Defiant Bodies:
Discursive Power and Resistance in the Post-Dictatorship Novels of Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz

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Abstract

This study examines three novels by contemporary Caribbean-American authors – Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz – which attend to the history of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. While recent studies on Trujillo focus on the cultural discourses that enabled the dictator to consolidate power and establish hegemony, they neglect subtle forms of resistance. I argue that the three writers attend to various discursive models of masculinity, femininity, and ethnicity through which Trujillo's regime induced individuals to understand their own bodies and the bodies of others. They also seek out and valorize alternative modes of relating to the body, which enable the characters to formulate new conceptions of resistant subjectivity.

Ce mémoire analyse trois romans d'auteurs caribano-américains – Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat et Junot Diaz – qui traitent de la dictature de Trujillo en République Dominicaine. Même si plusieurs études sur Trujillo examinent déjà les discours culturels qui ont permis au dictateur de solidifier son pouvoir et d'établir une hégémonie, elles ne s'intéressent pas suffisamment à des formes plus subtiles de résistance. Nous montrerons ici comment Alvarez, Danticat et Diaz considèrent différents modèles de discours sur la masculinité, la féminité et l'ethnicité - des discours à travers lesquels le régime de Trujillo a façonné la compréhension qu'ont les individus de leur propre corps et de celui des autres. Nous analyserons aussi comment les auteurs explorent et valorisent des rapports alternatifs au corps, qui permettent aux personnages de formuler de nouvelles conceptions d'une résistance subjective.

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Introduction: Post-Totalitarian Fiction and the Social Utility of Historical Memory

The project of literary historical recovery is often regarded, in critical discussions, as a productive end in itself. For instance, in her celebratory critique of two contemporary American works of fiction, Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998), Kelli Lyon Johnson asserts that both novels are socially important precisely because they direct readers' attention to the history of Dominican totalitarianism. "Ultimately," Johnson argues "both Alvarez and Danticat create a space for the collective memory of the trujillato [Trujillo dictatorship] within the novel, giving collective memory a face, a voice, and a story" (par. 32). It is of interest that Johnson does not comment on the social utility of Caribbean historical fiction within a North American context. This omission indicates that, for Johnson, the dramatization of marginal historical narratives is a productive undertaking in and of itself: consequently, one does need to justify such an endeavour.

This study focuses on both of the novels that Johnson addresses as well as Junot Díaz's fictional debut, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Together, these works constitute the most prominent English language literary texts to attend to the historical memory of the Trujillo era[1]. Although the three authors were born in the Caribbean – Alvarez and Díaz are from the Dominican Republic, while Danticat has Haitian origins – they all immigrated to the United States during their childhood. Moreover, each of them writes for an audience that extends beyond the Hispaniolan (i.e. Dominican and Haitian) community. In addition to working in English, the authors accommodate their presumed readers' lack of contextual understanding by

[1] Ignacio López-Calvo uses the term "Trujillo cycle" in reference to the primarily Spanish language body of creative literature that deals with the Trujillo dictatorship. My study is interested in the English language subset within this corpus.

explicating the works' historical material in detail[2]. Although the three novels are sensitive to various macro-political and discursive phenomena associated with the period in question, they all offer micro-narrative, character-focused depictions of life under Trujillo; this is a suitable approach, given that the regime significantly impacted its subjects' lives on a daily basis.

Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina was one of the longest ruling Caribbean dictators of the twentieth century. Trujillo's regime was typical of totalitarianism insomuch as it centered on the charismatic and monolithic figure of the dictator, who positioned himself as instrumental within a teleological narrative of national development[3] (Sondrol 600). Although born into a rural peasant community, Trujillo moved quickly through the ranks of the Dominican army to attain the position of Commander in Chief in 1924. He took control of the presidency through a coup d'état six years later, thereby undermining traditional vestiges of aristocratic power. Technically, the dictator occupied the position of president from 1930-38, and then again from 1942-52. In the intervening years, and in the nine years that followed his second term, he relinquished the official presidential role to various puppet subordinates; however, during these periods, he still retained his full political power as well as his position as the national head-of-state. Taken as a whole, therefore, Trujillo's reign lasted from his coup on August 16, 1930, to his assassination on May 30, 1961. The regime is characterized by its isolationism, highly centralized economic programs, lavish state spectacles, extensive surveillance apparatuses and erratic acts of brutality, of which the most far-reaching was the 1937 pogrom against Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans.

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[2] Alvarez and Danticat are subtle in their deployment of factual information, while Díaz punctuates his narrative with self-consciously clunky explanatory footnotes, thereby drawing readers' attention to the gaps in their historical knowledge.

[3] Paul Sondrol contrasts totalitarian with authoritarian systems. The latter tend to be less centralized and less reliant on charismatic leadership, national mythology or populism as a means of maintaining power. Although, Trujillo's reign was primarily totalitarian in nature, it should be noted that the dictator's unbridled pilfering of national assets constitutes a tendency that, for Sondrol, is more typically associated with authoritarian rule (600).

Although Trujillo presided over a period of unprecedented economic growth, he and his family also appropriated vast amounts of the nation's business assets, thereby enabling their inclusion among the global ultra-rich (Crassweller 4). Trujillo also expected unyielding displays of servility from his bureaucratic inner circle (Galíndez 200-2), and he brutally suppressed acts of dissent, or even suspected acts of dissent, by means of torture and imprisonment (Derby 139). As a highly centralized, restricting and domineering presence, Trujillo wielded an enormous degree of power over the daily lives of his subjects. Certainly, the events of the era make for dramatic narrative material. But can one locate a more constructive justification for the sudden emergence of Trujillo narratives within contemporary American literary discourse?

One might assume, quite simply, that acts of historical narrative recovery are productive insomuch as they bring new facts to public attention, thereby expanding people's knowledge of history. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's historiographic study *Silencing the Past* offers compelling reasons to challenge this assertion. Trouillot argues that all forms of historical production engage in acts of silencing. For him, narratives cannot be incorporated into the "historical landscape" in such a way that they co-exist harmoniously with previous accounts (49). Trouillot claims that sources gain legitimacy through competitive relations with rival texts: "They will have to gain their right to existence in light of the field constituted by previously created facts. They may dethrone some of these facts, erase or qualify others" (49). The implication here is that works of historical scholarship and fiction emphasize certain events or perspectives while ignoring others, thereby directing, or at least attempting to direct, the focus of readers' consideration. It is not sufficient to simply state that historical narratives increase people's understanding by expanding their factual knowledge, since all texts direct their readers away form certain topics or perspective at the same time as they draw attention to others. It is therefore important for critics

to assess the ideological impact of a given historical narrative, rather than assuming that all endeavours involving historical recovery are inherently or equally productive. One must inquire as to what, specifically, post-dictatorship novels achieve within non-dictatorship societies.

Certain prominent theorists suggest that trauma literature functions in part by enabling survivors to engage in constructive psychological processes. Drawing on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Cathy Caruth argues that trauma does not merely reside in immediate encounters with violence, but in recurring flashbacks that appear long after the initial traumatic event (1-2). She also contends that the experience of 're-living' certain traumatic encounters constitutes a means through which individuals learn to make intellectual sense of their past (4). Caruth applies Freudian conceptions of trauma to cultural artifacts: she argues that various texts depict the recurrent nature of traumatic memory (9). Building on Caruth, Petar Ramadanovic argues that literary works also assist individuals to manage traumatic past experiences. Insomuch as literature dramatizes instances of social violence, it also forces readers to re-visit painful memories and therefore to engage in the distressing, but also necessary, recollective processes through which they might gain a better understanding of the past (92-3). In short, Ramadanovic (via Caruth and Freud) suggests that post-dictatorship fiction can work to bring about a measure of cultural catharsis. In *The Untimely Present*, Idelber Avelar argues that post-Boom novels in Brazil and in the Latin American Southern Cone states serve to counter the opiatic effects of neoliberal ideology by creating space for individuals to mourn past encounters with political violence[4]. She argues that neoliberalism in the region – which is itself a partial product of the late twentieth century military dictatorships – treats mourning as a regressive form of thought that is

[4] Critics continue to debate as to when exactly the Latin American Boom period (associated with the expansive, Modernist-influenced undertakings of Garbriel García Márquez and Julio Cortázar) gave way to the more self-reflexive, ironic and anti-totalizing works of the post-Boom era; Avelar, however, situates this transition at about 1972-3 (13).

of little use within an expanding industrial economy (2). For Avelar, post-dictatorship literature stands as a bulwark against this ideology and thereby enables a necessary therapeutic process (3).

Conceptions of literature as a force that facilitates cathartic effects become problematic when applied to diasporic writing. For instance, in her study of post-trauma Haitian- and Dominican-American fiction, Lucía Suárez, like Ramadanovic and Avelar before her, equates literary discourse with the grieving process. She asserts: "writing, for the authors, and reading, for us, actualizes the possibility of mourning" (8). Some of the primary texts that Suárez addresses are among the most popular works of Hispaniolan immigrant fiction to be produced and disseminated in English speaking North America[5]. As widely circulated American texts, these novels' readership includes individuals who have no Hispaniolan ancestry and limited access to collective memory of political events in the region. It seems unlikely, therefore, that these particular readers feel compelled to mourn experiences with which they are largely, if not entirely, unfamiliar. Clearly, notions of post-trauma fiction as an exercise in collective catharsis do not fully translate to the North American context.

Narratives about Caribbean totalitarianism are nevertheless pertinent to non-Caribbean North American readers. Moreover, this pertinence extends well beyond vague conceptions of cultural awareness or emotional empathy. The most useful theories, for the purposes of the current discussion, position post-dictatorship literature as a form of discursive intervention. These studies focus primarily on two themes: polyphonic storytelling and gender relations. The latter is more relevant to the present study, however both are treated respectively in the discussion that follows. Numerous theorists argue that works of post-dictatorship fiction aim, through their narrative techniques, to counter the culturally restrictive dynamics associated with

[5] For instance Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* was singled out by the New York Public Libraries organization as one of the new classics of contemporary literature, while Danticat's bestselling novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was incorporated into Oprah's book club.

totalitarian power. Dictatorships are frequently understood as anti-intellectual, anti-humanistic institutions insomuch as they seek to implement hegemonic, master-narrative discourses and to suppress dissident voices. According to Manuel Antonio Garretón, dictatorships tend to treat ideological pluralism and free debate as forces that rupture the national consensus and thereby undermine economic development (19). Literary critics, including Beatriz Sarlo, Adam Lifshey and Charlotte Rich argue that post-dictatorship texts frequently counter the hegemonic power of dictatorial regimes by invoking a polyphonic, ideologically open storytelling form. For instance, according to Nandini Bhattacharya, Salman Rushdie's children's novel *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* allegorizes this opposition by staging a conflict between the monolithic voice of the dictator figure, and the ideologically open, curious disposition of the text's storyteller/protagonist (7).

Theories of post-dictatorship literature that situate polyphonic openness against dictatorial discourse fail to recognize that many such novels, including the works that are featured in the present study, are not wholly committed to ideological pluralism. The impulse towards polyphony is frequently offset by the necessity of advancing a clear ethical position. This tendency may constitute part of a cultural backlash to postmodern skepticism that aims, in the manner of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* as well as Terry Eagleton's *After Theory*, to stress the critical utility of certain foundational claims, including the supposition that human beings desire both respite from bodily suffering and freedom to pursue contentment on their own terms[6]. These assumptions are certainly essential to any denunciation of totalitarian power. Moreover, some post-totalitarian authors' rejection of experimentalism may reflect (albeit

[6] In his chapter "Truth, Virtue and Objectivity" Eagleton mounts an eloquent defense of certain, fundamental conceptions of morality, (103-49), while in "Symptoms of Passage," Hardt and Negri comment on the social utility of Enlightenment era conceptions of truth specifically in post-trauma societies (137-59).

with certain qualifications) Fredric Jameson's notion that "third world" writers feel ethically compelled to foreground certain collective, material concerns and therefore cannot afford to engage in radical deconstructive projects (85). Jameson's opposition between first and third world literature generalizes about numerous authors working in a wide variety of contexts on both sides of the so-called first/third world divide. While his argument inaccurately characterizes a great deal of contemporary authors, it nevertheless offers a framework through which one might understand the priorities of the three specific writers discussed in this project. All of these authors communicate an ideological position that clearly denounces totalitarian power and, in doing so, engages with the material reality of certain collective historical experiences. The point here is not to deny that polyphony or deconstructionism is an important element within the canon of post-dictatorship fiction, but merely to assert that this compulsion is frequently offset, particularly in the texts in question, by a counter-impulse towards establishing a measure of ideological coherence.

Many theorists also situate post-dictatorship novels as interventions into misogynistic gender relations. This argument is succinctly conveyed through Barbara Ehrenreich's assertion that fascism is "implicit in the daily relationships of men and women" (xv). Moreover, the connections between dictatorship culture and misogyny constitute major themes in prominent twentieth and twenty-first century literary works including Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938), Gabriel García Márquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch* (1975) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006). In a particularly insightful study of post-dictatorship fiction in Latin America's Southern Cone, Mary Beth Teirney-Tello argues: "the relationship between the sexual and the political in these works is more metonymical than metaphorical, implying contiguity rather than analogy or similarity" (13). For Teirney-Tello, it is wrong to

assume that authors merely exploit depictions of oppressive gender relations or sexual violence as a means of allegorizing power; rather, these depictions draw a direct connection between interpersonal misogyny and dictatorship culture. In short, Teirney-Tello argues that one cannot separate official power from the patriarchal social dynamics that both enable and are in turn enabled by the dictatorial regime.

This study is largely aligned with Teirney-Tello's position, although it seeks to expand the focus beyond considerations of misogyny. While gendered ideology certainly underwrites dictatorial authority, so too do numerous other discourses which, like patriarchy, seek to govern individuals' understandings of their own bodies. According to Michel Foucault, the body is the primary site at which people experience the impact of discursive power. Building on Foucault's formulation, this study analyses the ways in which bodily-oriented totalitarian discourses impact individuals through cultural texts, interpersonal exchanges and psychological processes. Moreover, it situates works of post-totalitarian Caribbean-American literature as critical interventions into these various discursive dynamics. Alvarez's, Danticat's and Díaz's texts all demonstrates that Trujillo's regime created cultural discourses that sought to induce individuals to understand their bodies in specific ways. The novels are not merely critical representations of the Trujillo era, but also reactions to it: they seek out and valorize alternative modes through which individual might relate to their bodies so as to situate themselves outside of totalitarian culture.

This study is divided into three chapters. The first attends to themes of femininity, affect and political resistance in Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Here, I argue that Trujillo induced middle and upper class women to subordinate their own affective impulses to the authority of a misogynistic and sexually exploitative dictatorial regime. The novel celebrates the

way in which the characters learn to place a measure of faith in their own affective/bodily inclinations, thereby resisting Trujillo era misogyny while simultaneously creating a feminized model of revolutionary subjectivity. The second chapter attends to issues of racism and abjection in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*. Danticat depicts Trujillo's 1937 massacre of Haitian labourers in the border region as an act of performative violence, one that situates Haitian bodies as abject entities within the emergent, racially homogenous Dominican imagined community. Danticat's Haitian protagonist responds to these oppressive discourses by re-conceptualizing the 'abject' body as a symbol of transnational identity, sensuality and physical connectivity. The third chapter argues that, in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, notions of seductive, dandified masculinity constitute a means through which Trujillo and his collaborators consolidate political and cultural capital. The text's narrator seeks out and valorizes an alternative conception of masculinity, which is embodied by the novel's protagonist whose lack of seductive or violent capabilities situate him outside of the symbolic order of the Trujillo era.

In recent years, historical discourse on Trujillo has taken a Gramscian turn towards investigating the various cultural dynamics that enabled the dictator to establish hegemony. The first major wave of historical studies on Trujillo, which include books by Jesús de Galíndez (1956), Howard Wiarda (1963) and Robert Crassweller (1966) focus on the dictator's effective use of violence and state terror in order to maintain power. Recent scholarly works, however, by Valentina Peguero (2004), Christian Krohn-Hansen (2009) and Lauren Derby (2009) attend to the cultural dynamics that afforded the dictator a measure of long lasting, albeit at times tacit, support form large segments of his subject population. According to Krohn-Hansen:

> A large portion of the academic literature on the twentieth century Dominican Republic emphasizes terror and deception as almost the sole explanation for

> Trujillo's…protracted [regime]. But there is another history – a story of political and social life under Trujillo…that is very different (2).

Krohn-Hansen does not deny the prevalence of state-terror as a means of maintaining power during the dictator's reign. Nor does he contend that Trujillo's popular appeal was unanimous or whole-hearted. His analysis is therefore reminiscent of Alexei Yurchak's study on late Soviet society, in which the author argues that popular acceptance of state power was tacit, qualified and frequently undermined by expressions of political dissatisfaction, which were circulated discreetly through interpersonal exchanges. Krohn-Hansen maintains that, despite widespread popular ambivalence towards Trujillo, the dictator nevertheless commanded a degree of respect from many of his constituents. In order to understand Trujillo's remarkable political longevity, therefore, one has to consider the ways in which the establishment of certain hegemonic cultural discourses helped to consolidate political capital for the dictator and his regime (2). In Krohn-Hansen's words, "political history under Trujillo…cannot be understood in isolation from cultural history" (5). This study, through its focus on the interactions between totalitarian power and popular culture, can therefore be situated in response both to Krohn-Hansen's claim and to larger trends in contemporary Trujillo scholarship.

As novels about the trujillato, each of the texts in question is firmly located in a specific geographic and historical locale. As cultural interventions concerning the relationship between the body, discursive power and resistance, however, the texts offer new social understandings for the benefit of a diverse reading audience. It is certainly important to avoid generalizing about these novels in such a way as to undermine the specific political situations to which they attend; however, it is equally crucial to emphasize that the very project of literary exchange necessitates that at least some ideas, sentiments or principles can be communicated from one literary-

historical locale to an external context of reception. All three texts constitute interventions into the social discourses associated with the Trujillo regime. As such, they can be treated as novels about dictatorship society, but also as meditations both on the relationship between the body and official power and on the ways in which individuals can re-conceptualize their bodies so as to oppose totalitarian authority. These texts therefore expand contemporary conceptions of resistance by drawing attention to various battles over cultural signification. Moreover, the novels demonstrate that these types of struggles are instrumental to the formation of defiant subjectivities.

Affective Bodies: Models of Feminized Resistance in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*

In the final chapter of Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* Bélgica "Dedé" Mirabal listens to a radio interview, broadcasted shortly after Trujillo's death, in which a political analyst discusses the way in which totalitarian power operates. "Dictatorships," the commentator asserts, "are pantheistic. The dictator manages to plant a little piece of himself in every one of us" (311)[7]. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines "pantheism" as "the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God." In the context of Alvarez's novel, therefore, the term situates Trujillo as an omnipresent, ethereal force. After hearing this pronouncement on the radio, Dedé touches "the place above [her] heart where [she does] not yet know the cells [are] multiplying like crazy" (311). Susan Sontag argues that cancer is frequently used, in twentieth century cultural texts, to allegorize violent or insidious political phenomena (82), and that the disease is also commonly associated with repressed emotions (22). In Alvarez's formulation, therefore, the regime comes to stand as a malevolent political force that infects people by tapping into certain emotional processes. By connecting analytical notions of the dictator as a pantheistic entity with the visceral depiction of Dedé's rapidly metastasizing breast cancer, Alvarez positions Trujillo as a ubiquitous, affective and embodied presence[8]. Dictatorial authority, for Alvarez, does not reside merely in governing entities, but in the subjective, internal experiences of individuals who live under totalitarianism.

