Jersey peers and also in his native land. "...in the DR he had watched too much Spider-Man, been taken to too many Run Run Shaw kung fu movies, listened to too many of his abuela's spooky stories about el Cuco and la Ciguapa" (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 21- 22).

Junot Díaz has used some phrases and characters from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* aptly in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. It shows his interest in the Science Fiction genre. Yunior cites the fall of Mordor and the dispelling of evil from Middle Earth from The Lord of the Rings trilogy as a complement to the fall of Trujillo. Yunior and Oscar are familiar with the elvish language created by J.R.R. Tolkien. Oscar writes in this language in his dormitory room and Yunior is also familiar with this tongue. He greets Oscar with the Elvish word for friend "mellon" (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 172). Díaz selectively uses these genres to shape the story.

Vol. 5 Issue 2 (April 2019)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

In Oscar's dorm room, he has written the Elvish language, "Do you know what sign the fool put up on our dorm door? Speak, friend, and enter. In fucking Elvish! (Please don't ask me how I knew this. Please.) When I saw that I said: De León, you gotta be kidding. Elvish?" (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 171-72).

Yunior's Science Fiction and fantasy allusions in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* mostly serve to reveal a fallen world where the marvelous either no longer exists or where what remains of it has been forced into the service of evil. Trujillo is compared to a comic book villain Darkseid, a character much feared for his ability to shoot energy beams from his eyes that unerringly hit their target which is called as Omega Effect. The dictator's destructive efficiency is shown through this comparison. References to other Science fictions and fantasy characters by Yunior are an example for Diaz's way of mixing science fiction genre in his narration. Yunior quotes about Oscar's nerdiness:

...could write in Elvish, could speak Chakobsa, could differentiate between a Slan, a Dorsai, and a Lensman in acute detail, knew more about the Marvel Universe than Stan Lee, and was a role-playing game fanatic.... Perhaps if like me he'd been able to hide his otakuness maybe shit would have been easier for him, but he couldn't. Dude wore his nerdiness like a Jedi wore his light saber or a Lensman her lens. (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 21)

Reading the novel is like travelling through time and space. According to Junot Diaz, immigrant experience resembles space travel. The immigrants leave one world completely and enter in a space shuttle and reach another planet i.e. is their host land. There they first face the problem of assimilation with the new culture and new language. As a Latino writer, JunotDíaz has mixed the genres like science fiction, fantasy, comic books with the magical realism in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Science fiction has an obvious influence in his novel. *Lord of the Rings* has been his favourite book from his childhood. He has given many footnotes in his novel. His reading of *Texamo* by the Caribbean writer Patrick Chamoiseau has inspired him to write a book footnotes like that in his boyhood days.

Darkseid is his all- time favourite comic book villain and he casts a long shadow over the story. He has a power called Omega effect which vaporizes a person until he chooses to put them back together again. He has mentioned many books in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. His voracious reading has helped him to mould the characters and go deep into the characters. The title refers to Oscar Wilde and *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*.

Junot Diaz refers to the descriptions of darkness or blackness in literary works such as *The Tempest*, *Dune*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *Dark Knight*, Yunior's numerous allusions to blackness and darkness are understood as metaphors of ill omens, evil, otherness, and even ugliness. The reference to the tyrannical DC Comics character Darkseid is associated with doom and darkness as he tries to take over the universe and free will. Another reference to darkness is found in a footnote about equating the Dominican Republic and the Third World with the "DarkZone" (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 92). Finally, both Oscar and his mother are brutally beaten at night, in the Dominican Republic, under the cloak of darkness and in the cane fields. Bad things happen in dark places.

Vol. 5 Issue 2 (April 2019)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

Without having a basic understanding of some of the science fictions like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Fantastic Four*, or the apocalyptic movies like *Akira* or *The Planet of the Apes* or *The Watcher*, a reader cannot comprehend the full meaning of the text. Allusions to Tolkien's Sauron and Jack Kirby's Darkseid permit readers to imagine the fictional but real evils of Trujillo and his regime. The Dominican culture mixed with the pop culture of the United states give more elegance to the novel. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Oscar reads a lot of science fiction stories and watches many apocalyptic movies. He tries to write many novels. He also adds, "He was writing a lot, which was always a good sign. I'm going to be a Dominican Tolkien, he said" (*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* 193).

Junot Diaz's handling of genres like magic realism and science fiction is evident through reference to the towns McOndo and Macondo in his novel. McOndo is a thoroughly modern and often banal world defined by Apple Macintoshes, condos, and McDonald's, a world named by Fuguet. Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is very much a product of Macondo and McOndo worlds. Since JunotDiaz is a voracious reader, he has taken references from the comic books and science fictions he likes the most. References to other Science fictions help the readers to understand the magical power of the Dominican Republic and also give a dimension to the narration.

References

- Diaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. USA: Penguin Group. 2007. Print.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*. USA: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2009. Print.
- Palmer, Richard E. *Hermeneutics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969. Print.
- Gunn, James and Candelaria Matthew. *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*. Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2005. Print.