

**Scars of Trauma: Duality of Signification
in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* (2004)**

Eman Mostafa Ahmed Atta

Assistant Professor, Egyptian Institute
of Alexandria Academy of Management
and Accounting, Egypt.

Abstract

As sliding into the abyss of trauma is harrowing, the cathartic role of telling one's story becomes crucial. This paper studies *The Dew Breaker* (2004) by Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat exploring how a work of fiction can be testimony of trauma and how the notion of trauma can penetrate a narrative; form and content. It shows how scars of political torture narrate the trauma of Haitian people during and after the Duvalier regime. The paper reads *The Dew Breaker* as striking in countering the perspective towards trauma narratives as unilateral manifestations of pain, victimisation, silence and/or irredeemable

guilt. The novel is rich in workings of trauma that mainly take the form of dualities and, it is argued, these are dualities that interrelate to reconcile. Layers of trauma are presented in the form of binary patterns rather than binary oppositions. Suffering is not versus healing, alienation does not impede narration, and neither is the victim placed against the perpetrator. The aim of the paper is to expand trauma's conceptual framework by blurring the line between apparent dichotomies and formulates a new possibility of approaching a trauma narrative that can bear a sign of hope and transformation.

Keywords: trauma, Haiti, narration, healing, Edwidge Danticat.

Scars of Trauma: Duality of Signification in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* (2004)

Eman Mostafa Ahmed Atta

Edwidge Danticat (1969-) is a contemporary Haitian-American writer whose work has received wide critical acclaim and expanding readership. Her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) was an Oprah Book Club selection in 1998, her second novel *Krik? Krak!* (1996) was a National Book Award finalist and her third novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) was an American Book Award winner. She has created a portfolio of highly-regarded fiction and non-fiction works for which she received numerous honours including the National Book Critics Circle Award in 2007 and a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship in 2009. A most committed writer, Danticat evokes the heartache of Haiti in almost all her work. Perhaps, Sophie Caco, protagonist of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, echoes Danticat herself when she claims that "I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head" (234). Homeland has always been the writer's subject in diaspora.

The Dew Breaker (2004) highlights Danticat's engagement with the past of Haiti and her deep concern to tell its story. In the novel, the writer investigates Haiti's legacy of trauma. The term trauma is defined as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 3). However, the text shows that trauma of Haitian people has left scars running on both body and mind. As Kali

Tal puts it, "[l]iterature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it "real" both to the victim and to the community. Such writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author" (21). In writing her nation's trauma, Danticat validates Haitian people's right to suffer as well as to recover.

This paper studies Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* exploring how a work of fiction can be testimony of trauma and how the notion of trauma can penetrate a narrative; form and content. It shows how scars of political torture narrate the trauma of Haitian people during and after the oppressive Duvalier's regime (1957-1971). Almost all the characters in the novel immigrate from Haiti to America with traces of the past that appear on their very physical and psychological existence: "home often carries within it the visible signs of a history of trauma and violence that continues to follow the migrating subjects in the diaspora space of the elsewhere" (Pulitano 27). Trauma travels with people dragging, rather than leaving, behind memories that haunt the survivors and resist effacement. The theory's foundation rests on psychoanalyst Cathy Caruth's proposal that a traumatic event is not experienced fully when it occurs, but only belatedly, in a form of possession or haunting. As Caruth puts it, "for those who undergo trauma, it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it

that is traumatic; that survival itself, in other words, *can be a crisis*" (*Trauma* 9). Trauma dominates, sometimes terminates, people's life.

However, the paper reads *The Dew Breaker* as striking in countering the perspective towards trauma narratives as unilateral manifestations of pain, victimisation, silence and/or irredeemable guilt. The novel is rich in workings of trauma that mainly take the form of dualities and, it is argued, these are dualities that interrelate to reconcile. Layers of trauma are presented in the form of binary patterns rather than binary oppositions. Suffering is not versus healing, alienation does not impede narration, remembering is not in contrast with forgetting, and neither is the victim placed against the perpetrator. The aim of the paper is to expand trauma's conceptual framework by blurring the line between apparent dichotomies and formulate a new possibility of approaching a trauma narrative that can bear a sign of hope and transformation.