Butterflies is Alvarez's second novel, appearing three years after her breakthrough fictional debut entitled *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991). Although born in New

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[7] Ignacio López-Calvo points out that the above quotation from Alvarez is actually a somewhat loose translation of a similar line from Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's Spanish language novel *Galíndez* (201).

[8] In *Oscar Wao*, the character Belicia Carbral is also a Trujillo dictatorship survivor who develops breast cancer later in life.

York City, Alvarez spent her first ten years in the Dominican Republic (her parents' country of origin), until being forced into exile in the United States because of her father's involvement in the anti-Trujillo movement. *The Garcia Girls* and its sequel *¡Yo!* (1997) attend primarily to issues of US-Caribbean transnational identity, migration, racism and cultural hybridity, while *Butterflies* deals with political resistance in the mid-twentieth century Dominican Republic. The novel's narrator-protagonists are based on the historical Mirabal sisters – Patria, Minerva and María Teresa (Mate) – three upper-middle class Dominicans, who, through their involvement in an underground plot to overthrow Trujillo, became popular figureheads for the Dominican resistance movement and were consequently murdered by government assassins on November 25th 1960. The novel also features the (fictionalized) voice of Dedé Mirabal, the one surviving sister, who abstained from direct involvement in revolutionary activities. While revered in their home country, the Mirabals were not well known in North America prior to Alvarez's novelistic reconstruction. As a popular and acclaimed text, *Butterflies* is the first major novel to introduce the Trujillo era into English language literary discourse.

In addition to rescuing an historical narrative from relative marginality outside of the Caribbean, Alvarez explores both the mechanisms through which power operates and the internal processes that enable individuals to form resistant subjectivities. This chapter builds on what Patricia Ticineto Clough calls "the affective turn" in contemporary theory, referring to the emergence of affect studies as an area of critical inquiry (1). Baruch Spinoza positions affect as an internal state, one that compels individuals towards certain desires and aversions and is moreover derived through relational interactions with other bodies. Building on Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze argues that affect is not a representational form of thought, but one that responds to environmental stimuli with a measure of *felt* immediacy. This conception enables Clough's

succinct definition of "affectivity as a substrate of potential bodily responses, often automatic responses, in excess of consciousness" (2). For the purposes of this chapter, it is also important to mention Eve Sedgwick's assertion that affect is relatively autonomous, although not entirely disconnected, from the individual's rational thoughts and ideas. Building on all of the above perspectives, I define affect as a supra-rational emotional and/or sensory experience that operates in relation to various external stimuli and engages dialogically, but is not coterminous, with the individual's conscious intellectual processes. Although a great deal of contemporary criticism on *Butterflies* attends to issues of gender identity and historical recovery, no critics have yet dealt with Alvarez's complex perspective on the relationship between affect, political authority and resistance. In *Butterflies,* the state uses certain affective mechanisms to exercise a degree of discursive power over its subjects; however the characters' affective experiences also constitute a means through which they come to develop politically subversive inclinations. In short, affect, in Alvarez's novel, can be made to comply with the interests of both official power and those who oppose it.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first situates the present argument within critical debates concerning the novel's relationship with postmodern aesthetics in the hopes that this discussion will enable a better understanding of the work's ethical agenda. In the second section, I analyze the way in which Alvarez shows power to operate by appealing to its subjects' affective faculties, thereby inducing a measure of compliant subjectivity. The third section suggests that, although affect can be made to collude with various repressive forces, it can never be entirely subordinated to the whims of governing authority and it therefore offers a degree of emancipatory potential. This section concentrates on *Butterflies*'s most overtly resistant figure, Minerva Mirabal, in order to show that her dissident position is derived, in part, through her

ability to locate political import in her various affective responses to the experiences of domestic, middle class life in Trujillo's Dominican Republic. The chapter ends with a discussion of what I call affective autonomy, which refers to the individual's ability to position his/her affective experiences in such as a way as to capitalize on their resistant potential. I argue that Alvarez situates affective autonomy as a feminized and indeed venerable model of revolutionary subjectivity.

Historical Fiction and the Deconstructive Impulse

Critics have debated whether *Butterflies* aims primarily to locate ethical certainties in its historical subject matter or whether it seeks to critique the very processes through which historical knowledge is accessed and narrativized in the present day. I argue that the former impulse predominates, even though the novel invokes certain techniques that are commonly associated with Bakhtinian dialogism, historiographic metafiction and deconstructive postmodernism. Charlotte Rich claims that Alvarez makes exemplary use of multivocalism in order to craft an ideologically open narrative. She states: "Alvarez's text…contains voices that speak back to and engage in dialogue with the "official" language of the Trujillo regime….[Therefore] *In the Time of the Butterflies* can be seen to resist…a single, authoritative narrative voice" (166). While Rich rightly attends to the story's multivocal structure, she does not consider the ways in which Alvarez manages the work's various perspectives so that they fit within an ethical framework. The characters certainly do bring divergent ideologies to the resistance struggle (broadly speaking, Minerva's ideas are Marxist, Patria's are Catholic, Mate's cohere with vaguely-defined humanistic sensitivities, and Dedé remains largely apolitical until after her sisters' deaths); however, all of the protagonists agree, by the novel's end, that totalitarianism, domestic repression and the patriarchal discourses that oppose women's social

advancement are institutions that must be opposed. In short, the various discordances between the narrators are subsumed within an overarching liberal feminist agenda. The point here is not to deny the existence of multivocalism in Alvarez's text, but to suggest that the work's dialogic openness is limited by certain ideological constraints. Moreover, I do not intend to criticize Alvarez for writing in accordance with an ethical agenda, but merely to point out that Rich's celebrative critique of the novel's radical multivocalism constitutes something of a misrepresentation.

Butterflies also occupies a complicated position with respect to experimental postmodernism. Some commentators argue that the work epitomizes the deconstructive tendency within contemporary fiction. For instance, Rich claims that the novel undermines clear, linear conceptions of history through its "centrifugal" and "fragmented" narrative structure (166), while Marta Caminero-Santangelo suggests that the presence of an American character – a researcher living in the present day who is an obvious surrogate for Alvarez – emphasizes the work's subjective approach to the project of historical recovery (511). These claims are valid, albeit somewhat exaggerated. The novel may be superficially fragmented; however, the occasional temporal disruptions within an otherwise coherent narrative can be easily re-organized, in the reader's mind, to forge a linear trajectory. Moreover, although the presence of the author figure calls the novel's objectivity into question, one's critical awareness of the work's contingent nature is at least partially offset by the sense of immediacy one receives upon encountering vivid, mutually corroborating first-person accounts of the various sisters' experiences.

Moreover, the novel takes a contradictory stance concerning the relationship between history and popular mythology. In a brief note at the work's end, Alvarez asserts that she sought, through her writing, to dismantle the mythical cult surrounding the Mirabal sisters – which is

more of a Dominican phenomenon than an American one – in order to portray them as "ordinary" people (324). Lynn Chun Ink rightly points out, however, that the presence of Alvarez's disclaimer suggests a discrepancy between the author's conscious intentions and the implications of the work itself. Ink argues that "in place of the Mirabals of fact or legend" Alvarez simply establishes "another national myth" (796). According to Ink, Alvarez sentimentalizes her heroines by exaggerating their harmonious relationships with men, downplaying the grittier aspects of their prison experiences and positioning the characters as icons with whom Dominican women of all classes and colours identify, thereby sidestepping the social stratifications that separated the Mirabal sisters' experiences from those of their impoverished and racially marginalized contemporaries (794-6). In short, there is good reason to question the depth or extent of the novel's meta-historical skepticism and demythologizing pretenses.

In an insightful generic critique, Trenton Hickman claims that the novel is less a work of historiographic metafiction than one of (what he calls) "hagiographic commemorafiction," a genre that melds contemporary humanism with pre-modern hagiographic traditions. According to Michel de Certeau, traditional hagiographic narratives favour "the actors of the sacred realm, 'saints,' and [intend] to edify through 'exemplarity'" (*History* 269). In short, hagiography acquaints readers with saintly characters whose narratives are presented as a source of moral inspiration. Hickman argues, however, that the Mirabal sisters are not positioned as saints, but as secular role models for a contemporary reading audience (99-100). Alvarez may register a degree of discomfort with respect to the myth-making impulses surrounding popular Dominican representations of the Mirabals, but she still elevates them to a level of symbolic importance. For Hickman, the novel stands as a work of commemorafiction insomuch as it valorizes the

characters' courage as well as their staunch devotion to their political ideals. This chapter demonstrates, however, that Alvarez also encourages her readers to admire, and perhaps to emulate, the way in which her heroines come to understand their affective bodies as the sites from which resistant sentiments emerge. Like Hickman, I argue that the work aims to locate ethical certainties in its historical subject matter, even though this drive for moral coherence undermines the more deconstructive impulses implied by its various postmodern flourishes.

Affect as a Mode of Social Control

Power, in Alvarez's novel, is shown to address its subjects on the level of affect. *Butterflies* is particularly attentive to the ways in which Trujillo's various affect-oriented cultural discourses attempt to interpellate young, middle class women as devout, but also sexualized, subjects of the patriarchal regime. Before delving into this argument, it is necessary to situate *Butterflies* within contemporary Caribbean literary discourse and mid-century Dominican history. In *Vulnerable States,* Guillermina de Ferrari identifies a trend in recent Caribbean (and Caribbean-Diasporic) women's writing in which authors use female-centered bildungsroman narrative conventions as a means of exposing the machinations of postcolonial power. She argues:

> [Antillean women's] coming-of-age stories attempt to unveil the cultural colonization of the region by establishing a more or less explicit connection between the colonial history of the archipelago, on the one hand, and the contemporary cultural and social practices that are cemented in and by the domestication of the girl's body, on the other (108).

In her analysis of various works by contemporary authors such as Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff, de Ferrari asserts that Caribbean women's coming-of-age stories connect the protagonists' maturation with the their (frequently reluctant) entry into a social order that regulates the female body in accordance with notions of propriety, comportment and gender roles. She claims that "through the teaching of manners and other forms of social behavior, whole ideologies become imprinted on the girl's body" (108). One can notice a measure of continuity between de Ferrari's analysis and the Althusserian assumption that power finds its expression not merely in overtly repressive acts of state violence, but also through individuals' interactions with ideological state apparatuses (such as the traditional domestic family, or religious and educational institutions) (296-7). While de Ferrari does not comment specifically on post-dictatorship novels, her critique is nevertheless relevant to the present discussion on Alvarez. Like the texts that de Ferrari addresses, *Butterflies* uses bildungsroman conventions to illustrate how power impacts female subjectivity. Moreover, Alvarez draws connections between her characters' physical maturation and their growing awareness of themselves as subjects of an oppressive system.

Trujillo's ideological state apparatuses sought to induce a *felt* sense of awe and reverence in his subject population. He exploited familial and religious metaphors in order to position himself as a figure for whom emotional loyalty was rightfully due. Dominican historians including Jesús de Galíndez, Howard J. Wiarda and Michael J. Kryzanek position the Trujillo regime as a variant of the nineteenth century Latin American *caudillo* tradition. A *caudillo* is a local strongman who gains political power by establishing a complex network of patrimonial relations among members of his subject population and by cultivating a public image rooted in popular conceptions of charismatic and paternalistic masculinity (Hamill 5-11). Lauren Derby comments on the 1955 Dominican World's Fair parade in which the dictator positioned himself

as the national patriarch while various subordinate daughter-figures represented the nation's provinces. This spectacle "presented a family model of state authority in which obedience to the patriarchal father was naturalized" (126-7). In keeping with the quintessential *caudillo* archetype, Trujillo embodied familial conceptions of authoritative masculinity; however, he also incorporated a measure of religious symbolism into his propaganda. For instance, Ignacio López-Calvo comments on the block-lettered sign at the Dominican international airport reading "God in his heaven, Trujillo on earth" (ix) and Galíndez observes that Trujillo's propagandists sometime reworked passages from the Bible in order to conflate the dictator with the figure of Christ (202). Although some state performances emphasized domestic themes while others exploited religious iconography, it seems reasonable to suggest that these different displays were more complimentary than oppositional, particularly when one considers the prevalence of familial metaphors within Catholic theology. Trujillo's public persona appealed simultaneously to domestic and messianic symbols, both of which sought to position his subjects as grateful recipients of his divine, fatherly munificence.

Although the state's ideological apparatuses situated all subjects, regardless of gender, as subordinate beneficiaries of Trujillo's saintly generosity, the regime's paternalism impacted young middle and upper class women in distinct ways. The state modeled its gendered discourses, to a large extent, on pre-existing social codes. In her study of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Dominican society, Teresita Martinez-Vergne asserts that traditional bourgeois culture positioned women as icons of virtue and beauty who, for the sake of their livelihoods, were expected to provide sexual concessions to benevolent male partner/protectors (114, 121). This paternalistic order did not accord women citizenship status, nor did it offer them more than an extremely proscribed, primarily philanthropic role within public life (123-4).

Trujillo altered the existing social order by enacting limited gender-oriented reforms. For instance, he expanded divorce laws and introduced women's voting rights – the latter being something of a redundant measure in a one-party state (Derby 134, Francesca Miller 114). For the most part, however, his social ideology drew on the same misogynistic discourses that were in place prior to his ascendency.

Trujillo era official culture positioned middle and upper class women as submissive objects of aesthetic contemplation and protective masculine ownership. In her analysis of the regime's patriarchal ideology, Derby discusses the figure of Lina Lovatón, an attractive high school student whom Trujillo publically courted in the summer of 1937, much to his wife's distaste. Lovatón was made the centerpiece of the lavish 1937 carnival and later became Trujillo's mistress (115). She was frequently presented, during various carnival parades and pageants, in extravagant dresses and she was accompanied by male figures adorned in soldiers' uniforms (117-8). This combined display of feminine beauty and military symbols offers intriguing insights into the patriarchal-nationalist narratives that Trujillo's festival invoked. As Derby argues, the proceedings sought to imply that Trujillo "made *la nacion* great by making it masculine – that is, virile, active, and *guapo* or courageous…. Yet even if Trujillo made the nation great, Lina and others ultimately gave it value" (122). In short, the state conceptualized women as symbols of social capital and providers of male aesthetic gratification, while men (albeit only privileged men) were considered rightful denizens of the public realm. The regime's gendered discourses are somewhat confusing for the way in which they combined notions of idyllic, saintly femininity with the sordid business of Trujillo's many extra-marital affairs with young girls. The dictator may have presented himself as a messianic father figure, but his alleged divinity did not prevent him from engaging in pedophilic sexual relations, nor did his fatherly

pretenses compel him to abstain from acts of symbolic incest with the daughters of the nation. When analyzing the Trujillo era, one has to accept that the regime's discourses were frequently self-serving and contradictory.

Alvarez speculates that the regime induced, in its young subjects, a sense of reverence that conflated religious and daughterly devotion with sexual submissiveness. This dynamic is brought to light through a number of passages in *Butterflies.* For instance, Alvarez re-images the carnival queen Lina Lovatón as Minerva's boarding school peer. Minerva, who is a precociously self-aware young adolescent, immediately senses the predatory nature of Trujillo's supposed romantic interest in her schoolmate. Lina, however, happily indulges Trujillo's flirtations (20). When asked if she loves the dictator, Lina's response is both idealistic and unequivocal: "'With all my heart' Lina sighed. 'More than my life'" (22). Through her sighing and her hyperbolic language, Lina engages in the affectations stereotypically associated with a young girl experiencing a first crush. Clearly, Trujillo does not force Lina into complying with his desires so much as he seduces her into offering her naive cooperation. Here, one sees echoes of Foucault's assertion that power does not merely operate through coercive mechanisms, but also by inducing a state of compliant subjectivity[9] such that, in *Butterflies*, an obedient Catholic schoolgirl instinctually conceptualizes herself as a willing subject of her nation's illustrious seducer-in-chief. (This Foucauldian assumption is one of the more controversial aspects of Alvarez's novel, since it implicates Lina as a willing participant in her own statutory rape.) Later in the story, Alvarez introduces Manuel de Moya, Trujillo's notorious procurer. Upon meeting de Moya at a state function, Minerva claims that the man is "supposed to be so smooth with the ladies, they probably think they're following the example of the Virgencita [The Virgin Mary] if

[9] See the chapter entitled "Docile Bodies" in *Discipline and Punish* (135-69).

they bed down with the Benefactor of the Fatherland [Trujillo]" (94). Minerva's comment may be somewhat exaggerated, but it nevertheless captures the ways in which Alvarez's Trujillo exploits his quasi-messianic presence in order to induce sexual compliance in his female subjects. The implication, here, is that the affective draw of Trujillo's regime is so powerful that it causes individuals to experience sexual submissiveness as an expression of felt, spiritual devotion.

To grow up, for Alvarez's characters, is to enter the oppressive discursive order of the mid-twentieth century Dominican Republic. Minerva is first alerted to the Trujillo regime's violence during a late night conversation with her boarding-school friend Sinita Perozo, whose father, brother and uncles were assassinated for opposing the government. After hearing Sinita recount her family's experiences, Minerva is suddenly overwhelmed by nausea; the next morning, she discovers that she is menstruating for the first time. By associating Sinita's story with Minerva's first menstruation, Alvarez alerts the reader to the connection between her protagonist's physical and political maturation (Brown 105). As Minerva comes of age, she begins to recognize her body as a subject of the state. Shortly after the Sinita episode, Lina Lovatón is courted by Trujillo and later transplanted to a lonely Miami mansion where she lives as the dictator's mistress-in-exile. This series of events leaves a lasting impression on Minerva and her peers:

> We were quiet thinking of this sad ending for our beautiful Lina. I felt my breath coming short again. At first, I had thought it was caused by the cotton bandages I had started tying around my chest so my breasts wouldn't grow. I wanted to be sure what happened to Lina Lovatón would never happen to me. But every time

> I'd hear one more secret about Trujillo I could feel the tightening in my chest even when I wasn't wearing the bandages (23).

This passage illustrates the extent to which Minerva's fears about her changing body are connected to her growing awareness of the patriarchal-totalitarian system in which she lives. It is telling that Minerva's apprehension expresses itself specifically as shortness of breath and constrictions within the chest. Clearly, she experiences state power as an affective presence, such that her anxiety over puberty comes to be conflated with her growing fears concerning Trujillo.

In *Butterflies,* to develop an adolescent body is to become subject to a regime that attempts to position middle and upper class women as the property of a sexually lascivious national patriarch. The above passage concerning Minerva's relationship with her body constitutes one instance within the novel where affective and intellectual processes cooperate: clearly Minerva's interpretations of her emotional experiences and bodily sensations are impacted by her rational understanding of the predatory political system in which she lives. Both Lina and Minerva are interpellated as sexual subjects of their president; Lina, however, responds with compliance while Minerva is overwhelmed by a sense of bodily revulsion. The disparity between their reactions indicates that the same affective discourse can induce strikingly different responses in different people. Affect is not predictable, but unstable. It is to this fundamental instability that this chapter now turns.

