

The brief wondrous
life of oscar wao: a
fukú story to end the
curse of the domini...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Junot Díaz brings to light a piece of Dominican history that he sees as both relevant and problematic. Within the first few pages of the novel, the speaker identifies his story as a fukú story. Fukú americanus is a curse supposedly specific to the people of the Dominican Republic, which Díaz uses to shape the circumstances surrounding his novel. The novel works to identify the true nature of fukú and transform it into something concrete rather than an ambiguous curse. In doing this, Díaz also attempts to identify the zafa or solution to counteract this ancient curse. With his portrayal of Beli and an allusion to the work of W. B. Yeats, Díaz reveals the true nature of fukú and the zafa needed to overcome this seemingly unconquerable force that appears to destroy the characters in the novel.

Díaz deems the tragedy of his story to be the product of fukú, which he reveals as the misfortunes in the history of the Dominican Republic that have affected the Dominican people. The novel identifies fukú as “ a curse or a doom of some kind” (*Oscar Wao* 1). The origin of this “ curse” has roots in the European colonization of the Dominican Republic and Díaz traces it through Dominican history to the reign of Trujillo, whom he considers to be the ultimate source of fukú. With its historical roots, the fukú is simply the sum of the effects of history on the Dominican people. When asked about his mention of fukú in an interview, Díaz replied, “ For me, though, the real issue in the book is not whether or not one can vanquish the fukú—but whether or not one can even see it...to be a true witness to who we are as a people and to what has happened to us” (“ Junot Díaz”). Rather than seeing the curse for what is, people view it as an inescapable curse that has predestined their

lives as seen in Yunior's description of Oscar's predicament: " He didn't want this future but he couldn't see how it could be avoided, couldn't figure his way out of it" (Oscar Wao 268). The book also addresses this type of Dominican denial by describing it as " common throughout the Islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucination" (Oscar Wao 259). This denial is the true tragedy of fukú because without acknowledgement, there can be no resolution.

Beli embodies the effect Trujillo's rule, Díaz's agent of fukú, had on individual Dominicans. When describing Beli's predicament or problem, Yunior claims, " If you want to cast her restlessness in a broader light; She was suffering the same suffocation that was asphyxiating a whole generation of young Dominicans" (Oscar Wao 80-81). Beli is described as always wanting something more, a common attitude among people trying to counter the effects of a suffocating dictatorship. This attitude caused trouble for Beli, which people attributed to fukú. After she is beaten and left for dead, it is said that her anger saved her: "...so did our Beli resolve out of her anger her own survival" (Oscar Wao 148). This was the moment she overcame the fukú or the effects of history. She refused to be a victim of fukú, a victim of her circumstances.

With an allusion to W. B. Yeats' " Easter, 1916," Díaz cements Beli's transformation, which comments on how to deal with fukú or tragedies of the past. When La Inca tells Beli that she must leave the country to escape further harm, Beli laughs, to which La Inca replies, " Don't laugh, mi negrita, for your world is about to be changed. Utterly. Yes: a terrible beauty is etc., etc." (Oscar Wao 160). This line alludes to Yeats' poem " Easter, 1916," more <https://assignbuster.com/the-brief-wondrous-life-of-oscar-wao-a-fuk-story-to-end-the-curse-of-the-dominican-people/>

specifically the repeated mantra in the poem: " All changed, changed utterly: / A terrible beauty is born" (Yeats 15-16). Yeats' poem refers to the Irish nationalists, whom he portrays as martyrs for their country. They died protesting the wrongs against their country. Out of the horrific results of their rebellion, Yeats claims they were transformed into something beautiful. Similarly, Beli suffers the results of the tragedies of her country's past (the fukú) and refuses to be defined or defeated by them. Because of such an experience, La Inca tells her a terrible beauty is emerging in her, a beauty that can only be fashioned from tragedy, a beauty that a whole nation can both admire and aspire to.

Paired with Beli's transformation as an example of overcoming fukú, Yunió's narrative serves as both a fukú story and a zafa or a counterspell that brings the true problem to light. As Beli boards the plane to leave, two things occur: she resolves to be a better person and La Inca tells her to not forget who she is. These two occurrences symbolize acknowledging the past and having a mind for a better future, which Díaz illustrates as the key elements of overcoming fukú or overcoming one's circumstances. While the entire story is about the effects of fukú or the effects of historical Dominican tragedies, it shows the true fukú problem and how to overcome it. First, one must be able to see and acknowledge past tragedies, both historical and personal, and accept them and their effects. Second, one must not let such tragedies dictate his or her future. The future is something left to be decided, not something governed by an ancient curse. The outlining of this process is what makes Díaz's novel a zafa. Fukú is not a mythical force. It is the sum of both historical and personal tragedies and manifests in the personal effects

of those tragedies. This encapsulates Díaz's message, which is that one's history is to be remembered and accepted as one moves on to make a better life. In conveying this message, Díaz emits the ultimate zafa, a zafa to eliminate all fukú: a fukú story that illustrates how to overcome the Dominican curse.

Works Cited

Díaz, Junot. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Riverhead Books, 2007.

"Junot Díaz." Interview by Edwidge Danticat. *BOMB: The Author Interviews*, Soho Press, 2017.

Yeats, W. B. "Easter, 1916." 1916. *The Twentieth Century and After*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, 9th ed., W. W. Norton, 2012, pp. 2093-95.