The novel opens in a diasporic community of Haitians living in America where the individual represents the collective and the political casts its black shadows on the personal. The setting is a shuttle journey in time and space between Haiti and America, past and present. The main character is the dew breaker; a torturer, a sadist, one of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier regime's despicable militiamen known as Tonton Macoutes. The novel shows that, in Haitian folklore, the Tonton Macoute is a mythic figure; "a bogeyman who abducted naughty children at night and put them in his knapsack" (216). Therefore, he is always a symbol of horror and brutality.

Describing Duvalier's macoutes, the novel reads: "[t]hey'd break into your house. Mostly it was at night. But often they'd also come before dawn, as the dew was settling on the leaves, and they'd take you away" (131). This is how Danticat's protagonist was in Haiti: "he liked to work on people he didn't know, people around whom he could create all sorts of evil tales" (187). But the writer re-introduces him to the reader in a new light; a loving husband, a kind father, and a barber. The reader meets a person whose life oscillates between a past of nefarious actions and a present of a true desire of atonement. Significantly, Danticat starts the novel with reference to the perpetrator incorporating his story in the traumatic experience and granting him a voice: "I didn't want to hurt anyone" (20).

The idea of duality functions very early in the novel with Danticat challenging the strictly established representation of a perpetrator as a one-sided all-evil character. In other words, the novel creatively maps the two halves of a perpetrator's life offering a re-vision of the fixed perspective towards an ex-agent of violence as an irredeemable person: "I'm free ... I finally escaped" (237). In *The Dew Breaker*, as Mary Gallagher puts it, "it is not simply ... a question of living with the memory of loss or trauma suffered ... but also of living with the tenacious and unambiguous memory of having (arbitrarily) inflicted trauma and loss on others" (154). Like his victims, the dew breaker is tortured by a past that occupies the present, nightmares of his heinous crimes, and horrible recollections that haunt his life. In her book *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth remarks that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's

past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature ... returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). Although Caruth's words are mainly aimed to describe the victim, the reader grasps that they can also apply to the (re)presented aggressor. Danticat shows trauma from the other side.

Interestingly, Danticat opens up a space for exploring trauma anew through a text that makes use of the technical features typical of trauma narratives. According to Anne Whitehead, "the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection" (3). In its very form, *The Dew Breaker* is a disjunctive work that is characterised by temporal and chronological collapse. The novel is divided into different yet interrelated chapters with the first and last ones fully dedicated to the dew breaker's story. At the beginning of the novel, the reader meets with the dew breaker in America years after the Duvalier regime and witnesses his sense of guilt and redemption. At the end of the novel, the reader meets with him again only to witness his last crime in Haiti and the start of his escape. As Gallagher affirms, "the fragmentation of the book's structure itself enacts the brokenness of the lives portrayed" (148). The novel's disruptive narrative structure, at once, departs from conventional linear progression and implies Danticat's unwillingness to marginalise the perpetrator or minimise his own account of trauma. In *The Dew Breaker*, form and content interweave to explore the concept of trauma in a new light.

The dew breaker's most prominent feature is "a ropelike scar that runs from [his] right cheek down to the corner of his mouth" (5). He has a facial scar that duplicates a psychological one. This is a scar that narrates his trauma and, at the same time, indicates his transformation. It is a visible reminder of the murder of his last victim "who left a mark on him, a brand that he would carry for the rest of his life. ... Whenever people asked what happened to his face, he would have to tell a lie, a lie that would further remind him of the truth" (227-28). It is only when he decides to tell "the truth" of his past that the scar starts to act as a sign of healing of a much rejected self. Such healing is confirmed by his full determination to confess to his daughter Ka that he is not the person she knows and loves: "[w]e have a proverb One day for the hunter, one day for the prey. Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey" (21). Uncovering his ugly face before his daughter, the dew breaker tries to purge his soul from past sins.