Resistance and Domestic Affect

While Trujillo's regime wielded a degree of affective power over its subjects, there are nevertheless limitations to the amount of control any single governing body can exercise over individuals' emotional/sensory experiences and over the various actions those experiences

compel. In *Touching Feeling*, Eve Sedgwick (drawing on the work of Silvan Tomkins) argues that affects provoke varied responses in different people. Unlike drives (i.e. bodily, survival-oriented impulses such as the need to eat or to breathe), affects are relatively open-ended in terms of their aims. For example, as Sedgwick asserts, "my pleasure in hearing a piece of music can make me want to hear it repeatedly, listen to other music, or study to become a composer myself" (19). In short, Sedgwick (via Tomkins) suggests that one can never predict how a given affect will take expression through action. In *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart contends that even the most calamitous happenings begin with random, and frequently mundane, affective encounters (15). While Stewart believes that affects constitute the catalyst for major social events, she contends, like Sedgwick and Tomkins, that one cannot predict the type of response a given affect is likely to provoke nor can one know precisely how that response will impact its environment. She states: "The politics of any surge depends on where it might go. What happens. How it plays itself out and in whose hands" (15). Here, the term "surge" refers to the build-up of events and responses that emanate from a particular emotional or sensory experience. In short, one must understand affect as a volatile, spontaneous and powerful political force. Because no single external actor can fully control the course that any affective "surge" might take, it necessarily follows that affects exercise a measure of relative autonomy from the agents that induce or provoke them.

Affects cooperate, at least to a degree, with the individual's reasoning faculties, such that no political regime can consistently induce an entire population to experience feelings that appear to defy common sense. Freudian psychoanalysis posits a power struggle between the ego, which seeks to gratify various desires and emotional compulsions, and the super-ego, which attempts to subject the ego to ethical and proprietary considerations. Sedgwick rejects such neat

distinctions between the various compartments of the human psyche, preferring instead to posit a close, communicative and mutually re-enforcing relationship between the brain's affective and cerebral mechanisms, such that neither can be truly independent. This position obviously does not imply that affects consistently overrule the processes of conscious contemplation. Sedgwick's assertion (cited in the previous paragraphs) that individuals can respond to affective sensations in different ways implies that affects can be at least partially subjected to the processes of intellectual contemplation; that is to say, one can choose to *think* about how best to respond to one's affective experiences (19). This observation has critical implications for the study of affect and totalitarian power: even if a regime can mobilize a successful propaganda campaign that induces its subjects to undergo certain affective encounters, it cannot control the specific form the subjects' responses will take nor can it monitor the ways in which individuals' different intellectual convictions will colour their affective experiences. Here, one sees a potential fissure in the affective apparatuses of any governing institution. It is in this fissure that Alvarez locates the possibility of resistance.

As a young woman growing up in the Dominican Republic, Minerva may encounter the same affective, patriarchal discourses as her middle and upper class peers; however, unlike many of her contemporaries, she responds to these experiences in a decidedly resistant manner. As Minerva comes of age, her political viewpoints become increasingly bound up with various affective domestic encounters, particularly those that involve her father. Shara McCallum and López-Calvo both argue that Enrique Mirabal occupies a complicated position as a victim of, and participant in, Trujillo's tyranny. For instance, López-Calvo asserts:

> The abusive and immoral middle- and upper-class man metaphorically represents an embryonic state of a potentially more dangerous development: the

> dictator…. [D]espite being one of Trujillo's victims, Don Enrique Mirabal, who…had been on good terms with the dictator, echoes synechdochically the immorality and wickedness of the patriarchal regime (95-6).

López-Calvo's invocation of the synecdoche is particularly revealing. He implies that Enrique's "immorality" – specifically his disregard for his daughter's scholastic ambitions, his marital infidelity and his abetment of totalitarianism – situates him in metonymic relation to the figure of Trujillo. In other words, López-Calvo positions Enrique as a bit player within a larger discursive system that works to reinforce the dictator's hegemony.

The patriarchal family is the site at which Minerva encounters a microcosmic variant of the same repressive tendencies that characterize Trujillo's regime. Enrique is a loving father, but he is also overbearing, protective, misogynistic, and in one instance, physically violent towards Minerva. She comments on her father's reluctance to accept her coming-of-age: "Papa discouraged boyfriends. I was his treasure he'd say, patting his lap, as if I were a girl in a jumper instead of a woman of twenty-three" (84). Minerva later explains: "One time he [Enrique] offered me anything if I would just sit in his lap" (84). While it would be presumptuous to ascribe a measure of incestuous desire on Enrique's part, it is nevertheless unsettling that he seeks to position himself as the primary recipient of his adult daughter's affection. It is also significant that Enrique is the first of two men in the story to refer to Minerva as a "treasure"; the second is Trujillo at the Discovery Day Dance, a state affair commemorating Columbus's so-called discovery of the Americas (98). When analyzing Enrique and Trujillo's word choice, it is helpful to remember that women, in official discourse, were conceptualized as the recipients of male veneration, ownership and security. This conception of femininity accords with the treasure metaphor. One thinks of a treasure – a term that, in colonial Caribbean history, has associations

with plunder – as an item that can be conquered through a display of masculine agency. The word also suggests value, which implies a protective form of ownership. In short, a treasure is an object of aesthetic contemplation, but also an item that affords the possessor a degree of social status. Moreover, one does not relate to a treasure as possessing subjectivity. When Enrique and Trujillo refer to Minerva as a treasure, therefore, they reveal their proclivity towards a superficially admiring, but also restrictive and domineering, disposition. It is precisely this attitude that Minerva encounters, and indeed rejects, in both her father and the dictator.

Minerva's anger towards Enrique and Trujillo is motivated primarily by a sense of irritation at her own social and physical confinement. Following Minerva's high school graduation, her father demands that she return to her family home to help run the farm and general store, despite the fact that business is already flourishing and that Minerva has ambitions to study law in the capital. While living at home, she describes her anguish at receiving letters from her former high school friends who are enrolled in university: "I'd get restless with jealousy when Papa brought their letters back from the Salcedo post office. I'd jump in the Jeep and roar off into the countryside" (85). One must understand Minerva's response in affective terms: she is restless, confined and jealous. At this point in her narrative, she has yet to connect these experiences with any broader ideology. Minerva's domestic frustrations take on national political significance, however, at the Discovery Day event in which she encounters similarities between her father and the dictator. While dancing with Trujillo, Minerva informs him that she would like to study law in the capital. He responds by proclaiming, "The university is no place for a woman these days" (99). Here, Enrique's misogynistic paternalism is reflected in the dictator's words. This parallel between Enrique and Trujillo compels the reader to see both characters as enabling Minerva's confinement and, in doing so, provoking her anger.

Not only is Trujillo intent on restraining Minerva's intellectual ambitions, he also stifles her physical movements through his invasive dance floor conduct. Alvarez provides grotesque descriptions of Trujillo's behaviour. The dance begins with the dictator pulling Minerva against himself, whereupon she immediately notices that "the smell of his cologne is overpowering" (98). Trujillo is an aggressive, sexually inappropriate dancer. The more anxious Minerva gets, the more assertive Trujillo's actions become: "I push a little against him so he'll loosen his hold, but he pulls me tighter towards him. I feel my blood burning, my anger mounting. I push away a little more decidedly, again he pulls me aggressively to his body" (100). Here, Minerva rages against both the dictator's sexual misconduct and his constraining presence. Just as she is unable to escape Enrique's overbearing disposition, she now finds herself enmeshed in a stifling, lecherous embrace with the dictator himself. In the dance floor interaction, she encounters a more sexually charged, predatory variant of the same combination of protective misogyny, condescending admiration and social/spatial confinement that she experiences with her father. It is little wonder that she responds to Trujillo with an outpouring of rage.

Minerva's first public act of political dissent constitutes a compulsive response to an overpowering affective sensation. Her anger at the dictator's inappropriate behaviour compels a sudden, unexpected and reflexive reaction: "I can see my hand in an endless slow motion rise – a mind all its own – and come down on the [dictator's] astonished, made-up face" (100). The slap can be understood through Stewart's concept of the "surge": it is a sudden groundswell of affect that manifests in a single drastic and consequential act. Moreover, this surge is the catalyst that propels Minerva into revolutionary dissidence. After slapping the dictator, she gathers her family and leaves the party. Shortly thereafter, the slighted tyrant retaliates by jailing Enrique and attempting to coerce Minerva into offering sexual concessions in exchange for her father's

release. Although she rejects his advances, this trauma nevertheless hardens her anti-Trujillo sentiments and compels her to become more directly politically active. It is difficult, therefore, to underestimate the importance of the slap in the chain of events that constitutes Minerva's narrative. Alvarez offers a social vision in which political happenings originate in everyday affective sensations and in the actions/responses that emanate from them. Although the slap is a reflexive act, it cannot be separated entirely from Minerva's intellectual convictions. She may not have intended to strike the dictator, but the action is nevertheless a response both to a variety of affective sensations and to an accurate evaluation of the oppressive order in which she lives. The slap itself is not premeditated, but the sentiments that compel it are at least partially rooted in rational contemplation. In short, Alvarez locates revolutionary potential both in affective experiences and in her heroine's propensity to respond to those experiences in an autonomous and resistant manner.

Conceptualizing Feminized Resistance

In her critique of *Butterflies*, Ibis Gómez-Vega offers a rather confusing assertion: "Although three Mirabal sisters…join a revolution," she argues, "they are not radical or subversive in any recognizable sense of the world" (95). One wonders how readers could fail to identify "radical or subversive" sentiments within a group of individuals who participate in a conspiracy to violently overthrow their president. Despite its incoherence, Gómez-Vega's assertion gestures at the complexity with which Alvarez portrays her protagonists: while the Mirabals are shown to participate in subversive undertakings, they do not adopt the rhetoric or dogmatism that one normally associates with Latin American rebel archetypes. If Gómez-Vega fails to locate "recognizable" symbols of subversion within Alvarez's Mirabal sisters, therefore,

it may be because the characters are constructed in such a way as to counter masculine conceptions of revolutionary subjectivity. Although Latin American history is replete with rebel heroes, from Tupac Amaru to Pancho Villa, no single revolutionary icon looms larger in contemporary culture than Che Guevara (Franco 109). Guevara embodies a particularly tough, ascetic and stereotypically male incarnation of revolutionary identity. According to Alma Guillermprieto, Guevara disdained any affective sensations that suggested feminized sentimentality (although one could argue that his utopian Marxism constituted something of a sentimental indulgence in itself, albeit of a different sort). In Guevara's conception, "Happiness and the desire for it…were, in a revolutionary, symptoms of weakness" (Guillermprieto 80). Moreover, Guevara's ideological dogmatism prevented him from relating to others in anything but the most binaristic of terms: for Guevara, "There [were] only revolutionaries, who [were] full of virtue, and counterrevolutionaries, who [were] worthless" (Guillermprieto 79). Guillermprieto does not undermine Guevara's achievements as a formidable opponent to the Batista regime in Cuba or as a galvanizing figurehead for global anti-imperialism; rather, she problematizes the Che legend by revealing some of the flaws inherent in a macho-revolutionary ideology that situates affect and emotional connectivity as decadent indulgences.

Alvarez's characters orient their feelings (both sensual and emotional) in such a way as to capitalize on affect's revolutionary possibilities. Rather than surrendering to the regime's paternalism, the characters locate ways of mobilizing maternal or stereotypically feminine sentiments in an autonomous and resistant manner. *Butterflies* can be situated within a reformist sub-genre of American sentimental fiction that, according to Lauren Berlant, seeks to "rescue the political from politics" by locating resistant potential not in official institutions, parties or ideologies, but in the realm of sentimentality and in the interactions and emotions associated

with domestic activity (145). Berlant claims that, in reformist sentimental fiction, political power is derived through the establishment of a feminized counterpublic in which individuals are connected through affective networks (146)[10]. Here, the term "counterpublic" refers to a politically marginalized community that makes claims on mainstream society (Warner 56-7). Sentimentality, domesticity and counterpublics are central to Alvarez's conception of resistance. In *Butterflies* one can detect sentiment's galvanizing potential when Mate falls in love with a seductive revolutionary named Leadro and decides that she too will devote her life to defending his cause (142), or in the passage during which Patria witnesses a group of teenaged rebels being slaughtered by army soldiers and feels an instinctual sense of maternal sadness for these young victims of state violence (162). Moreover, in *Butterflies*, the domestic home is the centre of both familial values and revolutionary action. As Holly Blackford argues:

> The connections between Patria's house as the motherhouse of the revolution and the motherhouse of everyday domestic activity are made by repeated juxtapositions between the violence of the weaponry and the life-sustaining activities that occur at the very same sites (breakfast at the same table used to make bombs, tweezers used to twine wires, etc.) (234).

One might push Blackford's analysis further by suggesting that these juxtapositions hint at an ideological connection between domesticity and revolution, since both endeavours are shown to spring from a sense of emotional concern for other people's well being. Finally, one can observe the ways in which familial sentiments combine to form a counterpublic in the novel's second half, in which the sisters find surprising allies in various uncles and cousins, in Patria's seemingly apolitical husband and in the estranged daughters of Enrique Mirabal's other family.

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[10] The most successful of these novels is surely Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) in which abolitionist ideals are located in familial sentiment (Berlant 36-40).

In short, emotional experiences and familial relationships form the basis for the revolutionary movement that Alvarez depicts in *Butterflies*.

Alvarez also considers the ways in which her characters learn to orient maternal affections so as to capitalize on the resistant potential contained within them. For instance, Patria describes an interaction with Captain Peña, an intimidating government official with whom she negotiates to procure her husband and son's release from prison. During one of the meetings in question, her fear mellows into pity:

> Maybe because I was watching him so closely a funny thing started to happen. The devil I was so used to seeing disappeared, and for a moment…I saw an overgrown fat boy, ashamed of himself for kicking the cat and pulling the wings off butterflies (217).

The phrase "watching him...closely" is typically invoked when referring to a guardian figure interacting with a disobedient child; by mobilizing such a gaze, Patria comes to view Peña in precisely this way. In an earlier scene, she invokes a similar sense of maternal condescension when contemplating the figure of Trujillo. She recalls an incident in which she dressed her troublesome son Norris in fancy clothes in order to encourage him to adopt the comportment befitting his gentlemanly image. She goes on to confess that she uses a similar tactic when apprehending the portrait of Trujillo that hangs, in accordance with government decree, over her living room mantelpiece. She frequently kneels down and asks Trujillo (or at least his image) to exercise benevolence in his treatment of her imprisoned family members. Through her supplications, she seeks to "treat [the dictator] as a spirit worthy of [her] attention" in the hopes that he will "start behaving himself" (202). It would be inaccurate to take any of the religious connotations here too literally, since Patria's prayer tactics do not deify the dictator so much as

they humanize him. The prayer ritual constitutes a performance through which she develops a new way of relating to the figure of Trujillo. One should pay close attention, in the above quotation, to Patria's demeaning tone. Clearly, she invokes a motherly disposition in order to belittle the figure of the dictator, thereby neutralizing his mythical aura. Rather than using the dichotomous good/evil classifications associated with simplistic revolutionary dogma, Patria mobilizes maternal sentiment in an inventive, productive and rebellious manner.

In addition to locating a measure of defiance in Patria's creative deployment of maternal condescension, Alvarez depicts the way in which Mate comes to see resistant potential in non-normative forms of sexual interaction. This thematic preoccupation constitutes something of a departure form traditional sentimental fiction. The novel contains a particularly ambiguous scene in prison, following Minerva and Mate's arrest, in which Mate establishes a physical connection with a fellow cellmate named Magdalena. Magdalena attempts to kiss Mate, after relating the brutal set of circumstances that preceded her (Magdelena's) imprisonment. Mate responds to this initial advance with the defensive assertion that she is "not that way" (249). Magdalena, however, immediately challenges this statement: "Girl, I don't know what you mean by *that way*, like it's a wrong turn or something. My body happens to also love the people my heart loves" (249). By asserting that the term "that way" is ultimately meaningless and that engaging in same-sex encounters does not render one anything other than what one already is, Magdalena rejects the larger discursive system that seeks to assign moral judgments based on sexual inclination. This oppressive moral order is tied to state power, evidenced by the fact that the women's prison warden disallows any sexual conduct between the prisoners (248). The passage ends with Mate agreeing to take Magdalena into her arms, although the details of the ensuing interaction are omitted from the narrative (250). It is significant, however, that Mate develops a more accepting

attitude towards sexual experimentation and that she manages to comfort Magdalena through acts of physical intimacy. Physical and sexual contact enables Alvarez's female characters to resist certain repressive discourses that regulate and classify women's affective experiences. Alvarez also suggests that sensual interactions can constitute expressions of solidarity between members of a feminized counterpublic. Mate, like her sister Patria, manages to find ways of mobilizing affective, nurturing impulses such that they further a counter-hegemonic, revolutionary agenda.

Conclusion

In *Butterflies* Alvarez depicts a confrontation between various affective discourses associated with official power and with those who oppose it. *Butterflies* is certainly concerned with the ways in which power seeks to induce a measure of compliant subjectivity by appealing to its subjects on the level of affect; however, despite its interest in the manipulative and far-reaching machinations of state authority, the novel does not invoke a deterministic perspective on social relations. Rather, the work places a great deal of faith in both individual and communal agency. It is important to recognize that this revolutionary agency requires individuals to engage in a creative manner with their own affective faculties. Affect, for Alvarez, is a relatively unstable force: the agents of official power can use it as a means of coercion, but it can nevertheless be reoriented towards the purposes of resistance. Alvarez celebrates the ways in which her characters learn not to overcome affectivity, but to use it for resistant political ends. Alvarez therefore provides a feminized conception of revolutionary autonomy, one that stands in opposition to both the coercive machinations of the Trujillo regime's patriarchal discourses and the traditional masculinized conception of revolutionary heroism in Latin American popular

mythology. As Ink and Hickman rightly point out, Alvarez's novel is not entirely successful at achieving its stated aim of demythologizing the Mirabal sisters: *Butterflies* is simply too invested in highlighting its protagonists' exemplary qualities to avoid indulging in idealized representations. Although the novel may not entirely debunk the mythic aura surrounding these cultural icons, it nevertheless succeeds in critiquing a larger, more pervasive cultural myth: that of the tough, dogmatic and emotionally detached male revolutionary hero.

Abject Bodies: Performative Violence and Embodied Memory in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*

On October 2, 1937, Trujillo's army entered the Dominican borderlands with orders to purge the region of its Haitian and Haitian-Dominican population. Five days later, when the violence finally subsided, an estimated 15-30 000 people had been murdered and countless others had fled the Dominican Republic to take refuge in Haiti. The atrocity stands as the largest act of state violence to transpire during Trujillo's 31-year reign. The event has since been remembered as *el corte* [the cutting] and also as The Parsley Massacre, since the army allegedly instructed potential victims to utter the Spanish word *perejil* [parsley] so as to determine whether they could roll their "r's" in the manner of a Spanish-speaking Dominican. *El corte* is shocking not only for the scale and brutality of the violence itself, but also because it appears to have been largely unmotivated by recent events (Turits 620). Certainly, postcolonial Haitian-Dominican relations were at times confrontational. Moreover, collective memory of the nineteenth century Haitian occupation still embittered some Dominicans towards their neighbouring state. Nevertheless, during the early 1930s, race relations in the border region were as stable as they had ever been (Turits 620). There was little evidence, therefore, to indicate that such an extensive act of purgatorial violence was about to ensue.

