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## **The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao**

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao is a fictional novel by Junot Diaz. The book chronicles the lives of its main characters in two contexts, New Jersey in America and the Dominican Republic. The main character in the book is Oscar Wao, an obese boy growing up in New Jersey who is obsessed with fantasy and science fiction books as well as falling in love. Oscar is also obsessed with a curse he believes has plagued his family for many years. The book also features a host of other characters with one of them being Yunior who is Oscar's friend and roommate in college and also the narrator of the most of the story. Other characters include Oscar's sister, Lola, his mother Beli and his grandfather Abelard. One standout feature is regard to the characters in the novel is that most of them have split personalities. The characters have multiple personalities because they are experiencing confusion of identity due to the fact that they share ties between the Dominican Republic and the United States. After being forced to immigrate out of their country, the characters find themselves traumatized by the divergent culture and customs that they encounter in the United States and are therefore forced to adopt multiple personalities as a way of adapting and fitting in with this culture.

First of all, it emerges that Oscar has multiple personalities and seems undecided on what he wants in life. He is depicted a “ghetto nerd” who is obsessed with comic books and fantasy tales and books. He also exhibits great interest in role playing games. This is in contrast to the expectation in the society that being from a Latina background he will be a hit with the girls. Oscar perhaps realizes this, and this is the reason that he decides to

date two girls at the same time at the age of 7. He creates a new personality where instead of sticking with his obsession with comics and true love, he lusts after two girls to fulfil or meet the society's expectation of being a "ladies man". This means that he is expected to be a hit with girls, that is, he is supposed to attract a lot of girls. He does this for some time but, later on, he chooses one. Unfortunately, this does not ultimately work for him as he loses both girls. Oscar multiple identity is a means of him trying to fit in with the society and meet society's expectations. Most of the people who place expectations on him are Americans and do not take into consideration that he is of Dominican background and he is therefore not fully acclimatized to the US culture as his peers are. These include his friends who are Americans who somehow seem oblivious of the fact that there is not a first generation American but that he has Dominican background. He tries to create multiple identities in order to appease those around him. However, everyone including his peers and his family tries to change him. For example, he is constantly encouraged to change his attitude, eat better, perform more exercise and even think better of himself. Because of this, he is forced to create multiple personalities on all these people who place expectations on him. This much pressure is bound to affect Oscar.

Oscar's obsession with fantasy tales and books and role-playing make him an outcast. It is uncommon to image a Dominican kid who is obsessed with comics and fantasy books because it is a trait that is normally associated with normal and mostly Caucasian kids. However, he becomes obsessed with these things and this only leads to further alienation. Yuniors writes " Dude wore his nerdiness like a Jedi wore

his light saber or a Lensman her lens. Couldn't have passed for normal if he'd wanted to" (Diaz, 21). This shows the extent to which Oscar was different from his peers and even his family members.

Oscar's sister also adopts multiple personalities or identities as she also attempts to become fully acclimatized to the American way of life. This is depicted by various experiences in her life. Lola is rebellious in nature, and this causes her to have a violent relationship with her mother. On one hand, Lola tries to stick to her Dominican roots but she also wants to experience the full American lifestyle and this partly contributes to her split personality. This also causes the huge conflicts between her and her mother. It gets so bad that she eventually runs away. Her mother is a stickler to the olden Dominican norms while Lola is second generation American. Her constant struggle between her Dominican influenced personality, and her new American personality causes a huge conflict not only within herself but also with her mother who she has constant and abusive fights with. For example, when she cuts her hair because she wants to be Goth, her mother is devastated and tries to make her wear a wig and screams at her " you're going to wear it every day. And if I see you without it on I'm going to kill you!" (Diaz, 59). The ultimate result is Lola being sent back to the Dominican Republic to live with an aunt. This action is designed to allow her to reconnect with Dominican roots and therefore perhaps eliminate her split personality conflict. By sending her back home, her mother perhaps to refresh her understanding of the Dominican culture. This will make her realize that this her parent culture and should be the one that takes precedence over other cultures that might come her way

The principal narrator of the novel *Junior* also exhibits a split personality also because of the clash between his Dominican roots and his American orientation. On one side, Yuniors comes across as the perfect ladies' man. As a Dominican, this is no surprise as people of this heritage were considered to be very appealing to the ladies. He presents himself as an almost perfect American lover and in fact; he tries to impose this identity on Oscar. This means that he tries to depict as a person who deeply cares about his partner and who is faithful to this one partner. He also goes to extreme levels to hide the fact that he is also a nerd. Yuniors also has another deep secret personality. He is a habitual cheater and comes across as being incapable of appreciating even the most loving and beautiful women who come into his life. This perhaps reveals his orientation towards the Dominican definition of masculinity. The Dominican definition of masculinity is perhaps revealed through the actions of the dictator Trujillo, a notorious womanizer who sleeps with almost every beautiful girl in the land. Yuniors in his narration writes that Trujillo was known for his desire and lust for sex even going as far as having "hundreds of spies whose entire job was to scour the provinces for his next piece of ass" (Diaz, 217) Yuniors's second identity can, therefore, be attributed to his Dominican background where men treat women as pure sexual objects to be used and then disposed. Here, there is a deep contrast between the Dominican identity and the American identity. While an American identity demands treating women with respect and being faithful when in a relation, the Dominican identity in contrast demands no respect for women and women are treated as mere objects and tools.

The major characters in Junot Diaz's 'The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao'

all exhibit multiple identities. The need to create this façade emanates from the characters' attempts to adapt and fit in with a divergent American culture that is significantly different from their own Dominican background. Oscar and his sister try to assimilate to the new American culture, but this does not ultimately end well. On the other hand, Yuniour appears to have assimilated to this culture but his true personality emerges when he is revealed to be a womanizer just like the dictator Trujillo is. In simple terms, all the split personalities in the characters lead to huge internal conflicts not only within themselves but also with those around them including friends and family members.