In this respect, Dauri Laub asserts, "[t]here is, in each survivor, an imperative need to tell and thus come to know one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life" (78). In the dew breaker's transformation, the act of telling challenges the shame of silence. In other words, silence and narration dramatically entwine and the scar that has been the unspeakable secret of his entire life turns to be the keyword of his narrative: "[t]his man who cut my face ... I shot and killed him, like I killed many people" (22). Perpetrators are able to "work through the past and not simply keep it encrypted or melancholically

interred within themselves" (LaCapra *History* 77). The father chooses to dump his daughter's statue in a lake, thus damaging the perfect image she has of him. It is a statue she has carved for him to honour his years of suffering in prison: "Ka, I don't deserve a statue ... not a whole one at least" (20). Confession clears a heart that is heavy with bloodshed.

Further, guilt and redemption are at play with the focus on the dew breaker's nightmares. Kai Erikson stresses the need for "daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations" (184) as important techniques in a trauma narrative. They dramatise the act of reliving the past traumatic event many times, asserting in the process Caruth's idea that "[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (*Trauma* 4-5). Describing her father, Ka clarifies that he has frontal dentures since he "landed on his face ... when he was having one of his ... nightmares" (4). When Ka asks him about "those nightmares" he always has, he makes it clear that they are "[o]f what I ... your father did to others" (23). Voicing out pain is not confined only to victims of trauma. Ultimately, the ex-macoute's nightmares reflect Dominick LaCapra's claim that "it is important for perpetrators ... to present and represent their suffering" (*History* 77). In the same vein, unearthing the past and the bitterness of confession echo LaCapra's argument that, for a perpetrator, "a genuine attempt is being made to work through the past and arrive at different forms of self-understanding and activity" (77). The dew breaker assures Ka that "[n]o matter what, I'm still your father I would never do those things now" (24).

According to trauma theorists, a perpetrator forfeits his right of

consideration. But Danticat does not deny the dew breaker his right in humanity even at his worst in Haiti: "[h]e had been constantly thinking about getting out of this life" (189). Paradoxically, while waiting for the preacher, his last victim, to come out of church, he gives a poor Haitian child some money thinking that "[t]here was a part of him that wished he could buy that child a future, buy all children like that a future. Perhaps not the future he would have himself ... but another kind of destiny" (194). Blurring the line between hunter and prey, the novel reads: "maybe his past offered more choices than being either a hunter or prey" (24). Danticat presents the perpetrator from a different perspective and, as Jo Collins puts it, "undercuts the possibility of unequivocally condemning him by suggesting that reprehensible actions do not wholly define identity" (131). In so doing, Danticat humanises the perpetrator.

The novel shows that the dew breaker himself, in his teenage, has been a victim of the macoutes who take away his father's land. As a result, the father goes mad and the mother suddenly disappears. Terror of loss forces him to join the regime's security force and terror of execution forces him to stay in position. Clearly, for Danticat, all Haitians are plagued by a history in which they have been pawns of irrational power. As Brinda Mehta puts it, "physical scars and psychological wounds inflicted on victims and perpetrators alike [act] as evidence of the state's immediate and invincible hold on its citizens" (70). Therefore, Danticat finds it more illuminating to explore the dew breaker's own trauma and the possibility of his transformation than to merely highlight the trauma he has inflicted on others.

Trauma expands in its ripple effect to include Ka as well as her mother, Anne. Remarkably, the idea of duality continues at play through both characters. For example, Ka has never tried to tell her father's story "in words" (6). As a wood-carver, she sculpts a statue to narrate or rather imagine the unknowable. Ka defies both his silence and her ignorance – of the past – through art which is, as Mehta puts it, "the sublimated language of the unconscious" (72). Remarkably, Danticat uses art to represent trauma. Ka believes this particular sculpture "my favorite of all my attempted representations of my father. It was the way I had imagined him in prison" (6). Interestingly, the piece of mahogany Ka uses to make the statue is naturally flawed with "cracks" which she finds beautiful "as they seemed like the wood's own scar, like the one my father has on his face" (7). In *The Dew Breaker*, scars are present in representing trauma both on the fictional and artistic levels.