Historians, anthropologists and creative writers have attempted to explain the motivations for this seemingly random event. One of the most well-known English language literary texts to broach this question is Rita Dove's 1983 poem "Parsley." Pat Righelato argues that, in Dove's poem, "a banal conjunction of memory and circumstance sets off the act that becomes frozen in the lens of history" (66). In the section entitled "The Palace," Dove depicts the dictator standing in his recently deceased mother's bedroom feeding sweets to the Australian parrot that she once

kept as a pet. Trujillo hates these saccharine confections because they conjure the painful recollection of "the morning / his mother collapsed in the kitchen / while baking skull-shaped candies / for the Day of the Dead." (17-20). The dictator's disdain for sweets causes him to resent the island's Haitian cane cutters who are responsible, at the most tertiary level, for sugar production. Moreover, Helen Vendler argues that in the poem, Trujillo fetishizes his mother's flawless Spanish, and therefore construes the allegedly improper Haitian dialect as an insult to her legacy (73). Taken as a whole, therefore, the poem turns on a striking juxtaposition in which the collective horror of *el corte* is set against Trujillo's highly personal, sentimental and frequently banal musings, which are shown to constitute the initial impetus for the massacre itself. The poem, therefore, articulates a vision of history in which calamitous events are rooted in the erratic thought-processes of an individual's troubled mind.

Dove's reconstruction is dramatic and compelling, but also myopic in its historical understandings. By envisioning the massacre as having its origins in the disturbed psychology of a single person, Dove disavows the larger cultural and political factors that motivated the event. As random and impulsive as the 1937 violence might seem, it cannot be understood in isolation from a number of interrelated social dynamics that came to prominence during the early years of the Trujillo regime and the decades immediately preceding them. In the Dominican Republic, the early twentieth century saw the rise of new conceptions about nationality, territory and state formation, as well as new ideas concerning the proper management of social and bodily filth. These discourses were more influential than exotic birds or baked goods in bringing about the anti-Haitian sentiments that motivated the horrific events of 1937.

This chapter attends to a more politically complex literary representation of the Parsley Massacre: Edwidge Danticat's testimonial novel *The Farming of Bones*. Set partly in the

Dominican Republic and partly in Haiti, the novel deals with the massacre itself as well as the years that preceded and followed it. The work is considered by critic Martin Munro to be a somewhat unsettling read, since it eschews dramatic emotional epiphanies or overtly redemptive plot turns (93). Danticat's protagonist is Amabelle Désir, an orphaned, Haitian-born domestic servant who works for the Ignacio-Duarte family in the Dominican borderland town of Alegría. During her young adult life, Amabelle's closest companion is her lover Sebastien, a fatherless Haitian cane cutter[11]. Amabelle's employers include Don Ignacio, a Spanish Civil War veteran, his daughter, Valencia, and Valencia's husband, Señor Pico Duarte, who is an officer in Trujillo's army. The first half of the novel deals with the experiences of Amabelle and her Haitian peers as they confront the escalating rumours of the ensuing attack. During the massacre itself, Amabelle is separated from Sebastien and is forced to flee the country in the company of another cane cutter named Yves. Despite a near-fatal encounter with soldiers and Dominican citizens in the border city of Dajabón, Amabelle and Yves successfully escape to their country of birth. The second half of the novel is notably inconclusive. Amabelle never reunites with Sebastien, nor does she enter into another romantic relationship. Although Danticat hints at a nascent romance between Amabelle and Yves, this is never consummated in part because of Yves's post-traumatic sexual dysfunction and in part because Amabelle remains infatuated with Sebastien, even though she tacitly accepts that he is long deceased. While the novel is dramatic and emotionally affecting, it is also frustrating insomuch as it resists triumphant reunions, requited love or dramatic epiphanies.

Unlike Dove's "Parsley," however, *The Farming of Bones* offers intriguing insights into the various macro-political and cultural discourses that motivated the 1937 events. While Dove

[11] Richard Turits notes that was no sugar cane production in the northern border region in which Danticat's novel is set (161). This inaccuracy seems to have resulted from an oversight on the author's part.

locates the causes for the 1937 massacre in the crazed psychology of the dictator, Danticat pays attention to the larger performative strategies that the violence sought to achieve. The 1937 massacre, and the various anti-Haitian propaganda campaigns that immediately preceded it, should be understood as state-sanctioned performances that attempted to forge new conceptions of ethnicity and citizenship. This argument builds on contemporary definitions of performance that take the term's sociological applications into account. Scholars such as Erving Goffman, Richard Schechner, and Judith Butler assert that public performance is not merely confined to designated artistic spaces such as the theatre, but also to the realm of everyday life. Goffman's definition of performance is particularly pertinent to the present discussion. For him, a performance is any act that seeks to produce new conceptions of reality within a given population (59). More recent theorists, including Victor Turner, Homi Bhabha and David Guss have investigated the ways in which performance practices enable people to formulate a sense of ethnic and national identity. In his study on performance and nationalism, Guss asserts that both popular and official interests use performance "to shift the way in which history is told, to rethink the boundaries of a community, or to reconsider issues of race and ethnicity" (12). This chapter argues that the 1937 massacre achieved precisely these ends.

It may seem problematic to imply that a genocidal act can be understood as a type of social performance, since this claim appears to undermine the brute reality of the violence itself. It is important, therefore, to emphasize the distinction between violence and the performative ends it sometimes seeks to achieve. In his study of urban violence in the Bolivian city of Cochabamba, Daniel Goldstein refers to lynchings as "spectacular cultural performances" (3). Goldstein argues that Cochabamba residents participate in the lynching of thieves, gangsters and drug dealers in order to delineate those individuals who are believed to threaten public safety

(182). In positioning lynchings as performances, Goldstein does not dismiss the violence as mere artifice; he merely points out that public killings constitute symbolic acts that produce meaning in a social context. Like the violence that Goldstein describes, the 1937 Haitian massacre sought to mark certain individuals as embodying a subversive threat that had to be eliminated in order to preserve the social order. Unlike civilian lynchings, however, *el corte* was not actually an expression of public sentiments, but a state-orchestrated initiative masquerading as a spontaneous popular uprising. As Sebastien explains to Amabelle in *The Farming of Bones*, Trujillo instructed his soldiers to abstain from using military issued rifles so as to create the impression that borderland peasants conducted the massacre (263). Consequently, most of the 1937 violence was carried out with machetes, knives, shovels and picks (Wucker 48). The 1937 attack can therefore be understood as a performance both because it produced new conceptions of social reality, but also because it mobilized various props (machetes, knives etc.) to falsely assert that the atrocities constituted an expression of popular frustrations among Dominican borderland residents. The violence of *el corte* was all too real; however, the event was performative primarily because it created new ways of understanding Dominican society.

Although *The Farming of Bones* can be viewed as a testimonial narrative, since it recounts a single individual's experiences with trauma, the work nevertheless explores the larger social and political dynamics that motivated *el corte*. The body of critical commentary on the novel fails to attend, in detail, to these macro-political considerations. Discussions of collective and individual historical memory dominate in scholarly debates over Danticat's novel. Critics such as Semia Harbawi, Denise R. Shaw and Martin Munro take these discussions in productive directions; however, their work focuses primarily on the massacre's historical impact, rather than attending to the various political and social discourses that prompted the atrocities in the first

place. Other scholars, such as Heather Hewett and Martin Todd, attribute the massacre to vaguely defined notions of racism and ethnic nationalism. These assertions are not wrong; however, neither Hewett nor Todd interrogates these racist and nationalist discourses in detail, nor do they pay attention to the massacre's performative dimensions. Consequently, they imply that the events of 1937 constitute a simple, spontaneous outpouring of nationalist, racist violence, as opposed to a deliberate performance aimed at creating new understandings of social reality and new racialized perceptions of Dominican and Haitian bodies.

My argument responds to omissions within the corpus of *The Farming of Bones* scholarship by attending, in detail, to the various performative aims that the massacre sought to achieve. The novel contextualizes *el corte* within broader state-building and modernization initiatives, and it demonstrates that the atrocities altered people's relationship with their own bodies and with the bodies of others. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first considers the ways in which the agents of official Dominican power are shown to use performance in order to forge new notions of an essential Dominican nationality from which Haitians are excluded. The second section considers how the state uses violence as a means of positioning the novel's Haitian characters as having corporeal, abject bodies that are inassimilable within the new cult of hygiene and bodily containment. In the final section, I argue that Amabelle's memory of Sebastien, her deceased lover, enables her to conceptualize a rebuttal to the various violent state performances to which Danticat's Haitian characters are subjected. While the state uses violence to position Haitians as abject *others*, Amabelle's recollections of Sebastien complicate reductive conceptions of ethnicity and locate redemptive potential in that which is deemed abject.

State Violence as a Performance of Ethnic Difference

El corte was part of a larger project aimed at cultivating popular conceptions of a distinct and geographically bounded imagined Dominican community. Prior to the massacre, borderland Haitians and Dominicans maintained a relatively fluid understanding of their own ethnicity and of their relationship with national space. The border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti came into being shortly after the Dominican-American Convention of 1907 (Derby 489-90). Despite official attempts to clearly demarcate Dominican and Haitian territory, borderland residents, living during the pre-massacre period, consistently undermined this distinction (Turits 594). A lack of policing in the frontier, combined with strong and deeply rooted Haitian-Dominican networks of commerce and exchange, ensured that people continued to pass back and forth along the border during the early days of its existence (Turits 595-6). Moreover, practices such as intermarriage, as well as processes of linguistic and cultural creolization, undermined clear social distinctions between people of Haitian and Dominican origins (Turits 596). Finally, the border's geographic marginality from the centers of Dominican power further encouraged the formation of a unique society that was distinct from mainstream conceptions of Dominican or Haitian identity (Turits 600). In short, while borderland Dominicans maintained limited contact with the agents of mainstream Dominican culture, they lived in close proximity with their Haitian counterparts. It is therefore hardly surprising that a creolized Dominican-Haitian borderland culture emerged and thrived in the pre-massacre period.

The process of Dominican state formation involved the establishment of a more regulated, properly demarcated border region, as well as a top-down initiative to foster racial antagonisms between borderland Dominicans and Haitians. In his recent article on the 1937

massacre, Richard Turits counters what he believes to be false assumptions that *el corte* was motivated by age-old racial hostilities among border residents:

> The Haitian massacre should…be seen as an all-out assault by the national state on a bicultural and trans-national frontier world collectively made by ethnic Dominicans and ethnic Haitians. Reframing the problematic of the Haitian massacre as a conflict between two visions of the Dominican nation deconstructs and challenges the dominant, essentialized construction of Dominican nationality as founded on a putatively transhistorical anti-Haitianism (594).

For Turits, anti-Haitianism was not an age-old phenomenon, but a cultural construct developed to further an official nation-building project. As Homi Bhabha argues, "The language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past" (294). In other words, the project of consolidating national identity involves retroactively projecting contemporary social divisions onto the historical record, such that present-day constructs of difference come to be associated with the allegedly 'timeless' narrative of the nation itself. In order to integrate the hybrid borderland into a monocultural, monolinguistic nation state, it was necessary for Trujillo to purge the region of its Haitian influence and to foment a sense of irreducible difference, among border Dominicans, between themselves and their Haitians peers (Turits 629). Both preceding and following the massacre, the state emphasized an alleged Haitian threat to Dominican property, livelihood and cultural integrity (Wucker 47, 52). This conception of the Haitian threat did not take into account the opinions or lived experiences of borderland Dominicans who had co-existed relatively peacefully with their Haitian counterparts in the decades prior to the anti-Haitian campaign (Turits 628-9). Moreover, by forcibly removing Haitians from the region through the 1937 pogrom, Trujillo's government

ensured that anti-Haitian sentiments could be more effectively spread among border Dominicans without the counter-influence of a strong Haitian presence (Turits 629).

The 1937 Haitian massacre worked to create a sense of geographic separation between the Dominican Republic and Haiti as well as new notions of essential ethnic difference between the people who were presumed to belong in each respective country. In order to interrogate the dynamics of state-formation in the border region, it is helpful to consider Chicana theorist Gloria Anzaldua's distinction between the concepts of "border" and "borderland." Broadly speaking, Anzaldua defines the "border" as an official cartographic line that separates two nations; whereas "borderland" denotes the region that surrounds the border itself (3). Borders seek to create clear demarcations between national groups and their respective territories; borderlands, however, are characterized by hybridity, cultural as well as linguistic exchange and the resultant formation of in-between identities. Anzaldua positions the border as an official, and indeed "unnatural," construct that attempts to impose a conception of order onto a "vague and undetermined" borderland space (3). Her analysis attends to the material conditions of those living on the American side of the Rio Grande River – people who do not consider themselves to be wholly American or Mexican. However, she also discusses the psychological experience of inhabiting an identity that disrupts neat distinctions (or borders) between social categories. Although Anzaldua's study relates specifically to the US-Mexican context, it lays out theoretical concepts that are relevant to the present discussion of the Haitian-Dominican border.

One might position Turits's argument in Anzaldua's terms by suggesting that, for Turits, the massacre constituted an attempt to impose a more clearly defined border onto a "vague and undetermined" borderland space. Turits's analysis reflects Anzaldua's understanding of the border as both a geographic and ideological construct. For Anzaldua, the term border refers to a

national frontier, but also to the social conceptions of essential difference between types of people who live, or are presumed to live, on opposing sides of that dividing line. Similarly, Turits asserts:

> It may thus have appeared to government leaders, and ultimately to Trujillo, that to harden the boundary between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in expeditious fashion, a boundary between ethnic Haitians and ethnic Dominicans also had to be established in the frontier (612).

Here, Turits uses the word "boundary" in much the same way that Anzaldua invokes the dual concept of the border. Turits argues that Trujillo and his authorities were not merely interested in demarcating and policing a geographic division between nations, but also in fomenting a sense of immutable difference between Haitians and Dominicans in the border region. Turits positions the massacre as a top-down attempt to impose a certain vision of monocultural nationality onto a society whose modes of organization resisted clear territorial or racial distinctions. Much like Anzaldua, Turits understands the border as an artificial creation that opposes more organic processes of cultural intermixture and exchange.

Trujillo's nation-building project emphasized a conception of essential Dominican-ness rooted in imperial Spain. While this vision incorporated certain elements from a mythologized indigenous Caribbean past, it dispelled notions of Dominicans as having African ancestry (Krohn-Hansen 33). Given the size of the slave economy in colonial Hispaniola, and the relative quickness with which the island's indigenous inhabitants were eliminated following the region's so-called discovery, it was ludicrous for Trujillo to attribute the Dominican population's darker skin tones solely to the nation's Taíno Indian heritage. Although racist distinctions between an ostensibly European/Taíno Dominican nationality and a Haitian identity with origins in slavery

certainly preceded Trujillo's reign, the president's ethnic nationalist project brought these sentiments to the forefront of public consciousness (Krohn-Hansen 33). According to political theorist Anthony D. Smith, official state-building initiatives frequently involve top-down manipulations of popular mythology. Smith argues that "what gives nationalism its power are the myths, memories, traditions, and symbols of ethnic heritages and the ways in which a popular living past has been, and can be, rediscovered and reinterpreted by modern nationalist intelligentsias" (9). It would seem that Trujillo sought precisely these ends. Michelle Wucker explains that, prior to the massacre, the dictator "launched a massive propaganda campaign to portray himself as the savior of Dominican nationhood: Catholic, white, and oriented to Europe" (52). In short, Trujillo positioned himself as the embodiment of an essential Dominican identity, rooted in a mythologized past that nevertheless could be re-created (or salvaged) in the present.

In *The Farming of Bones*, the agents of official power use performance to produce notions of a subversive Haitian threat, of immutable racial differences between Haitians versus Dominicans and of a new relationship between ethnicity and national space. In one particularly memorable scene, the Ignacio-Duarte family listens to Trujillo discussing the alleged national security threat associated with the nation's Haitian population[12]. The Dictator states: "Tradition shows as a fatal fact…that under the protection of rivers, the enemies of peace, who are also the enemies of work and prosperity, found an ambush in which they might do their work, keeping the nation in fear and menacing stability" (97). When reading this quotation, one notices both the emotionally charged language as well as the lack of syntactical cogency. This passage exposes the Dictator's proclivity for rhetorical

[12] This speech is a translation of a real address that the president delivered upon the opening of a suspension bridge over the Yaque River (Besault 368-9). Danticat manipulates the historical record somewhat by situating this address on the eve of the massacre. Although no official date is available, the speech's inclusion in Lawrence de Besault's celebratory account of the dictator and his work (published in 1936) indicates that it was delivered at an earlier point in the regime's history.

clumsiness, while also demonstrating that the alleged Haitian threat is thinly conceived and described only in general terms. The dictator compensates for his vague descriptions by using inflated language and a declamatory speaking style. Clearly, he aims not to *prove* the existence of the Haitian threat, but to *perform* it. In this scene, Trujillo also uses historical references to imbue his speech with galvanizing potential. When asking his fellow citizens to help the army counter the alleged Haitian threat, he asserts: "The liberators of the nation did their part…and we could not ask more of them. The leaders of today must play their parts also" (97). Here, the president attempts to position his listeners within a mythologized but nevertheless living past. Although, when reading the novel, one cannot definitively trace the dictator's historical reference points, one might guess that he attempts to invoke residual anxiety concerning the 1822-44 Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic[13]. Regardless of the dictator's specific historical allusions, one can clearly grasp the extent to which he connects nationalist sentiments to notions of a mythologized historical narrative that continues into the present day.

