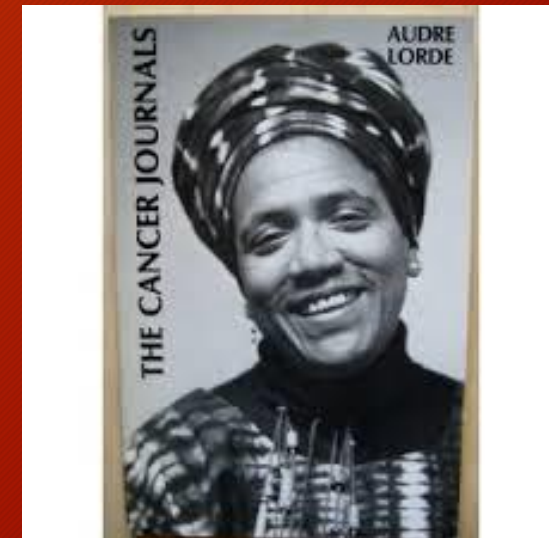


Cancer in the Caribbean Literary Tradition

Professor Donette Francis,
University of Miami

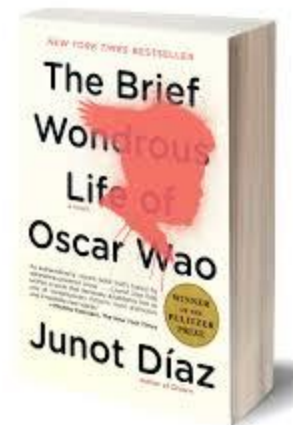
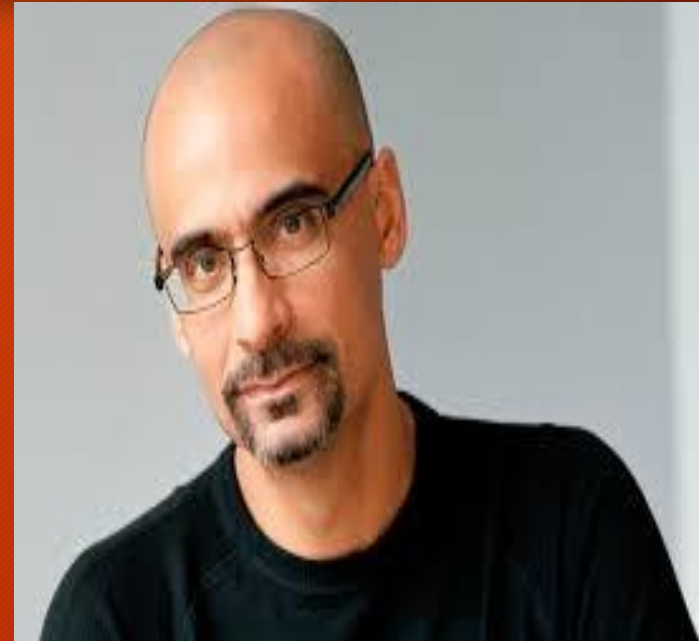
Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals*, 1980

- Born 1934
- Parents from Barbados & Carriacou
- BA, Hunter College, 1959
- MA, Library Science, Columbia 1961
- Diagnosed at 45
- Publishes journal 1980
- Died in 1992
- 58 years old



Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 2007

- Dominican American Writer
- Winner, Pulitzer Prize 2008
- Professor of Creative Writing,
• MIT (Mass. Institute of Technology)
- BA, Rutgers University, 1992
- MFA, Cornell University, 1995



Elizabeth Nunez, Anna Novels, 2009, 2011

- Trinidadian American Writer
- American Book Award, 2001, *Bruised Hibiscus*
- Distinguished Professor, Hunter College
- *Anna in Between*, 2009
- *Boundaries*, 2011
- PhD in English Literature, New York University



Edward Baugh, *It Was the Singing*, 2000

- Professor Emeritus, UWI, Mona, 1968-2001
- Born 1936 in Jamaica
- Produces founding Generation of Scholarship
- on West Indian Literary Criticism
- Poet
- PhD, University of Manchester, 1964



The Cancer Journals, 1980

- Each woman responds to the crisis that breast cancer brings to her life out of a whole pattern, which is the design of who she is and how her life has been lived. The weave of her every day existence is the training ground for how she handles crisis. ...I am a post-mastectomy woman who believes our feelings need voice in order to be recognized, respected and of use...Survival is only part of the task; the other part is teaching (7).