Ultimately, the revelation of the secret of the father's scar shatters Ka's imagined construct of him as the innocent sufferer, thus losing her only source of inspiration: "I have lost my subject, the prisoner father I loved as well as pitied" (31). Reality seems to disrupt imagination. But Ka manages to gain a more illuminating sense of understanding. She gets to know why her father has never liked having his picture taken, why he has never returned to Haiti, and why, Ka thinks, "he has never wanted the person he was" (34). She cannot deny him the relief of sharing his trauma. Through the dew breaker's narrative, the daughter grasps the role she has to play: "[w]hen you born, I look at your face, I think, here is my ka, my good angel" (17). Ka gets to conceive the idea that a room for hope and change is still

possible for him but with the help of "no one except my mother and me, we, who are now his kas, his good angels, his masks against his own face" (34).

In the same vein, Anne, Ka's mother, is no exception in bearing her own scar of trauma that is mainly psychological. Her husband's last victim happens to be her brother, the man who cut the dew breaker's face. The scar again is a physical signifier of a past murder as well as a psychological split in her own sense of self. She lives with the shameful burden of being "the wife of a man like her husband" (81). Having to relate herself to a former *macoute*, she "was nurturing a great pain that she could never speak about" (22). Nevertheless, as "a devout Catholic," (81) Anne assumes a sense of responsibility for her husband's life being oriented towards both healing and redemption. Anne tells her daughter: "[y]ou and me, we save him. When I meet him. It made him stop hurt the people. This is how I see it. He a seed thrown in rock. You, me, we make him take root" (25). Anne tries to reconcile between her traumatised self, on the one hand, and her faith and duty, on the other hand through her deep belief in the "miracle of her husband's transformation" (73).

Duality of signification is at its best with the description of Anne's life as "always like this ... a pendulum between forgiveness and regret" (86). Brinda Mehta refers to the dew breaker's wife as a "figure whose duty lies in healing lives rather than destroying them" (78). To overcome her inner conflict, Anne decides to act as a savior rather than a judge. The novel reads, "she had been reciting to herself all these years, that atonement, reparation, was possible and available for everyone" (242). Anne perceives the dual

meaning of both scars; her husband's and her own.

It is clear therefore that trauma is not solely an experience of no return. There could always be that confrontation between suffering and recovery, stasis and change. Michela Borzaga affirms that "the repetition and re-living of traumatic experiences as well as the potential for overcoming trauma ... are not separate and set at the two ends of the spectrum but coexist and struggle with one another in complex and unexpected ways" (78). In this regard, neither the traumatic event itself nor its debilitating aftermath is to be the dominant approach in dealing with a trauma narrative. Some room for hope and healing is present and persistent. In *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat does not only highlight the two conditions that the concept of trauma can imply but also employs the hunter and prey binary model to intensify the duality of signification.

Along with the story of the dew breaker, the novel is teeming with stories of his victims. In between the two encounters with the dew breaker, there are different stories that are shaped by similar non-linear sequence as they give way to different plotlines, time lines and places. This is a form that ultimately transmits the perplexity of the traumatic experience. It also goes in line with Whitehead's further stress on "a narrative form which does not succumb to closure and coherence, but retains within itself traces of traumatic disruption and discontinuity" (142). Trauma manifests itself in both form and content.

The different stories that comprise the text also give way to a plurality of voices and perspectives. In *The Dew Breaker*, the reader listens not only to the victims but

also to the perpetrator, his wife and daughter. Referring to a trauma narrative, Alan Gibbs places special importance on "fragmented, non-linear chronologies" as well as "shifts in narrating voice" (27). These shifts, at once, highlight the fragmentation of the text and increase the depth of the traumatic experience. As Whitehead puts it, "[t]he narrative voice is dispersed or fragmented so that each of the protagonists takes up the story, adding to it his or her individual perspective" (88).