Not only did the 1937 massacre aim to convince Dominicans of an illusory Haitian threat, it also created new notions of an essential Haitian ethnicity that was considered to be wholly separate from Dominican nationality. Danticat depicts this change in the social order by charting its impact on Amabelle's consciousness. April Shemak argues that in the first half of the narrative (the section that precedes the massacre itself), Danticat dramatizes Amabelle's growing awareness of the Dominican government's hostility towards members of the Haitian borderland community (87-8). Building on Shemak's perspective, I argue that Amabelle does not merely

[13] Although, in Danticat's text, this line appears as part of the radio address, it actually belongs to a speech that the president delivered in 1934 to commemorate the hundred-year anniversary of the Dominican Republic's independence from Haiti (Besault 369-70). This contextual information supports my assumption that Trujillo alludes, here, to the nineteenth century Haitian occupation.

become conscious of her vulnerability to state violence, but also of her position within an essentialized, homogenized racial category. Prior to Trujillo's reign, many border Haitians were treated as Dominican citizens or as welcome participants within the border community (Turits 596, Derby "Haitians" 508). Although members of borderland society were certainly not impervious to racial differences, notions of ethnicity did not constitute the sole or primary means through which people conceptualized their social order (Turits 596-7). For instance, distinctions between people were also structured in accordance with multi-racial class groupings (Derby "Haitians" 511). During the scenes in *The Farming of Bones* that precede the massacre itself, Danticat illustrates the ways in which rumours concerning the ensuing massacre cause notions of identity to shift away from class-based taxonomies and towards more essentialized conceptions of ethnicity. Sebastien refers to himself, Amabelle and their peers as *vwayaje* [wayfarers], due to their status as Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic. Both Sebastien and Amabelle understand their position in opposition to that of the stable non-*vwayaje* cohort of Haitian tradesmen and small landowners who have lived in the Dominican Republic for generations. As incipient rumours of the upcoming pogrom circulate among the cane-workers, many are surprised to hear that this middle class sector of the Haitian populace is also under threat. Amabelle expresses distress immediately following a conversation with a few of her non-*vwayaje* acquaintances: "I found it sad to hear the non-vwayaje Haitians who appeared as settled in the area as the tamarind trees, the birds of paradise, and the sugarcane – it worried me that they too were unsure of their place in the valley" (70). Amabelle's assertion that the non-*vwayaje* Haitians are "as settled" as the indigenous birds, trees and sugarcane is of interest for the way in which it naturalizes the ethnic Haitian presence in the border region; clearly, Amabelle's conceptions of citizenship and belonging are not strictly rooted in ethnic terms. The fact that the

non-*vwayaje* population – who have lived in the area for generations and have been treated previously as Dominican citizens – are suddenly at risk of expulsion, demonstrates that Trujillo's campaign aimed to denaturalize the Haitian presence in the borderlands and to re-inscribe notions of citizenship in strict accordance with ethnic criteria. In short, the novel demonstrates that Trujillo sought to enforce rigid distinctions between ethnicities within a borderland community whose social arrangements favoured racial hybridization.

In addition to reinforcing racial divisions, the 1937 massacre also territorialized these distinctions by aligning specific ethnicities with discrete, bounded national territories. Literary texts that attend to the aftermath of *el corte* detail the ways in which the violence reoriented people's relationships with national space. In Danticat's short story "1937," the main character refers to the Dominican Republic as "the Spanish Speaking country that [her mother] never allowed [her] to name" (33). This quotation emphasizes the extent to which historical memory has impacted both popular superstition and geographic perception: for Danticat's character, the Dominican Republic is such a dangerous region that one should refrain both from visiting it and from uttering its name. Moreover, in *Oscar Wao,* Junot Díaz asserts that, through the 1937 massacre, Trujillo "inflicted a true border on the countries, a border that exists beyond maps, that is carved directly into the histories and imaginaries of a people" (225). According to Benedict Anderson, national borders are textual entities: they do not exist in nature, but have to be created, drawn up and officialized through documents such as censuses and maps[14]. Díaz expands on Anderson's point by implying that the 1937 massacre ultimately served to reify state-sanctioned geographic constructs by making them a felt reality within the popular imagination. In short,

[14] See Anderson's chapter entitled "Census, Map, Museum" (163-86).

both "1937" and *Oscar Wao* draw links between traumatic historical memory and geographic perceptions.

The Farming of Bones provides a detailed exploration of the relationship between ethnicity, the body and national space. In her article on Danticat's novel, Amy Novak uses the term "embodied memory" to refer to traumatic recollections that are accessed through individuals' sensory encounters with their own bodies and with the bodies of others. Building on Novak, I argue that it is not only traumatic memory, but also geographic perception, that is inscribed onto the bodies of the novel's massacre survivors. During Amabelle's first visit to Cap-Haïtien after escaping across the border, she realizes that her body has become a site/sight of trauma. Strangers react to her and Yves's presence in noticeable ways: "Some of the merchants and shopkeepers and their workers moaned as we moved among them. They recognized us without knowing us. We were *those* people, the nearly dead, the ones who had escaped from the other side of the river" (220). Trauma has become an inextricable part of Amabelle's public identity. Amabelle's assertion that "they recognized us without knowing us" demonstrates that, because of her scarred body, even strangers can now access aspects of her personal history. The above quotation is also of interest for the way in which it situates Amabelle and Yves's bodies not only in history, but also in space. The violence they have experienced is specifically associated with "the other side of the river." Of course, since the above encounter is filtered through Amabelle's subjective consciousness, it is impossible to know for sure whether people perceive her the way she believes they do. At the very least, however, Amabelle's perception of the events in Cap-Haïtien reveal a great deal about the ways in which violence has impacted her subjectivity. She feels herself to be a symbol of the traumatic events that have transpired on "the other side." Here, as with *Butterflies*, individuals experience their subject position with respect to

the regime on a supra-rational, affective level. Amabelle's sensory and affective awareness of her body is also inextricably linked to new geographic perceptions. The violence of *el corte* positions Amabelle, Yves and their fellow Haitian survivors as those who cannot live safely on the Dominican side of the river.

Danticat is sensitive to the ways in which the 1937 massacre produced new conceptions of ethnicity and of national space. Contrary to Hewett and Todd, I argue that *el corte* was not merely a spontaneous outpouring of racial violence, but a calculated endeavour aimed at inscribing a border onto geographic and ideological borderland space. The novel shows that, by demonizing all Haitians instead of just poor migrant workers, the massacre reoriented borderland culture away from class-based social relations and towards notions of essential Dominican and Haitian ethnicities. Moreover, by subjecting the Haitian characters to violence, Trujillo's forces effectively reoriented these individuals' perceptions of space. The physical scars on Amabelle and Yves's bodies stand as testaments to the danger that exists on the Dominican side of the Massacre River. In short, the characters' embodied perceptions also serve to reinforce awareness of newly created national boundaries.

Embodied Memory, Violence and Abjection

In *The Farming of Bones*, the agents of state power use performative violence not only to create new distinctions between Haitians and Dominicans, but also to mark Haitian bodies as abject entities that do not belong within the emerging nation state. During the pre-massacre era, notions of racial purity collided with modern ideas about the proper management of bodily and social filth. Before delving into this discussion, it is helpful to consider a few ideas from Julia Kristeva. In the introduction to *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva defines "the abject" as that which

"disturbs identity, systems, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). When people become aware of the abject inside of themselves, they are beset with an impulse to expel this material. In Kristeva's words:

> Refuse…shows me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands…on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border (3).

The concept of borders is central to the above passage. By creating a clear separation (or border) between bodily waste and the body itself, the individual distances him/herself from the material that appears to threaten his/her continued existence, thereby symbolically evading the border that separates life form death. Although the above quotation deals with the ways in which individuals relate to their bodies, it can also be made applicable to modern understandings of the healthy body politic. The 1937 massacre demonstrates that, just as individuals attempt to create clear distinctions between the self and what is abject, nations also attempt to symbolically expel those elements that are understood (however erroneously) to jeopardize their survival.

In the Dominican Republic, state-sanctioned anti-Haitian rhetoric was bound up with early twentieth century discourses concerning bodily purity, hygiene and the proper demarcation of social and territorial boundaries. Lauren Derby argues that in the wake of the US occupation of 1916 – 1924, the Dominican government made increasing efforts to formalize distinctions between private and public realms and to regulate social conduct in the public domain ("Haitians" 505). Derby asserts: "The modernization of the country implied the sanitation of the public sphere and the elaboration of a wealth of new taboos concerning the placement and displacement of bodily and social filth" (506). New policies concerning the management of filth

became bound up with racist ideas about Haitians during the pre-massacre period. While these ideas certainly resided within popular consciousness, they were nevertheless exploited and exaggerated by official power; consequently, Haitians came to be increasingly associated with notions of bodily impurity (504). Their alleged hyper-fertility and strong sexual drives (518), their supposed indiscretion regarding standards of public decency (521), and their association with disease and contagion, marked them as transgressors within the new cult of proper hygiene and public conduct (504). Moreover, popular superstition positioned Haitians as having the power to transgress the corporeal limits of the human body. Haitians had the alleged capacity to imbue material objects with supernatural capabilities and to place curses on people by gaining access to those people's homes or possessions (521). Derby argues:

> The very boundaries of the Dominican body were [perceived as] different: Dominican bodies were closed, orderly, and domesticated, the bodies of the civilized. In contrast, Haitians had "carnival bodies" which stress their orifices and organs, their fertility, over their upper regions, which connote reason and control. Haitian bodies were porous, open, and seemed to seep onto whatever they touched (521).

It is of interest, here, that these racist conceptions of Haitians rely on a Cartesian dichotomy between bodies that are restrained by the intellect, versus the unregulated, impulsive bodies of the inferior other. The presence of this particular racialized distinction demonstrates the continuing impact of colonial ideology in the postcolonial era. One might also notice the extent to which anxieties over boundaries are central to the anti-Haitian sentiments that Derby discusses. One can position Derby's analysis in Kristevan terms by asserting that Haitians were perceived as abject insomuch as they were associated with bodily impurity, but also because they

allegedly transgressed the boundaries that were established by the modernizing discourses of the national government.

In *The Farming of Bones,* Pico engages in ritualistic performances that emphasize a new obsession with boundaries and a sense of fear concerning the possibility of Haitian contamination. For instance, when he discovers that his wife, Valencia, served tea to a group of Haitian cane cutters using the family's imported orchid-patterned tea set, "he [takes] the set out to the yard and, launching them against the cement walls of the house latrines, he [shatters] the cups and saucers one by one" (116). It is significant that Pico smashes the items *individually*. Had he intended merely to dispose of allegedly contaminated goods, he might have more efficiently thrown them away. Pico's actions, however, are more symbolic than practical: he performs a decontamination ritual, thereby drawing attention to the perceived presence of contamination in the first place. Pico engages in a similar act immediately following his daughter Rosalinda's baptism. Amabelle describes the incident: "I leaned forward and grazed Rosalinda's cheek with my lips…. Senor Pico yanked his wife's arm and pulled her away, almost making the señora drop the child" (119). In her capacity as the family's domestic servant, Amabelle has daily physical contact with Rosalinda. Moreover, as Valencia's midwife, Amabelle was also the first person to lay hands on the child. It is absurd, therefore, that Pico would react so violently to a simple kiss. Moreover, although Pico couches his intervention as a protective measure, it actually jeopardizes Rosalinda's safety by causing Valencia to lose her grip on the newborn baby. Clearly, Pico's action cannot be understood as a logical display of paternal protectiveness, but as a ritualistic performance through which he establishes a symbolic boundary between his Dominican daughter and the allegedly contaminating body of his Haitian servant.

The violence of *el corte*, in Danticat's representation, is motivated by similar sentiments to those that compel Pico's hysterical performances. The massacre seeks not only to expel Haitians from the Dominican Republic, but to mark their bodies as abject entities. Heather Hewett, in her article on disability and trauma in Danticat's novel, positions disablement as an unwanted byproduct of the violence itself. She claims that, "while the purpose of the massacre was to kill Haitians, not disable them, *The Farming of Bones* suggests that disablement was also one of the consequence" (127). Contrary to Hewett, I argue that, in Danticat's literary-historical reconstruction, disablement *is* indeed one of the massacre's aims. In *The Farming of Bones*, Trujillo's forces not only kill Haitians, but also symbolically mark them, through disablement, as abject and therefore out of place within the emergent nation state. The text does not simply present the massacre as a genocidal frenzy aimed at murdering as many Haitians as possible, but also as a performance that sought to frame Haitian identity in new and disempowering ways. While the military figures in *The Farming of Bones* cultivate bodies that symbolize dignity and restraint, they use violence to position Haitian bodies as earthly, corporeal and disorderly entities.

The military characters present themselves, or are presented by others, in ways that connote order, civility and containment. In one instance, Amabelle describes Pico's highly manicured appearance: "The señor was wearing his ceremonial khakis with his cap set in perfect alignment with his seashell-shaped ears" (111). Here, the notion of "alignment" is particular important for its associations of tidiness. One might also notice that the cap and ears, which intersect at right angles, provide a square frame for Pico's face, thereby suggesting a body that is contained, a body that respects the borders between the self and that which is external to it. In another instance, Amabelle describes Valencia's portrait of Trujillo, which hangs in the Ignacio-

Duarte living room. The portrait is carefully crafted so as to remove any abject signs of aging or deterioration in the dictator's body (43). Moreover, Trujillo's image casts an imposing gaze over the living room scene. Amabelle describes Valencia's artistic rendering: "She had made him [Trujillo] a giant in full military regalia, with vast fringed epaulets and clusters of medals aligned in neat rows under the saffron braiding across his chest" (43). Descriptions of the dictator as a "giant" with "vast epaulets" call to mind Hobbes's Leviathan figure, a sovereign ruler whose stature exceeds that of any other human being within his subject population. Although imposing in size, the dictator is nevertheless dressed in a manner that suggests restraint. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "regalia" signifies "order or…civic dignity" (1010). These connotations of orderliness are further reinforced by the neat arrangement of the medals, which line up with the "saffron braiding" on the dictator's chest. In short, Trujillo is presented in such a way as to make associations of near superhuman grandeur co-exist with notions of order and containment.

While the novel's military characters position themselves as having restrained, civilized bodies, the military itself uses performative violence in an attempt to reify the stereotype that Haitian bodies are abject, uncontainable entities. In one particularly harrowing scene, a Haitian character named Tibon describes his near-fatal encounter with a group of soldiers and armed civilians during the massacre:

> They make us stand in groups of six at the edge of the cliff [overlooking the sea], and it's either jump or go against a wall of soldiers with bayonets pointed at you and some civilians waiting in a circle with machetes[15]. They tell the civilians where best to strike with the machetes so our heads part more easily from our

[15] Although the massacre was orchestrated by the state and carried out primary by paid soldiers, the army did - by means of coercion - recruit some civilian participants (Turits 115.)

> bodies…. They make us stand in lines of six on the edge of the cliff…. Then they come back to the truck to get more. They have six jump over the cliff, then another six, then another six, then another six (173).

The soldiers do not seek merely to kill their victims, but to expel their bodies from the landscape by forcing them into the sea. The violence can be understood, therefore, as an act of purgation. Danticat's reiteration of "then another six" emphasizes the repetitive, ritualistic nature of the performance. One might even notice a subject rhyme between the above passage and the earlier instance in which Pico smashes the tea set against the wall of his house: both scenes feature orchestrated decontamination rituals. The soldiers position Haitians as abject by emphasizing the victims' vulnerability to bodily destruction. For Kristeva, the abject body collapses "the border between inside and outside" (53). During encounters with abjection, "it is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guarantee[s] the integrity of [the body's] 'own and clean self' but…[gives] way before the dejection of its contents" (Kristeva 53). By teaching the gathered crowds how to effectively dismember their victims, the soldiers position Haitians as having fragile, corporeal and therefore abject bodies that can be dismantled with a single stroke.

Violence also alters the Haitian characters' self-perceptions. Following the massacre, many of Danticat's Haitian subjects begin to conceptualize their own bodies – in accordance with racial stereotypes – as corporeal, disordered and vulnerable entities. Following the attack at Dajabón, Amabelle describes the experience of trying to walk properly on injured feet: "Every moment required a pause, a thought to what I was doing, where my legs were going as opposed to where they were supposed to be" (220). Through injury, Amabelle becomes conscious of functional thought processes that are typically involuntary. In short, her attackers manage to interfere with the easy communication channels between mind and body, thereby reifying (in

Amabelle's case) the stereotype that Haitians are incapable of domesticating their bodies to the restraining influence of the mind. Amabelle witnesses an extremely direct articulation of corporeal vulnerability during her stay at the makeshift clinic on the Haitian side of the river. From her hospital bed, she hears a fellow patient delivering an agonized monologue about how the massacre has altered his self-perception: "It all makes you understand that the flesh is like everything else…. It is no different, the flesh, than fruit or anything that rots. It's not magic, not holy. It can shrink, burn, and like amber it can melt in fire. It is nothing. *We* are nothing" (emphasis added, 213). Clearly, the anonymous speaker no longer conceptualizes his body as sacred or divine, but as a material entity that is subject to the process of decay. One sees, here, an affective response to sensory experiences: it is not just the injuries themselves, but the way in which the character is induced to *feel* about them, which contributes to his disempowering realization. The passage relates the speaker's epiphany to his newly formed conceptions of his own intrinsic worth. He has discovered that his body is not superior to "anything that rots"; clearly, the character experiences this heightened awareness of his vulnerable, corporeal (or abject) self as a demoralizing discovery. It is unclear as to whom the word "we," in the final sentence, refers. It potentially denotes humanity as a whole; however, given that the speaker addresses a room full of massacre refugees, who have been recently interpellated into a homogenous racial group, it seems more likely that "we" designates the speaker's Haitian peers. In short, the above passage demonstrates the extent to which the massacre alters the character's perception of his body, and perhaps the bodies of his fellow Haitian survivors. To possess a scarred body, for this character and for others, is to stand as a symbol of abjection within a new white supremacist ideology that situates notions or cleanliness and bodily integrity as evidence of Dominican racial superiority.

New Conceptions of Resistant Subjectivity

Danticat shows how the massacre altered individuals' relationships with their own bodies and with the bodies of others. In the above sections, I argue that the performances surrounding *el corte* mark Danticat's Haitian characters as belonging to a distinct, homogenous and territorialized racial group. Moreover I claim that the 1937 violence also works, in the novel, to position Haitian bodies as symbols of abjection. Danticat, however, does not merely expose these dynamics; she also critiques them, in part through the figure of Sebastien. Although physically absent throughout most of Amabelle's life, Sebastien continues to dominate her thoughts. Amabelle's musings about Sebastien should not be dismissed as the product of naïve infatuation, but as a means of resisting racial essentialism and of reclaiming and indeed valorizing abjection.

This section responds to a relatively small but lively critical discussion concerning Sebastien's significance within *The Farming of Bones*. Susan Strehle and Florence Jurney position Sebastien as a symbol through which Danticat exposes patriarchal structures in borderland society. According to Strehle, *The Farming of Bones* draws an analogy between romantic love and racial oppression. Strehle argues that, "By conjoining a fractured love story with a historical tale of genocide, the novel suggests that women's roles as lovers emerge from the same cultural values that express themselves in the historical slaughter of the racialized other" (28). To conflate romance with genocide is to undermine the productive possibilities inherent in the former and the unmitigated brutality of the latter. Moreover, W. Todd Martin points out that, in positioning Sebastien as a symbol of the same oppressive forces that Haitians encounter during the massacre, Strehle denies Sebastien's status as a victim of state violence. For Martin, Strehle's argument "essentializes masculinity, presuming that all males are aligned with the hegemony, when in fact the power structures portrayed in the novel oppress Sebastien as

much as they do Amabelle" (65). The relationship between the two characters is not without its power imbalances, but it is, by and large, a nurturing, emotionally supportive union. It is grossly reductive, therefore, to argue that the novel conflates Sebastien and Amabelle's romance with the genocidal impulses that motivated *el corte*.

Jurney's commentary on Sebastien is less extreme than Strehle's, but still problematic. She claims that Sebastien's presence within the story undermines Amabelle's subjectivity. Her critique is particularly concerned with the novel's opening line, in which Amabelle introduces Sebastien instead of herself. Jurney argues:

> When Amabelle chooses to introduce Sebastien first in the narration and to place him in a position of subject, she places herself implicitly in a position of object. As an objectified being, Amabelle is thus pushed into invisibility, into a no man's land of identity (par. 13).