Oscar Wao

It's never the changes we want that change everything.

This is how it all starts: with your mother calling you into the bathroom.

You will remember what you were doing at that precise moment for the rest of your life.....She was standing in front of the medicine cabinet mirror, naked from the waist up, her bra slung about her waist like a torn sail, the scar on her back as vast and inconsolable as a sea. **Venaca**, she commanded. She is frowning at something on one of her breasts....she takes your right hand and guides you. Your mom is rough in all things but this time she is gentle. Do you feel that she asks in her too-familiar raspy voice? At first all you feel is the heat of her and the density of the tissue like a bread that never stopped rising. She kneads your fingers into her. You're as close as you've ever been and your breathing is what you hear. Do you feel that? She turns toward you. **Cono, muchacha** stop looking at me and feel. So you close your eyes and your fingers are pushing down and...then suddenly without warning you do feel something. A knot just beneath her skin, tight and secretive as a plot. And at that moment, for reasons you will never quite understand, you are overcome by the feeling, the premonition, that something in your life is about to change...I feel it, you say, too loudly. **Lo siento**. And like that, everything changes. Before the winter is out the doctors remove that breast you were kneading along with the axillary lymph node. Because of the operations she will have trouble lifting her arm over her head for the rest of her life. Her hair begins to fall out, and one day she pulls it all out herself and puts it inside a plastic bag. You change too. Not right away, but it happens. And it's in that bathroom where it all begins. Where you begin. (53-54)

Anna in Between

- I want to show you something. Unhook me her mother says....Anna remains where she is, a safe distance away from her mother. She does not move. In their household, they do not expose their bodies, not to each other. Husbands and wives may have to bare their naked bodies to each other, but not mothers and daughters. Here, I'll help you....Her mother removes her bra. She turns around. This is what I want you to see. Nothing has prepared Anna for what her mother wants to show her. Nothing has prepared her for the lump pushing out beneath the skin on her mother's left breast or for the thin trail of partially dried blood beneath it. Anna gasps. Instinctively, with no time to think, she throws her arms around her mother's neck and buries her head in the well of her shoulders. ...How long, she asks, How long have you had this? Her mother, calm now, lifts her arm. Under her arm is another large lump, her lymph nodes swollen, pushing against her skin. Oh Mummy! Anna clutches her neck and squeezes her skin to stop her head from shaking. I haven't told your father." I prayed every night for it to go away...Every morning at two o'clock I come here. I pray. I say the rosary. It's on my mind all the time. In the day, I am busy and I forget sometimes, but at night I am alone. You need a doctor, Ana says. Her mother shakes her head. I'll take you to the doctor. A doctor can't help me (47-49).

Words- Edward Baugh, *It Was the Singing*, 2000

- My mother loved words. Not necessarily
- in sentences or speeches. Just words.
- She read the dictionary like a bedside book.
- She taught me words while I watched her
- at the crossword puzzle, her relief
- from drudgery. And now this
- delectable, mouth-filling word
- I cannot teach her: *metastases*.
- ‘multiple metastases.’ The word
- glows a guilty secret through
- the large brown envelope lying on
- the back seat with the x-rays and
- the radiologist’s report. She sits
- rigid with pain, too proud to ask
- if there is any world of relief.
- In the silence between us
- you can hear the metastases multiply.

Caribbean Literary Critics Lost

- In memoriam



June Jordan, 1936-2002

- Born in Harlem of Jamaican Immigrant parents
- Graduate of Barnard College
- Poet of Numerous Collections
- Professor of African American Studies,
Berkeley 1988-2002
- Directed Poetry for the People Program
- Died in 2002
- Breast Cancer, Berkeley California
- 65 years old



Barbara Christian 1943-2000

- Born in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands
- PhD, Columbia University
- Professor of English, City College 1965-72
- UC, Berkeley 1972-2000
- Established African American Studies Department
- Died of Breast Cancer
- Berkeley, California, 2000
- 57 years old



Nellie McKay 1930-2006

- Born in Queens, NY of Jamaican immigrant parents
- PhD, Harvard, 1977
- Endowed Professor of English,
- American & African-American Literatures
- UW-Madison, 1977-2006
- Died of Colon Cancer in Wisconsin in 2006
- 76 years old



Take - Aways: Cancer in Caribbean Literary Tradition

- Cancer still shrouded in Secret and Stoicism
- Our Bodily Health is the most pressing silence to be broken