In the chapter entitled "Night Talkers," the reader meets with a young Haitian whose house in Haiti was set on fire by the dew breaker who also shot his parents dead. Dany's scar of trauma reflects itself in deep psychological suffering. He is heard speaking "his dreams aloud ... to the point of sometimes jolting himself awake with the sound of his own voice" (98). The victim is a night talker, one of those people, the novel reads, "who wet their beds, not with urine but with words" (98). Recalling trauma subconsciously in dreams is, for Caruth, "purely and inexplicably the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (*Trauma* 5). To free himself from the trap of such "return," Dany decides to kill the dew breaker. Being one of his tenants, Dany can recognise the man who has ruined his life.

Significantly, beside dreams, the use of flashbacks intensifies the act of re-experiencing trauma in Dany's story. For example, while the reader observes Dany sitting inside his aunt's house years after his parents' death, the novel simultaneously reads, "[o]utside, most of the wooden porch was already on fire ... he could barely see his parents, his mother slumped over his father on the ground" (105). Intrusion of the past into the present

is emphasised through flashbacks and dreams. Both technical devices are thus functional in showing how a past traumatic event impinges on a survivor's present. They also contribute to the intermittent structure of the text. Dany makes his way to the man's bedroom "hoping he would wake him up and startle him to death. ... Or maybe press a pillow down on his face. Or simply wake him up to ask him "Why?" (107). Ultimately, the idea of unknowing is part of a victim's trauma.

Danticat deftly depicts Dany's inner conflict in such a critical moment in his life. Throughout the text, Danticat is mindful of what Dominick LaCapra calls a process of healing by negotiating the future. As LaCapra states, "one is able to distinguish between past and present and recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realising that one is living here and now with openings to the future" (*Writing* 21-22). Danticat proves true LaCapra's argument through the character of Dany. Looking down at the macoute's face, the novel reads, "he lost his desire to kill" (107). Perhaps, Dany can observe in the scar on the man's face a sign of healing. Perhaps, he cannot see in himself a tool of further bloodshed. Tolerance interweaves with hatred and the duality of Dany's feelings helps him to make his choice. The victim chooses to stop recoiling in fragmentation and undertakes instead a quest for wholeness not for death. Dany resists the temptation of killing instilled with: "the dread of being wrong, of harming the wrong man, of making the wrong woman a widow and the wrong child an orphan" (107). This is a sign of humanity that provides access to the future and reveals, as Brinda Mehta puts it, "the

complicated trajectories of the human struggle against adversity" (63).

Dany finds more relief in telling his aunt Estina, living in Haiti, about the dew breaker: "I found him in New York, the man who killed Papa and Manman and took your sight" (97). The beauty of place unite with the "beauty marks" (95) of the old woman's face to indicate that Dany's journey back to Haiti is a transformational step: "Estina Estème lived in a valley between lime-green mountains and a giant waterfall, which sprayed a fine mist over the banana grove that surrounded her one-room house" (93). Knowing the reason behind Dany's return, aunt Estina is "neither depressed nor irritated" (97). Though blind, the old woman can see in her own way. She sees nothing but evil in re-opening the family's wound and shows no interest in hearing of the family's torturer. The next day, aunt Estina dies in her sleep. In witnessing his aunt's death, the least desire of revenge subsides inside Dany: "[p]erhaps ... he could at last witness a peaceful death and see how it was meant to be mourned" (116). Dany gains the full range of life's possibilities rather than of life's ruin, thus achieving recovery.