Jurney neglects to consider Bahktin's assertion that novels are large, complex textual entities that offer plenty of space for multiple subjectivities; Sebastien's presence as a subject, therefore, does not immediately necessitate Amabelle's objectification. Moreover, to claim that Amabelle is somehow objectified is to ignore her agency as a narrating subject. When describing the characters in her life story, Amabelle selects those traits that she wishes to reveal, emphasize, idealize or critique. In short, Amabelle's position as narrator affords her a measure of discursive power over her subjects.

Contrary to Strehle and Jurney, I argue that Amabelle's infatuated musings concerning Sebastien are subtly empowering. When attending to Danticat's representation of Sebastien, one must consider the novel's dual narrative structure. Although the story is told primarily in a chronological fashion, there are a number of intermittent passages, offset in bold typeface, which

punctuate the work's linear trajectory. Novak argues that, by using present tense narration in these disruptive segments, Danticat imbues them with the sense of visceral immediacy one might experience in dreams or flashbacks (109). The present tense sections, which contain what Novak calls "spectral memory," valorize alternative, non-linear and frequently sub-conscious modes of recollection (110). These textual fragments "evoke experiences and events that official narrative and its epistemology, grounded in causality, progress and evidence, cannot contain" (Novak 113). Building on Novak's argument, I assert that the passages do not merely constitute an alternative testimonial form; they also serve a responsive function. Amabelle's spectral memories enable her to envision an alternative discursive order to the one that the massacre's perpetrators and organizers foist upon her.

The spectral memory passages are heavily preoccupied with the figure of Sebastien. He exists, here, not as a living character, but as a recollection. Amabelle's musings on Sebastien are sentimental and imaginative. She frequently speculates about interactions that never actually happened and she openly admits, in a number of instances, that her recollections of her former lover are obscured by distance and time. I argue that there are two Sebastiens present in Amabelle's narrative: the flesh and blood character with whom she spends her leisure hours in the first part of the story, and the ethereal presence who exists within the realm of spectral memory. This chapter concentrates entirely on the latter; however, for the purposes of brevity, I will refer to Sebastien's spectral presence simply as Sebastien. Amabelle's reconstructions of her former lover conjure up and valorize an alternative conception of masculinity that opposes the violent performativity embodied by the oppressive military figures that populate Danticat's text.

Through her musings on Sebastien, Amabelle conceptualizes an alternative to rigid, ethnic-nationalist conceptions of identity. Within the spectral memory passages, Sebastien

frequently articulates his admiration for Amabelle's body. Although his praise may at times come across as maudlin or patronizing, it nevertheless serves productive purposes. In one passage, he comments on Amabelle's "deep black skin," that contains "all the shades of black…what we see and what we don't see" (3). Here, Sebastien positions blackness as a composite of multiple skin tones. This conception of race is certainly pertinent to Hispaniola, in which contemporary ethnicities (Dominican and Haitian) came about through cultural and genetic intermixtures with people of African, European, and to a lesser extent, Asian and Taíno Indian descent. Creolization theorist Kamau Braithwaite asserts that, due to the history of intermixture in the Antilles, Caribbean ethnicities cannot be sectioned off into discrete, mutually independent categories (203-4). Insomuch as Sebastien, like Braithwaite, rejects notions of essential, transhistorical ethnicity, he also resists the racialized social constructions that Trujillo's forces sought to impose upon the borderland population at the time of the 1937 atrocities.

Amabelle imagines Sebastien not only as a spectral presence, but also as a transnational one. In one particularly elegiac passage, she expresses her longing for her former partner: "I wish at least that he was part of the air on this side of the river, a tiny morsel in the breeze that passes through my room at night. I wish at least that some of the dust in his bones could trail me in the wind" (281). Amabelle is obviously aware that Sebastien's ashes do not follow her throughout her life in Haiti; this quotation, therefore, communicates a fantasy rather than a misguided perception of reality. This fantasy, however, does not merely express a desire for intimacy, but also a nascent transnationalist ethic. Amabelle imagines that, through death, Sebastien might have been transformed into an incorporeal presence that moves, like the wind, across national boundaries. She envisions that, having been deprived of his mortal existence, Sebastien might be liberated from the imposition of divisive human constructs such as national borders. In short,

Amabelle's musings on Sebastien enable her to contemplate conceptions of hybrid ethnicity and transnationality, both of which oppose Trujillo's essential, territorialized conception of race.

Amabelle's spectral musings on Sebastien also undermine the dandified performativity associated with many of the novel's Dominican figures. While Danticat's descriptions of Pico and Trujillo draw attention to the characters' finely tailored uniforms, Amabelle's recollections of Sebastien emphasize, and indeed valorize, nakedness. During the spectral memory passages, Amabelle frequently calls attention to the ways in which Sebastien encourages her to become comfortable with her own naked body. She recalls one instance in which he asks her, upon her return from a shift at the Ignacio-Duarte home, to remove her uniform. "Your clothes cover more than your skin," he explains. "You become this uniform they make for you. Now you are only you, just the flesh" (2). Here, Sebastien juxtaposes a quasi-Aristotelian conception of the essential self, which is conceptualized in opposition to Amabelle's performative working body – a body that is attired in the specific costume that society deems appropriate for professional endeavours. Although Sebastien's sentimental notion of an essential naked self is hardly compatible with contemporary postmodern skepticism, it remains a productive concept at least within the context of Danticat's narrative. One must keep in mind that, during her time as a domestic servant, Amabelle frequently experiences the strain of emotional labour: her job requires her to perform an attentive, selfless disposition, which renders her own subjective needs invisible to her employers[16]. To shed one's uniform, therefore, is to free oneself from the emotional and material constraints that labour imposes on the individual. More importantly, the naked body stands in opposition to the highly manicured military-gentleman performances

[16] In the novel's final chapter, Amabelle returns to Alegría where she visits her former employer, Señora Valencia. Upon introducing herself to her former mistress's servant, she comments on the latter's behaviour: "The woman walked up the drive to the patio, with the haste of those afraid to displease at every moment of their day. Working for others, you were always rushing to or away from them" (292).

associated with Pico and Trujillo. While the Dominican officers use clothing to emphasize notions of containment, rationality, and hence, racial superiority, Sebastien's conception of nakedness valorizes the unadorned, earthly human body. Even if one rejects the concept of an essential humanness that is somehow outside of social discourse, one should nevertheless regard Sebastien's idea of nakedness as a productive alternative to the highly cultivated performances of racial supremacy in which Pico and Trujillo engage.

Through her spectral musings on Sebastien, Amabelle reclaims concepts that are associated with abjection. Her romantic dreams about her former partner valorize the earthly, corporeal body that is capable of leaving a lasting, sensual impression on other bodies. In one passage, Amabelle demonstrates the extent to which her recollections of Sebastien impact her tactile senses:

> I can still feel his presence there, in the small square room. I can smell his sweat, which is as thick as sugarcane juice when he's worked too much. I can still feel his lips, the eggplant-violet gums that taste of greasy goat milk boiled to candied sweetness with mustard-colored potatoes (3).

Here, the references to eggplants, goat milk, and potatoes link Sebastien's body to natural elements, to items that decompose, turn sour and rot. Unlike the anonymous character in the Haitian ward, who experiences despair upon encountering his corporeal, vulnerable self, Amabelle positions earthliness in erotic terms. The organic metaphors imbue encounters with Sebastien's body (or the memory of those encounters) with a measure of tactile sensuality. Amabelle also celebrates the body's potential to impress itself upon other bodies. Her ideas are therefore similar to the realization that Alvarez's character, Mate, experiences in prison. In the respective passages from Alvarez and Danticat, the characters locate resistant potential in the

body's ability to engage in physical expressions of intimacy with other bodies, thereby undermining masculinized, colonial notions of the inherent superiority of reason over affective or sensory impulses. Moreover, by locating romantic and erotic recollections not only in the brain, but also in the realm of the senses, Amabelle demonstrates that embodied memory is not merely a site of trauma, but also a mechanism through which one can revisit pleasurable physical encounters. One might recall that, during the lead-up to the massacre, Pico engages in purification rituals that serve to position Haitians as possessing uncontained, contaminating bodies. Amabelle's spectral recollections of Sebastien counter Pico's hysterical performances by locating erotic potential in the body's ability to impress itself sensually (and also consensually) upon the bodies of others. In the context of the 1937 massacre, and its attempt to mark Haitian bodies as uncontainable entities that contaminate or mark other bodies, Amabelle's erotic memories of Sebastien articulate a reclamation of that which is deemed abject.

Conclusion:

This chapter positions the 1937 massacre as part of the aggressive nation-building initiatives associated with Trujillo's early years as president. Contrary to Dove's formulation in "Parsley," *The Farming of Bones* subtly demonstrates that the 1937 massacre was not a spontaneous outpouring of irrational violence, but a deliberate, state-sanctioned performance that sought to create racialized distinctions between those who did and did not belong within newly formulated, but seemingly timeless, conceptions of Dominican nationality. In Danticat's reconstruction, the massacre also brings about new ways through which Haitians are induced to understand their bodies. Derby argues that, during the decades preceding *el corte*, conceptions of corporeal integrity collided with racist notions of Haitians as having abject, disorderly bodies. In

The Farming of Bones, the Dominican authorities reify these stereotypes by literally dismembering and disfiguring Haitian victims. While Hewett positions physical disablement as an unintended by-product of the 1937 violence, I argue that, in Danticat's novel, injury and disablement constitute part of the performative strategy through which Trujillo's forces create new perceptions of reality.

Amabelle's musing on Sebastien should not be dismissed as the product of idle infatuation; to do so would be to undermine the political and indeed resistant ideas that Amabelle conceptualizes. Jurney and Strehle position Sebastien as a conduit through which Danticat critiques the patriarchal dynamics in borderland society. They neglect, however, to consider that Sebastien exists, in large part, as an imaginative creation within Amabelle's spectral consciousness. Through her musings on Sebastien, Amabelle comes to re-signify the racialized body in innovative and empowering ways. Her spectral recollections of Sebastien enable her to challenge the various state-sanctioned perceptions of national identity and of Haitian abjection that she encounters at the time of the 1937 massacre. To be a wayfarer, in Amabelle's spectral imagination, is to embody transnationality and, therefore, to stand outside of racial essentialism and violent nationalistic discourse. Moreover, for Amabelle, Sebastian's allegedly abject body is not a source of shame, but a symbol both of autonomy from oppressive labour conditions and of the body's potential to engage in sensual interactions with other bodies.

The Farming of Bones certainly complements *In the Time of the Butterflies* insomuch as it draws attention to various milieus that are not the focal point of Alvarez's analysis. The difference between the social strata to which Alvarez and Danticat attend, lines up with distinction between the marginal versus the subaltern. Alvarez's protagonists are victimized due their status as women within a predatory, misogynistic regime; however, they nevertheless derive

a measure of power from their desirability within Dominican culture and from their privileged class status. While Alvarez is primarily interested in the patriarchal discourses that positioned middle and upper class Dominican women as sexualized 'national treasures,' Danticat focuses on those bodies that were excluded altogether from Trujillo era conceptions of desirability. The point here is not to suggest that Danticat's text is in some way nobler or more significant than Alvarez's, but merely to point out that *The Farming of Bones* complements *Butterflies* by attending to various social strata that the latter neglects. Both novels, however, are involved in similar ideological projects insomuch as they seek out alternative methods through which individuals can relate to their bodies so as to counter the repressive discourses of the Trujillo regime. Moreover, both authors locate resistant potential in the realm of sensory and affective experience and, in doing so, they undermine racialized and gendered notions of the superior (i.e. European, male) intellect, over the corporeal, affective body of the other.

Seductive Bodies: Hegemonic and Alternative Masculinities in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

In his revisionist literary-historical account of twentieth century Latin American history, Eduardo Galeano makes the following observation concerning Trujillo:

> At supper, he clinks glasses with a governor or deputy who will be off to the cemetery after coffee. When a piece of land interests him, he doesn't buy it: he occupies it. When a woman appeals to him, he doesn't seduce her; he points at her (106).

Galeano's claim that Trujillo abstained from seductive endeavours contradicts perceptions of Trujillo as a consummate seducer, a notion that was widespread during the dictator's reign. Galeano's quotation is nevertheless of interest for the way in which it re-situates Trujillo's sexual exploits as evidence of his megalomaniacal tendencies, be it in terms of land acquisition or sexual conquests. Galeano also gestures to the dictator's proclivity for exercising control, either through physical or sexual violence, over the bodies of his subordinates. In Galeano's formulation, sexual encounters between Trujillo and his female subjects clearly constitute one of many acts through which the dictator asserts a domineering masculine persona.

Recent studies by Valentina Peguero, Christian Krohn-Hansen and Lauren Derby consider the ways in which the dictator's cultural interventions fostered new conceptions of masculinity. In *The Militarization of Culture in the Dominican Republic* (2004) Peguero argues that Trujillo extended a strongly militaristic ethos into almost every facet of public life, and, in the process, popularized a conception of male soldierly asceticism. Krohn-Hansen's *Political Authoritarianism in the Dominican Republic* (2009) demonstrates that Trujillo positioned his regime as a force for national development through commerce, industry and technological

modernity. This culture valorized notions of hardworking, industrious masculinity, thereby elevating rural peasants and working class men to positions of symbolic importance within the emergent national economy. Derby's book *The Dictator's Seduction* (2009) is most relevant to the present study for the connections it draws between seduction and sex, on the one hand, and cultural conceptions of domineering masculinity, on the other. Derby argues that performances of dandyism, virility and sexual cupidity were central to the production of social legitimacy for Trujillo and his subordinates.

This chapter attends to Dominican-American author Junot Díaz's debut Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Díaz first appeared on the literary scene in 1996 with the publication of his acclaimed short-story collection *Drown*. The work established Díaz's preoccupation with representations of tough, domineering masculinity in various New York and New Jersey Dominican immigrant communities. James Wood argues that *Drown* is emblematic of a post-Raymond Carver aesthetic in American literature, due to its terse, muscular prose, and its preoccupation with hardened, emotionally stunted macho protagonists. Wood does not account for the subtle but nevertheless revealing instances in which Díaz's male narrators acknowledge a measure of empathy or emotional growth. David Cowart argues that, despite the collection's harsh tone, it also offers occasional passages in which "the subject matter addressed by the narrators forces them into postures of unexpected sensitivity" (196). According to Cowart, the collection exposes the facade of detached, unsentimental masculinity as untenable by depicting instance in which this performance fails.

Oscar Wao adopts, develops and historicizes *Drown*'s musings on the limitations of machismo. The narrative is told primarily through the voice of Yunior de Las Casas, a brash, streetwise Dominican-American who also narrates six of the stories in *Drown*. While *Drown*

registers character development through occasional moments of limited emotional insight, *Oscar Wao* presents a narrator whose perception of dominant masculinity is radically altered by the novel's end. Moreover, unlike *Drown*, *Oscar Wao* situates its commentary on Dominican and Dominican-American masculinities in response to the legacy of the Trujillo dictatorship. As critic Jim Hannan asserts, the novel "refuses to forget the heavy burden the past can place on the present" (65). I argue that the narrator experiences the burden of the past through his growing awareness of how certain scripts of seductive, hyper-sexual and domineering masculinity were complicit in the production and consolidation of official power during the Trujillo era. Yunior's sensitivity to the collusion between certain performances of male identity and totalitarian power prompts him, by the novel's end, to seek out and valorize an alternative conception of masculinity which is embodied in the figure of Oscar de Leon (nicknamed Oscar Wao), the novel's protagonist.

The narrative of *Oscar Wao* moves back and forth between contemporary New Jersey and the mid-century Dominican Republic. Oscar is a geeky, overweight and sexually curious Dominican-American who comes of age living in a New Jersey ghetto in the eighties and nineties. During the sections within the novel that focus on Oscar, Yunior offers a frequently humorous and at times dark account of the protagonist's beleaguered quest to find romantic fulfillment, lose his virginity and confront his recurring bouts of depression. There are a few lengthy chapters, however, in which the narrative flashes back in time in order to explore Oscar's family history. Here, the novel recounts the experiences of Oscar's mother and grandfather, both of whom faced tremendous persecution while living in the Dominican Republic under Trujillo. These various narratives, although separated in time and space, combine to articulate a complex

perspective on the way in which historical memory impacts the narrator's perceptions of contemporary American culture.

Oscar Wao is, in many respects, a story about storytelling. In his study of literary self-consciousness, Robert Alter asserts: "A self-conscious novel, briefly, is a novel that systematically flaunts its own condition of artifice and that by so doing probes into the problematic relationship between real-seeming artifice and reality" (x). In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior is certainly concerned with revealing the artificial processes through which narratives are constructed in the present day. By frequently substantiating his story with references to historical artifacts (photo albums, interview, works of historical scholarship), Yunior reminds the reader that he stands apart from his historical subject matter, which he accesses through textual materials, not first hand experience. *Oscar Wao* therefore demonstrates a measure of implicit awareness regarding de Certeau's assertion that historical narratives are not mimetic reconstructions of reality, but second level interpretations of other textual sources (*History* 71).

The novel offers an intriguing development within the canon of contemporary historical fiction: it does not merely consider the process of narrating history, but also the ways in which that process impacts the subjectivity of the narrator himself. In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon asserts that the presence of a subjective narrator is a predominant feature within historiographic metafiction. She claims that, within the genre's most representative works:

> The narrativization of past events is not hidden; the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed – not found – order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure (66).

Hutcheon argues that, by invoking a highly subjective narrative voice, works of historiographic metafiction imbue readers with a sense of the contingent nature of historical knowledge. In short, the genre acquaints readers with the ways in which historical understandings are impacted by the individual consciousness that researches and narrates them (67). This chapter pushes Hutcheon's argument further by suggesting that, in Díaz's novel, one sees an even more reciprocal relationship between the narrator and his historical material. Yunior's historical account may be impacted by his own consciousness, but his consciousness is simultaneously influenced by the historical subject matter that he relates. *Oscar Wao* emphasizes that the process of researching and writing history prompts the narrator to re-evaluate his own conceptions of masculine identity.

This study is divided into three sections. The first concerns the president's attempts to assert his own masculine persona through public performances of seductive prowess. The second concerns the dictator's use of 'bodily surrogates' (highly conspicuous individuals who embodied Trujillo's public image) to imbue his regime with associations of opulent, dandified masculinity. The third section considers the extent to which the novel's exploration of Trujillo era masculinities impacts the narrator's consciousness, thereby prompting him to seek out alternative modes of relating to the male body. One can observe the ways in which Yunior's historical account affects his outlook by analyzing his evolving perception of the geeky, overweight protagonist, Oscar Wao.

Seduction and State Power

Oscar Wao demonstrates that performances of violence and seduction combined to create a single vision of state-sanctioned, dominant masculinity during the Trujillo era. Díaz's

representations counter D.A. Miller's claims regarding an alleged opposition between violent and seductive masculinities. In one of the most frequently cited critical passages on male body building culture, Miller draws a distinction between the different ways in which straight and gay bodies respectively are presented for public consideration:

> The first deploys its heft as a tool…as both an armored body and a body wholly given over to utility...whereas the second displays its muscle primarily in terms of an image openly appealing to, and deliberately courting the possibility of being shivered by, someone else's desire (31).

One may take issue with Miller's easy division between straight and gay culture, as well as his faulty assertion that straight men do not relate to their bodies as potential objects of desire. One might also assert that even the most seemingly armored, utilitarian straight male body is still cultivated in adherence to a set of aesthetics principles, since utilitarian asceticism is an aesthetic in itself. This paper is primarily concerned, however, with unsettling one of the foundational assumptions that underlies Miller's argument: that violence and seduction constitute opposing performances of male subjectivity. Analysis of the Trujillo regime demonstrates the extent to which these two discourses worked in tandem to construct a single image of domineering, heterosexual masculinity.

Numerous historians have commented on Trujillo's habit of engaging in public extra-marital affairs with the daughters of prominent Dominican citizens. In *The Dictator's Seduction*, Lauren Derby argues that these public displays of sexual rapacity worked, in conjunction with acts of state-sanctioned violence, as a symbolic assertion of the dictator's power. She asserts:

> Trujillo's power and charisma were based on the consumption of women (and their status) through sexual conquest as well as the domination of enemies of

> state, and on the near mythological fear and resultant aura he acquired by eliminating men. Whereas Trujillo's insatiable sexual cupidity brought ignominy, it also brought respect and was a key element in his legitimacy (111).

Clearly, Trujillo understood performances of both violence and seductiveness as components necessary to the construction of an assertive, masculine persona. It is important to note that many of Trujillo's extra-marital encounters were more akin to rape than seduction, given that consent was always derived through grossly uneven power relations (Wucker 45). Nevertheless, Derby contends that these affairs were presented to the public as evidence of the dictator's remarkable seductive capabilities (*Seduction* 111). As she explains, Trujillo sought to publicly demonstrate that he could "consume" women as easily as he could "eliminate" men (111). One must pay careful attention, when attending to Derby's argument, to the ways in which both violence and seduction (or elimination and consumption) imply notions of conquest or mastery. Seduction and violence, for Derby, are two complimentary tactics aimed at demonstrating the dictator's capability to control the bodies of others. Derby also argues that the dictator's performances of seductive capability required a measure of dialectical engagement with his subject population. Trujillo did not merely seek to present himself as a powerful patriarch, but as *the* supreme embodiment of assertive, womanizing masculinity. Consequently, the dictator's "overblown cult of personality depleted the collective honour of all Dominican men except himself" (174). In short, Trujillo's assertions of social legitimacy necessitated the denigration of other people's masculinity relative to his own.

In the chapter entitled "Poor Abelard," Díaz dramatizes the ways in which the dictator combined violence with performances of seductive intent to symbolically emasculate a prominent Dominican citizen. While previous texts within the Trujillo cycle demonstrate how

sexual encounters with the president traumatized female victims, Díaz focuses on the ways in which public performances of sexual desire and seductive prowess impacted male subjectivity. Díaz's novel, therefore, offers a unique take on pre-established themes within texts about the Trujillo era. The dictator's voracious sexual appetite is frequently cast in threatening terms within novels of the Trujillo cycle. One might recall that in Alvarez's *Butterflies,* Minerva Mirabal comes to political consciousness during early adolescence when her boarding school peer is selected to be the dictator's mistress and is subsequently banished to a lonely house in Miami. Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* features Urania Cabral, a Dominican-American lawyer, whose hatred for Trujillo is rooted in her traumatic recollections of being raped by the dictator at a young age. In her survey of twentieth century Dominican literature, Doris Sommer defines what she believes to be a perennial patriarchal narrative within the Dominican tradition. She argues that subversive challenges to the emergent nation are frequently allegorized as either assaults on, or threats to, the bodies of female characters[17]. Sommer's observation is certainly pertinent to Vargas-Llosa's *Feat of the Goat*, in which, according to López-Calvo, the attack on "Urania comes to symbolize once again the country oppressed by the tyrant" (86). One might make a similar argument for *In the Time of the Butterflies*, were it not for the fact that the novel makes space for female agency and resistance. As López-Calvo asserts, female bodies in *Butterflies* "still become allegorized as a text about the political developments in the national scene"; however, these female characters are not portrayed as passive subjects, but as national heroes who mobilize against the dictator's power (88). Unlike the above texts, *Oscar Wao* sidesteps the allegorical overtones associated with presidential rapes by refusing to portray any

[17] The trend that Sommer identifies is not distinct to Dominican culture. It can be located in numerous bodies of nationalistic literature, including the eighteenth century aisling tradition in Gaelic poetry (Armengol 8-10), or in many of the Reconstruction narratives from the American South, of which D.W. Griffith's early Hollywood classic *Birth of a Nation* (1915) is perhaps the most prominent example (Segrest 33-4).

such encounters. In the novel, Trujillo makes public advances on the daughter of Dr. Abelard Cabral, a prominent Dominican citizen, but never has any physical contact with her. Díaz, therefore, turns the reader's attention away from the act of sex itself, and towards both the public performance of seductive intent and the ways in which this performance impacted male subjectivity.

Through his chapter on Dr. Abelard Cabral, Oscar's grandfather, Díaz demonstrates that performances of seduction colluded with acts of violence to assert the dictator's authoritative, masculine persona and to symbolically emasculate his enemies. Abelard is a wealthy Dominican physician who, for an unspecified reason, falls out of the dictator's favour. Trujillo antagonizes Abelard first by making public advances on his (Abelard's) daughter, Jacquelyn, and later by having him arrested on phony charges and subjected to torture. Both the public assertions of sexual interest in Jacquelyn and the ensuing acts of violence against Abelard serve the same purpose: to undermine the doctor's claim to masculinized legitimacy. In one instance, Abelard receives an invitation requesting that he bring his wife and daughter to a dinner party held in Trujillo's honour. Jacquelyn's name is triply underlined on the card itself (228). Although Jacquelyn is blissfully unaware of Trujillo's predatory inclinations, Abelard is beset by a demoralizing sense of his own powerlessness to resist the dictator's request. Abelard responds to the invitation with a mixture of "impotent rage and pathetic self-pity" (229). By invoking associations of impotence, the narrator positions Abelard's lack of agency in emasculating terms. The theme of emasculation is reinforced during an exchange between Abelard and his closest friend, Marcus. Abelard angrily explains to Marcus that, as the father of his own house, he (Abelard) should have a right to protect his daughter from the dictator's advances. "It's madness! Sheer madness!" he exclaims. "I'm the father of my household! I'm the one who says what

goes!" (229). Marcus's response is strikingly despondent: "What can you do?.... Trujillo's the president" (229). Marcus's meaning is clear: Trujillo's presidential status trumps Abelard's status as father. As the national patriarch, Trujillo has the power to override Abelard's paternal authority within his (Abelard's) family home. In short, Trujillo's displays of sexual interest in Jacquelyn are positioned, within the novel, as attacks on Abelard's patriarchal status.

After refusing to relinquish his daughter to the dictator, Abelard is arrested on phony charger of slandering the president and subjected to brutal, humiliating violence. Just as the dictator's advances on Jacquelyn diminish Abelard's sense of patriarchal authority, the violence Abelard experiences in prison also serves an emasculating function. In short, performances of violence and seduction are positioned, in this chapter, as two components within a single incarnation of oppressive, state-sanctioned masculinity. According to Christian Krohn-Hansen, notions of courage were understood, in mid-century Dominican society, as signifiers of ideal male identity (138-9). The violence Abelard experiences upon being brought into police custody is performed in such a way as to undermine his claim to courageous masculinity. Abelard is beaten promptly after being taken into the prison. When the shock of this first encounter with violence brings the doctor to tears, the interrogating officer calls his colleagues in from the other offices to witness the spectacle: "Look at this one!" the officer commands. "Look at how much he likes to cry!" (239). Elaine Scarry argues that during instances of violent interrogation or torture, the persecutor works to turn the victim's body against itself. In other words, the torturer finds creative ways to transform the victim's body into "the agent of his agony" (47). One sees an analogous phenomenon happening in the above encounter form *Oscar Wao,* during which Abelard's body is transformed into an agent not of its pain but of its own symbolic emasculation. While one should understand Abelard's crying as a coherent reaction to extreme trauma, the

officer does not position this act in such a way. The phrase "he likes to cry" implies that crying is a common, cowardly and, by extension, unmanly predilection on Abelard's part. The officer brings Abelard to tears and then presents the tears, to his fellow officers, as proof of the doctor's cowardice. In short, he transforms Abelard's body into a visual symbol of its own emasculating shame.

Abelard's symbolic emasculation is further brought to light during the scene in which his wife, Socorro, visits him in prison. During this passage, one comes to understand the performative dimensions of the violence that Abelard experiences during his incarceration. The narrator offers a detailed depiction of the prison visiting room:

> The visiting room where Socorro awaited her husband seemed to have been fashioned from a latrine. There was only one sputtering kerosene lamp and it looked as though a number of people had taken mountainous shits in the corner. An intentional humiliation that was lost on Socorro…. After what felt like an hour…Abelard was brought in handcuffed. He'd been given an undersized shirt and an undersized pair of pants; he was shuffling as though afraid that something in his hands or his pockets might fall out…. The night before, he had been interrogated by the guards, and they had beaten him mercilessly with leather truncheons; one of his testicles would be permanently shriveled from the blows (241).

This passage is inflected with language that suggests theatricality. The waiting room is not *actually* a latrine; it is merely *fashioned* to seem like one. Moreover, although it "looked as though" several people had defecated in the corner, one is not sure as to whether this is actually the case. While one does not know the origins of this particularly objectionable display and is

perhaps disinclined to speculate, one is nevertheless aware that this set piece is crafted intentionally for its humiliating effects. Abelard's body is also positioned so as to take part in the spectacle of humiliation. Instead of merely saying that Abelard *wore* poorly fitted clothing, Díaz specifies that "He'd been given" his outfit, thereby drawing the reader's attention to that the fact that Abelard's captors have the power to cultivate his physical appearance. The brief reference to "interrogation" at the passage's end suggests that even torture has been administered, at least in part, for visual effect: Abelard's body provides a legible indication of the demoralizing violence he underwent the night before. When Socorro encounters Abelard in the visiting room, she apprehends him as "a husband looking nearly destroyed" (242). It is of interest, here, that Díaz uses the indefinite article "a" instead of the possessive pronoun "her." Socorro does not see "her husband" destroyed, but "a husband" destroyed. This syntactical maneuver suggests that Abelard has been robbed of his ability to be "a husband," that his husband-like qualities have been subject to destruction. Clearly, theatricality and violence combine to reduce Abelard to a spectacle of emasculation in front of his wife. In this chapter, the dictator's performances of seductive intent combine with acts of state-sanctioned violence to further the same end: the denigration of Abelard's masculinity relative the regime's public image.

Sartorial Finery, Class Ascendency and Violence

Díaz's depiction of Trujillo era culture accords with Derby's assertion that performances of violence and seduction served to bolster the dictator's status as a patriarch who could exert his control over the bodies of Dominican citizens. According to Lauren Derby, performances of dandyism – itself a cultural incarnation of seductive masculinity – were also central to the Trujillo regime's public image. Derby argues that Trujillo modeled his dandified postures on the

lower-class Dominican trickster archetype known colloquially as *el tiguere* [the tiger] (*Seduction* 173). In their respective articles on *tiguere* culture, anthropologists Antonio de Moya and Chris Girman both situate *el tiguere* as an urban lower class male who achieves a measure of social ascendancy through guile, personal charm and a capacity to use performance to occupy social positions that are presumed to be above his station. Although de Moya and Girman understand *tiguere* culture to be a grassroots phenomenon hailing from the urban ghettos of the mid-century Dominican Republic, Derby argues that Trujillo derived social prestige in part by appropriating aspects of this lower class persona. In her words, the *tiguere* archetype "has a countercultural valence that Trujillo officialized by brining it into the corridors of power" (174).

According to Derby, dandyism was central to Trujillo's incarnation of the *tiguere* archetype. In her words: "The Tiguere is the classic dissimulator, someone who gains access to a station above his own through dressing for the part" (*Seduction* 186). Throughout his career, Trujillo defied classist power structures by moving up in the ranks from a poor foot soldier to the nation's dictator. In short, his life story embodied the *tiguere* narrative of class ascendency writ large (Derby 184). The dictator's penchant for sartorial finery could not possibly signify aristocratic lineage, since his constituents were well aware of his humble origins. Rather, in *tiguere* fashion, the dictator's adornments came to symbolize class mobility rather than noble lineage (Derby 184-5). One must understand Trujillo era dandyism in counter-distinction from its eighteenth and nineteenth century European predecessor. Dandyism in Regency England and nineteenth century France represented an attempt, on the part of an imperiled gentlemen class, to assert its cultural sophistication relative to an ascendant bourgeois, utilitarian culture (Ratcliff 102). Trujillo's dandyism, on the contrary, signified the dictator's personal ascent from poverty

into the ranks of the global ultra-rich and his access to the various accoutrements that this acquired station afforded him.

Trujillo era dandyism features in *Oscar Wao* primarily through the character of Dionisio (also referred to as the Gangster), a middle-aged racketeer for the trujillato. As a functionary within the Trujillo regime, Dionisio also represents certain aspects of the dictator's dandified persona. According to Derby, Trujillo disseminated his public image in part through the use of surrogates – people who embodied aspects of the dictator's desired persona and carried those representations into the public sphere. Most notably, Derby comments on Portfirio Rubirosa, the jet-setting, dandified diplomat who represented the regime in the gossip columns and tabloids of Europe and the United States (*Seduction* 203). As a consummate seducer and famously well-dressed socialite, Rubirosa imbued the regime with a measure of international celebrity cachet (Derby *Seduction* 183). Dionisio is something of a minor Rubirosa figure within the novel. Like his more renowned counterpart, Dionisio is both a jet-setter with connections in the international criminal underworld and a highly conspicuous dandy figure who represents the regime's sartorial culture within the public domain.

In the novel, Dionisio's rise to power within the ranks of the trujillato accompanies new postures of dandified masculinity. After introducing Dionisio, Díaz explains the process through which his character becomes a privileged member of Trujillo's inner-circle, despite hailing from an obscure and impoverished background. Dionisio's first state-sanctioned murder serves as his initiation into the dictator's coterie. Díaz provides a cursory but nevertheless revealing gloss of the event: "At age fourteen he killed his first 'comunista,' a favor for the appalling Felix Bernardino…. With the money he earned he bought himself a new suit and four pairs of shoes" (119-120). Dionisio's transformation from street tough to government assassin accompanies a

change in wardrobe. The above quotation clearly foregrounds the centrality of both violence and sartorial fashion within Trujillo's milieu. Moreover, it demonstrates the extent to which fashion came to be associated with class ascendancy within the dictator's inner circle.

As a Dandy figure, Dionisio derives social prestige by positioning himself as a focal point of visual attention. According to Krohn-Hansen, notions of public visibility were essential to the production of social and political legitimacy in Dominican culture. Krohn-Hansen argues that men derived authority through highly conspicuous performances that emphasized their easy associations with men and their flirtatious confidence in the presence of women (140-1). Krohn-Hansen's assertions are pertinent to Dionisio's character. In the chapter entitled "The Three Heartbreaks of Belicia Cabral," Díaz chronicles the relationship between Belicia, a Dominican teenager who later becomes Oscar's mother, and Dionisio. Belicia first meets Dionisio at the El Hollywood nightclub in her hometown of Bani. Here, Dionisio makes a memorable first appearance in the novel:

> [He was dressed] in a Rat Pack ensemble of black smoking jacket and white pants and not a dot of sweat on him…. [He had] pouched grey eyes that had seen (and didn't miss) much. Eyes that had been scoping Beli for the better part of an hour, and it wasn't like Beli hadn't noticed. The nigger was some kind of baller, everybody in the club was paying tribute to him (115).

At El Hollywood, Dionisio engages in an interactive public performance: he dresses in such a way as to attract attention and the club patrons respond by performing their admiration. It is important to note, however, that Dionisio is not merely a spectacle but also a spectator. As Díaz later asserts, he is a man who enjoys both "seeing and being seen" (125). Dionisio exerts power through his gaze. From his position at the El Hollywood bar, he takes stock of his environment

and allows his eyes to rest on the bodies of the women he finds attractive. Like everything else about him, Dionisio's gaze is conspicuous, as evidenced by the fact that Belicia notices him noticing her. The act of looking is, therefore, a visible performance of power. Dionisio asserts that he occupies a position of social authority that enables him to freely and unapologetically exercise his sexualized gaze. Through his conspicuous presence, dandified body and assertive gaze, Dionisio effectively performs and produces social legitimacy.

For Dionisio, the dandy aesthetic is not merely a superficial performance, but a ritual through which he manages encounters with violence. Díaz explains that Dionisio "survived any number of gank-attempts [attempted gang killings], and after each shoot-out, after each drive-by, he always combed his hair and straightened his tie, a dandy's reflex" (122). Walter Benjamin's comments on dandy culture are particularly pertinent to this passage. He argues that dandyism first appeared among stockbrokers in eighteenth century London who were expected, in their professional capacity, to respond to the market's drastic fluctuations with a display of detached composure (96). In short, Benjamin understands dandyism as a strategy through which professional individuals managed the volatility of modern industrial life. Dionisio engages in a similar ritual: he negotiates volatile encounters – albeit with violence, rather than financial loss – through a performance of self-control. Dandyism must be understood, therefore, as a strategy that affirms Dionisio's competence as a government assassin and enables him to participate assertively in an economy of violence. Moreover, as with Pico in *The Farming of Bones*, dandyism constitutes a mode through which individuals who engage professionally in acts of violence nevertheless present a façade of serenity and self-control.

Both presidential seduction and male dandyism constitute performances that enable the dictator, or his surrogates, to establish social legitimacy. Moreover, neither of these gendered

performances can be understood in isolation from the violence that characterizes the Trujillo regime. In the chapter on Abelard Cabral, Díaz depicts the ways in which the president's performances of seductiveness combined with physical violence to antagonize the doctor and to undermine Abelard's claims to patriarchal masculine status. Moreover, in the chapter on Dionisio, Díaz positions dandyism as a performance through which one of Trujillo's agents derives prestige and effectively negotiates encounters with violence. Seduction, sexual virility, dandyism and violence are shown to be complimentary components within a single conception of dominant masculinity.

Alternative Masculinity as Symbolic Resistance

In the first line of the novel's first chapter, Yunior introduces Oscar: "Our hero was not one of those Dominican cats everybody's always going on about – he wasn't no home-run hitter or a fly bachatero [musician], not a playboy with a million hots on his jock" (11). Yunior depicts his principal character primarily in negative terms, that is, he enumerates a list of impressive archetypes that do not apply to Oscar. It is important, however, to notice the one positive characterization within this passage, which stands out precisely because it resists the syntactical negativity of the sentence itself. Significantly, Oscar is still a "hero" despite (or perhaps because) of the various attributes that he does not possess. How is that Yunior, a weightlifting, womanizing, vaguely misogynist football player comes to understand Oscar's geekiness in heroic terms? In order to answer this question, one must juxtapose the figure of Oscar with the discourses of masculinity that predominate within Yunior's account of Trujillo era life and culture. In short, I argue that through the process of researching and writing the historical sections of his narrative, Yunior becomes sensitized to the ways in which cultural performances

of masculinity are complicit in the machination of state power and violence. The overweight, geeky character of Oscar Wao is a hero precisely because he stands in opposition to a vision of seductive, dandified and violent masculinity that features in Yunior's literary reconstruction of the Trujillo era.