Danticat highlights the story of another victim through the character of Beatrice, a seamstress who makes wedding dresses "since Haiti" (126). In the chapter entitled "The Bridal Seamstress," Beatrice is introduced to the reader through an interview she has with a journalism intern, Aline Cajuste. Though famous with a considerable circle of acquaintance, Beatrice decides to retire and "[m]ove, again" (131). Haunted by the phantom existence of her ex-torturer, she chooses to end both her social and practical life and conceal her new address: "[t]his man,

wherever I rent or buy a house in this city, I find him, living on my street" (132). Significantly, Caruth maintains that the response to a traumatic event is not to be found in the immediate aftermath of the event but, rather, "occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (*Unclaimed* 11). Aline assures the woman that the apartment she refers to as the dew breaker's is just an empty place. However, Beatrice is sure that the dew breaker is chasing her everywhere: "[t]hat's where he hides out these days, in empty houses. Otherwise he'd be in jail, paying for his crimes" (137). Beatrice's response comes in full agreement with Caruth's statement. Clearly, Beatrice is possessed by the overwhelming presence of traumatic memory.

The scars Beatrice has on her feet narrate her story and display a metaphor for a mind distorted by fear and pain. In an act of traumatic remembering, Beatrice tells Aline: "[h]e tied me to some type of rack in the prison and whipped the bottom of my feet until they bled. Then he made me walk home, barefoot. On tar roads. In the hot sun. At high noon" (132). Remarkably, the scars of violence on Beatrice's feet allude to the metaphor in the title of Beverly Bell's edited book *Walking on Fire*. The woman refuses to go out dancing with the dew breaker and, as a result, is subjected to physical torture that lives with her and inhabits her body. The trauma of Beatrice, as Caruth puts it, "brings one repeatedly to this peculiar paradox: that in trauma ... immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness" (*Trauma* 6). Scars of Beatrice's trauma relate the actual traumatic event in the past to a belated

form of existence in the present. Duality is striking, in this regard, as "immediacy" conflates with "belatedness" compressing the victim's whole life into one point of time. Ultimately, time is suspended in one tough moment that signifies both past and present. It seems that the kind of recovery Dany has achieved eludes Beatrice. The novel reads: "Aline had never imagined that people like Beatrice existed, men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every blank space in their lives" (137). Just as Danticat does not demonise the perpetrator, she does not idealise the victim.

Nevertheless, it could be said that Beatrice's new move might indicate a new attempt and a new start rather than a new escape. She decides to take action filled with the hope that "[t]he next time I move, he won't find out where I am" (137). If these words can be taken as a shred of hallucination, they can also be interpreted as a gleam of hope. In her new move, Beatrice is determined to pursue transformation. The victim aspires for healing; a life no more hindered by a ghost-like existence from the past. Ultimately, the idea of moving despite the scars carved on her feet indicates the possibility of such healing.

In "Water Child," Nadine, a nurse, is caught up in her own trauma which, though not directly connected to the dew breaker as a person, is still related to the whole expelling national context. She is a Haitian immigrant whose physical dislocation constitutes part of her trauma. Besides, the burden of having to be financially responsible for her parents in Haiti "always made her wish to be the one guarded, rather than the guardian" (63). However, like Dany, Nadine's scar of trauma is mainly psychological. It is

caused by the miscarriage of her baby and the inability to voice out her pain of losing a part of herself. Sometimes, she finds it difficult to call her parents thinking that "her voice might betray all that she could not say" (57). Separation from family in Haiti is intensified by an aborted dream of establishing her own family in America.

Traumatic loss inhabits Nadine and this is shown in a state of self-imposed silence: "the dread of being voiceless hitting her anew each day as though it had just happened" (66). Nadine stops all kinds of social communication: "the television was her way of bringing voices into her life that required neither reaction nor response" (56). The only one person she can identify herself with is Ms. Hinds, a patient who has her voice box removed. Silence therefore becomes an important theme in Nadine's life. Significantly, features of a trauma narrative include characters' inability to speak. Nadine's compulsion to keep silent attests to the limits of language in face of trauma. For Caruth, traumatic experience "must ... be spoken in a language that ... defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (*Unclaimed* 5). Through the character of Nadine, Danticat shows the disruptive influence of not sharing a traumatic experience on a victim's life.