One can measure the extent to which Yunior's consciousness is affected by his historical subject matter by analyzing his changing relationship to the figure of Oscar. Certain critics have expressed uncertainty regarding Oscar's status within the novel. Oscar is not only an unimpressive character (at least in terms of traditionally heroic masculine ideals), he is also something of a vaguely defined protagonist, in part because the narrator provides such limited access to his subjectivity. As William Deresiewicz observes, "Oscar remains something of a blank, perhaps deliberately: not only relatively underdeveloped…but also unknowable" (41). In a more cynical assessment of Oscar's character, Roberto Ontiveros asserts that Oscar represents a figure of lamentable passivity, and that he is more of a structuring device through which Yunior creates his story, than he is a figure who exercises agency within the narrative. "Oscar reads and watches and eats" Ontiveros says. "His fatness can take no expression" (14). Deresiewicz and Ontiveros do not take account of the ways in which Yunior imbues Oscar's passivity with associations of resistance.

Passive resistant figures play a prominent role in the American literary tradition. Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle stands as the most significant embodiment of heroic laziness in the American canon. According to Tom Lutz, Irving's story must be understood as a rebuttal to the literary and cultural legacy of Benjamin Franklin (100). Franklin is associated with industriousness, productivity and the active struggle for American revolutionary independence, while Rip forthrightly rejects profitable labour and sleeps through the events of the American

Revolution. Theorists have advanced somewhat similar readings of Herman Melville's "Bartleby." For instance, Michael Rogin argues that the character Bartleby, through his obstinate refusal to complete the monotonous work for which he has been hired, comes to embody Thoreauvian notions of passive resistance (195). Neither Rip nor Bartleby are consciously ideological. While neither of them articulate a theory of resistant subjectivity, they nevertheless situate themselves if not against, then at least outside of, the dominant culture. Oscar might be understood as a literary descendent of Rip and Bartleby, since he passively disengages from various social discourses that are critiqued within Díaz's text.

In order to fully understand Oscar's heroic status, one has to position him as a foil for the various incarnations of Trujillo era masculinity with which the novel is preoccupied. Dionisio and the dictator himself derive social prestige both through violent actions and seductive performances. Oscar, on the other hand, is neither violent nor seductive, and is therefore unable to produce social legitimacy among men and women. Oscar lacks "all aggressive and martial tendencies" and therefore cannot impose his will on others through physical intimidation (15). However, as Díaz explains, Oscar is incapable of attaining social status through any other means:

> [Oscar] couldn't have pulled a girl if his life depended on it. Couldn't play sports for shit, or dominoes, was beyond uncoordinated, threw a ball like a girl. Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle, no rap, no G. And most damning of all: no looks (20).

The above passage is preoccupied with Oscar's lack of power. Oscar cannot 'properly' put a ball into motion, cannot coax music out of an instrument and cannot court the desire of his female peers. In short, he possesses a body that fails to act effectively on other bodies. Oscar's physical appearance is positioned as yet one more disempowering attribute. His homeliness renders him

as powerless in the realm of seduction as his lack of physical coordination or business-sense renders him ineffective at sports or commerce. In short, Oscar possesses an 'undesirable' body and therefore occupies a subordinate place within his social milieu.

Oscar's position as hero is nevertheless cemented in the book's final chapter. Here, Oscar falls in love with a prostitute named Ybon during a summer trip to the Dominican Republic and provokes the anger of her jealous police officer husband. In the final showdown, Oscar is confronted by two of the police officer's subordinates who drive him out to a remote sugar cane field and murder him. Moments before the fatal attack, Oscar turns to confront his assailants: "He told them that what they were doing was wrong, that they were going to take a great love out of the world. Love was a rare thing, easily confused with a million other things, and if anybody knew this to be true it was him" (321). Given that the only people present at this moment are Oscar and his attackers, one wonders how Yunior accesses the content of this final monologue. One has no choice but to assume that Yunior takes extensive creative liberties when reconstructing this encounter. Although the scene may provide faulty information about Oscar, it reveals a great deal about the protagonist's symbolic importance within the narrator's consciousness. In Yunior's imagination, Oscar uses his final words to defend a somewhat sentimental conception of love: he speaks of a love which is pure, inasmuch as it cannot be conflated with "a million other things." One can surmise, therefore, that Oscar presents a vision of love that is uncorrupted by power and politics. It is of interest that this idealistic conception of love stands in opposition to the forces of institutional law and order. This juxtaposition demonstrates the extent to which Yunior understands Oscar's ideals to be wholly separate from official power.

The novel ends with a depiction of Yunior, now approaching middle age, who contemplates Oscar's symbolic impact on his own consciousness:

> Years and years now and I still think about him. The incredible Oscar Wao. I have dreams where he sits on the edge of my bed. We're back at Rutgers…which is where we'll always be, it seems. In this particular dream he's never thin like at the end, always huge. He wants to talk to me, is anxious to jaw, but most of the time I can never say a word and neither can he. So we just sit there quietly (325).

The specific image of Oscar that comes to predominate in Yunior's psyche is characterized both by passivity and obesity. Oscar's silence might be taken as emblematic of his predominantly symbolic position within Yunior's narrative. The image of Oscar as a silent, endomorphic presence might indicate the extent to which he is a blank slate upon which Yunior inscribes an image of heroism. However, the fact that Yunior's nostalgic memories of Oscar emphasize the latter's obesity and passivity might also indicate the extent to which these attributes are valued as an alternative to an image of active, seductive masculinity. Oscar does not derive social legitimacy through performances of seduction or acquisition, nor does he act as a willing participant in the relationship of dominance and subordination that are shown to characterize Trujillo era masculinity throughout the novel. It is precisely because Oscar stands outside of this symbolic order that he comes to occupy the position of hero within Yunior's imagination. By the novel's end, Oscar becomes the site of Yunior's veneration. This transformation in Yunior's perception demonstrates that he has been sensitized by the content of his historical narrative.

Conclusion

Although *Butterflies* and *The Farming of Bones* contain notable experimental flourishes – for instance, the brief interventions of the author-surrogate in the former, and the presence of highly subjective, spectral memory passages in the latter – neither text is as overtly self-conscious as *Oscar Wao*. The novel contains a conspicuous narrator whose historical knowledge is predicated on acts of interpretive engagement with textual artifacts. The text therefore emphasizes, in accordance with Hutcheon's perception of historiographic metafiction, that historical narratives are mediated by the individuals who recount them. Díaz also demonstrates, however, that historical material in turn impacts the narrator's consciousness. Yunior's encounters with history changes his perceptions of ideal masculinity. Moreover, these changes are registered through his evolving relationship with Oscar. In the historical sections of his narrative, Yunior shows that conceptions of seductive and dandified masculinity enable the dictator and his "surrogates" to produce social legitimacy. Oscar, through his lack of violent and seductive capability, is shown to stand outside of this symbolic order. Since Oscar does not live during the Trujillo era, his resistant disposition serves a symbolic function within the narrative. Nevertheless, by positioning Oscar, at least by the novel's end, as a venerable protagonist, Díaz makes space for alternative literary depictions of male subjectivity that oppose idealized notions of domineering, seductive machismo.

Alvarez, Danticat and Díaz are all concerned with the performative dimensions of Trujilllo era culture. Both *Butterflies* and *Oscar Wao* attend to Trujillo's sexual relations with the daughters of various prominent Dominican citizens. Alvarez focuses on the ways in which Trujillo victimizes young women by positioning them as compliant subjects of his sexually exploitative, patriarchal regime. Díaz shows that the dictator's seductive endeavours also

impacted male subjectivity. Through demonstrations of seductive intent, Díaz's dictator consolidates social capital while simultaneously denigrating his opponents' claims to masculine legitimacy. Neither Alvarez nor Díaz, however, position the dictator's sexual excesses as the product of mere rapaciousness or greed; rather, both authors show that these acts constitute performances that produce and reinforce dominant power structures within a highly political context.

Both Danticat and Díaz attend to the theme of sartorial elegance within Trujillo era culture. Danticat focuses on a particularly militaristic incarnation of the dandy archetype in the figure of Pico. The latter's dandy posturing reinforces popular, dichotomous conceptions of the ordered Dominican body, versus the abject, uncontainable body of the Haitian other. In *Oscar Wao*, Díaz's dandified playboy, Dionisio, produces social legitimacy by making himself a conspicuous symbol of opulence and seductiveness relative to the less privileged patrons at the El Hollywood nightclub. There is a dialectical component to both Pico and Dionisio's dandified self-presentation: both characters derive power by positioning themselves favourably in relation to other marginalized or impoverished characters. Moreover, both figures use performances of dandified self-restraint to distance their public image from the violence of their professional endeavours. In short, dandyism, for both Danticat and Díaz, constitutes performative methods through which members of Trujillo's inner circle cement existing power relations while simultaneously managing encounters with violence.

Oscar Wao also differs from *Butterflies* and *The Farming of Bones* insomuch as it situates its main character outside of the historical context to which it attends. Alvarez's and Danticat's narrators develop resistant subjectivities while living in the midst of Trujillo era turmoil. Yunior, however, approaches the Trujillo regime from the distanced vantage point of the

historian. I argue, however, that the three texts are more similar in their approaches to historical material than they initially seem to be. All three novels work to deconstruct the dominant discourses of the Trujillo era, particularly those that concern the relations between individuals and their bodies. Moreover, all of the texts respond to these discourses by locating alternative social understandings within their characters, thereby positioning these individuals as emblems of resistant subjectivity. Each of the protagonists are, of course, created by an author in accordance with an ethical agenda. *Butterflies*, *The Farming of Bones* and *Oscar Wao*, therefore, stand as literary re-creations in which the writers intervene by projecting certain venerable traits onto their subjects. Díaz's novel, however, is more self-conscious about this process than the other two texts. *Oscar Wao* is therefore instructive insomuch as it draws readers' attention to certain processes that are also subtly apparent in Alvarez's and Danticat's works. Díaz offers an assertion that is central to my understanding of all three novels discussed in this project: that the process of historical recovery enables narrators to formulate new and productive models of resistant subjectivity.

Coda: (Re-)Conceptualizing Resistance

In the introduction to his influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin outlines his theoretical objectives: "The following concepts, here introduced into art theory for the first time, differ from the more familiar ones in that they are quite useless for the purposes of fascism" (229). One can detect an analogous aim in Alvarez's, Danticat's and Díaz's novels: each text locates and valorizes new ways of relating to the racialized or gendered body, all of which are incompatible with Trujillo era totalitarianism. Although only Alvarez's text depicts organized, overtly dissident endeavours, each of the novels locates seemingly banal acts that stand in opposition to the dominant totalitarian discourses. Moreover, these practices – Minerva's domestic rebelliousness, Patria's prayer ceremonies, Mate's physical intimacy with a female prisoner, Amabelle's spectral recollections of Sebastien and, finally, Yunior's efforts to reconstitute Oscar's story in heroic terms – work to ascribe new meaning to various social codes relating to the body and to the ways in which it is understood.

Alvarez, Danticat and Díaz all depict their subjects engaging in acts of cultural re-signification. In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes argues that there is no inherent connection between a given symbol and its ideological referent; rather, he claims that this link is socially produced (110). Barthes's assertion that signifying referents are never fixed has important implications for contemporary theories of resistance: if signifiers are always unstable, then no powerful institution can exercise complete authority over the meaning of any cultural sign. As the forces of official power seek to create connections between signifiers and signifieds in accordance with an ideological agenda, those who oppose power can reorient dominant signifiers in a manner that enables resistant articulations. In *Butterflies*, the agents of official power attempt to position the bourgeois female body as a symbol of compliant subjectivity. This discourse

interpellates women as affective subjects who experience their fidelity to the regime with a measure of supra-rational, felt immediacy. The Mirabal sisters re-inscribe feminized notions of affectivity by locating revolutionary potential in the realm of emotion. The affective body, therefore, becomes a sign of political dissidence. Similarly, in *The Farming of Bones*, the state and the army attempt to position Haitian bodies as signifiers of essential otherness and abjection. Amabelle, through her spectral recollections of Sebastien, re-imagines the racialized body so that it comes to connote transnationality and sensual connectivity. She thereby valorizes those very bodily attributes that the agents of official power attempt to denigrate. Finally, in *Oscar Wao*, the Trujillo regime acquires cultural capital through performances of domineering, seductive masculinity, while degrading its opponents' claims to masculine legitimacy. Yunior responds, however, by valorizing bodily characteristics that stand outside of Trujillo era conceptions of ideal masculinity. By the end of Yunior's narrative, Oscar Wao's alleged homeliness, as well as his lack of violent capability and seductive prowess, renders him a symbol not of lamentable passivity, but of commendable passive resistance to various oppressive notions of domineering masculinity. In short, all three novels work to re-signify the gendered or racialized body such that it stands outside of, and in opposition to, the machinations of dictatorial power.

Oscar Wao differs from the other two works insomuch as it responds to Trujillo era culture while simultaneously highlighting the processes through which that response is formulated. By invoking an extremely conspicuous narrative voice, Díaz demonstrates that the very act of historical narration induces new ideological understandings within the storyteller's consciousness. In short, his text draws attention to the way in which historical material impacts the individual who recounts it, thereby prompting him/her to formulate a response to the events in question. This assertion is central to my argument. My readings of Alvarez's, Danticat's and

Díaz's works show that the texts are not merely reportorial, but also responsive: they expose certain troubling totalitarian dynamics and also suggest alternatives to them. In doing so, the novels register critical engagement with the contextual material to which they attend.

All three authors formulate resistant articulations by capitalizing on the interpretive freedom that the historical fiction genre affords. In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau considers the processes of textual mediation through which lived experiences are converted into narrative form:

> [Historians] 'work' on materials in order to transform them into history. Here they undertake a practice of manipulation which, like others, is subject to rules. A comparable manipulation would be the manufacturing of goods made of already refined matter. First transforming the raw materials (a primary source) into a standard product (secondary source), the work of the historian carries it from one region of culture ('curiosities', archives, collections, etc.) to another (history) (71).

In short, historical narratives are second-order representations insomuch as they are rooted not in reality but in previous textual artifacts. The three novels discussed here occupy a third remove from historical experience, since they are largely based in secondary research[18]. Moreover, as works of fiction, the texts exercise a type of ideological freedom that is not available to the producers of non-fictional historical narratives. The process of scholarly historical production certainly enables a degree of interpretative work. Hayden White argues that, when crafting their narratives, professional historians "emplot" the chaotic mess of events, which constitutes history in its raw or unmediated state, into a consumable textual entity (83). For White, the process of

[18] All of the authors mention their secondary sources in the acknowledgement sections of their respective novels.

selecting certain facts, discarding others and drawing connections between seemingly disparate occurrences (i.e. "configuring events") constitutes an interpretative endeavour in and of itself (84). Historians are nevertheless limited by considerations of factual accuracy. Simply put, one expects scholars to only make claims that can be substantiated with evidence, to refrain from fabricating characters or anecdotes and to avoid imputing fictitious motivations for the actions that their subjects take. The transition from secondary narrative material to historical fiction, however, opens up a further degree of interpretative possibilities, precisely because authors are permitted to invent characters and to creatively imbue those characters with psychological motivations. By locating resistant articulations in the conscious thoughts of their fictional (or fictionalized) subjects, Alvarez, Danticat and Díaz intervene into the historical discourses to which their novels attend. The novels can be understood, therefore, as interpretative entities not merely because they feature imagined people and events, but because they locate creative, resistant articulations within their characters' subjectivities.

My analysis of the novels in question is broadly Foucauldian insomuch as it locates power not merely in governing bodies but in the discursive relations that both enable, and are enabled by, the agents of official culture. My study departs, however, from Foucault's work partly because it attends not only to the workings of authority but also to the processes through which authority can be resisted. There is a deterministic undercurrent to Foucault's writing: it situates power as omnipresent, discursive and, by extension, impossible to avoid. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau provides a valuable corrective to Foucault by suggesting that, if power itself is discursive, resistance must also operate within the realm of discourse. De Certeau criticizes Foucault for focusing on the ways in which discursive power is produced, but not the

myriad, creative and frequently resistant modes through which it is consumed (xiv). In de Certeau's words:

> To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous, and spectacular production corresponds *another* production, called "consumption." The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly (xii-xiii).

It should be noted that de Certeau's notion of "consumption" implies a measure of voluntary engagement between the producers of culture and the individuals who consume it. While this metaphor may apply to free-market, democratic systems in which consumers have at least some freedom to choose between cultural products, ideas and ideologies, it is less appropriate to dictatorship societies, in which certain hegemonic cultural understandings are foisted upon the populace. I therefore propose the term *reception* instead of consumption, with the caveat that notions of receivership should not imply submissiveness or acceptance. Practices of subversive consumption (i.e. reception) operate, according to de Certeau, by subtly re-appropriating symbols of the dominant order for defiant ends. These activities can be frequently performed without fear of reprisal because they are illegible, to the state and its surveillance apparatuses, as acts of resistance. For instance, neither Patria's prayer sessions nor Amabelle's musings about Sebastian place the characters in a position of danger with respect to the regime. Just as Trujillo era discourse operates through subtle undercurrents and multiple channels that are difficult to detect, so too do the processes through which individuals counter this oppressive system.

When attending to representations of the Trujillo era in Alvarez's, Danticat's and Díaz's novels, one has to acknowledge the relationship between the regime's cultural interventions and its coercive practices. To contemplate Trujillo era discourse in isolation from discussions of

violence would be to ignore the close relationship between the two phenomena. When critiquing *In the Time of the Butterflies*, one cannot fully separate the discursive forces that attempt to position women as subservient, sexualized subjects of the dictator from the acts of presidential rape that prey upon this subjective disposition. Moreover, in *The Farming of Bones*, notions of alleged Haitian otherness and abjection do not exist independently of the violent endeavours through which Trujillo's forces attempt to reify these stereotypes. Finally, when reading *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, one should not consider displays of seductive prowess without also addressing the ways in which these acts collude with various aggressive performances of masculine agency to produce a single vision of dominant male subjectivity. In all three novels, cultural violence enables and reinforces physical violence. As mentioned before, each of the novels intervenes on the level culture; to do so, however, is to address violence at its discursive base.

It is partly through Alvarez's, Danticat's and Díaz's interventions into their historical subject matter that their writings gain potential relevance for readers whose life experiences are not immediately connected with the collective trauma of the trujillato. As recent studies by Peguero, Krohn-Hansen and Derby suggest, Trujillo gained his power, in large part, through the establishment of various hegemonic cultural discourses. The historical context of the mid-century Dominican Republic, therefore, lends itself to the dramatization of myriad struggles over cultural re-signification. Alvarez, Danticat and Díaz all demonstrate that the confrontation between official power and those who oppose it occurs, in part, through discursive battles over the symbolic import of gendered and racialized bodies. As texts that are firmly situated in a specific historical locale, the novels nevertheless work to expand contemporary understandings of resistance. By locating defiant potential in the realm of independent thought, everyday actions

and signifying practices, the works offer, for the reader's contemplation, new ideas about the multiple ways in which individuals can come to develop resistant subjectivities.

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