Another important feature of a trauma narrative, shown through Nadine, is a character's splitting sense of self. As Ms. Hinds leaves hospital with her parents, Nadine finds herself alone "facing a distorted reflection of herself" (68) in the elevator's shiny metal doors. Her fragmented self is mirrored before her. At that particular moment, Nadine thinks of her parents, of her ex-lover, and her aborted child only to find all of them "belonging to the widened, unrecognizable

woman staring back at her from the closed elevator doors" (68). Perhaps, such lack of recognition awakens in Nadine the idea that yielding to trauma would leave nothing of her except the scar of her inner wound.

Writing a trauma fiction, Danticat seems to be in full agreement with Borzaga's critique that "the tale of trauma" is told as a backward-looking narrative and "hardly as growth, change or renewal" (88). In *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat demonstrates the ability to depict characters that can "heal suffering with a profound belief in the power and continuity of the spirit" (Meacham 137). Significantly, the character of Nadine, like Danticat's other characters, reveals the dual pattern of disconnection and re-connection, of fragmentation and wholeness, of loss and self-redemption. If narration fails her, she searches for another form of catharsis, thus initiating a process of healing. She thinks how to re-connect with her aborted child and therefore turns her bedroom into a shrine with an altar, a wooden frame, and some dried red roses: "[s]he had once read about a shrine to unborn children in Japan, where water was poured over altars of stone to honor them" (57). She fills "her favorite drinking glass with water and a pebble" and adds that to "her own shrine" (57). The shrine thus is Nadine's attempt to shield herself against collapse.

In this respect, duality of the ritual of mourning is evident as it signifies, at once, separation and relation. Knowing how to mourn her "unborn" child signifies Nadine's own re-birth. It also signifies a step towards rehabilitation. Like Beatrice, Nadine wants to move on, breaking a barrier of grief and loss. She wants, as the novel reads, "to be reassured now and then

that some wounds could heal" (63). The victim has the desire to regard the inner scar of her trauma in a more positive light. This desire in itself is the start of the process of healing.

Significantly, in *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat presents the characters of Haitian victims in a new light. The writer does not reduce a character's entire life to the traumatic event undermining, in the process, its full strength and resilience. Each character tries to find its own way to survive applying LaCapra's claim that "it is possible ... for the victim not only to live on, caught in a crushingly oppressive past, but also to survive" (*History* 75). In so doing, each character remarkably undergoes a stage of recovery during which the idea of duality is strikingly evident. Recovery, in this sense, "refers to both the victim's belated reconstruction of the traumatic event and the healing associated with the process" (Doane and Hodges 63). Suffering and healing are part and parcel of the delineation of each character whose story demonstrates, as Mehta puts it, "the epic story of ordinary people" (87). Ultimately, Mehta's words sum up Danticat's new approach in presenting her characters. They are simple, yet great, people. Scars of their trauma bear duality of signification that turns them, as the novel reads, like Ka's statue of her father, "regal and humble at the same time" (11).

In the chapter entitled "Seven," Danticat displays the fragmented life of a Haitian couple whose trauma of displacement leads to the breakdown of all meaningful connection between them. A scar of trauma, in this respect, symbolises a cut, not on a body, but of a human bond. Like in "Water Child," the main character immigrates to America escaping from a

political context that is boiling with violence and poverty. Danticat means to write a story of "personal and political intersections" (Walcott-Hackshaw 74). On the one-day honeymoon, "he'd had no idea that it would be seven years before he would see her [his wife] again" (42). It takes him "six years and eleven months" (42) to get a green card. As the wife arrives to America and meets her husband, she enters a new world. Her husband holds her and her feet leave the ground. Danticat deftly describes a dual feeling of uprooting and re-rooting: "[i]t was when he put her back down that she finally believed she was really somewhere else, on another soil, in another country" (41). The couple's true desire to heal from years of loss is highlighted in their wish to have their wedding dress and suit so that "[t]hey could have walked these foreign streets in them, performing their own carnival" (52). Remarkably, the couple is hopeful to be able to start life anew despite a "foreign" setting.

Duality of signification continues to play and is most significant in the text through "The Funeral Singer," a story of three Haitian women who flee homeland loaded with a legacy of loss and violence. Each one of them represents many other Haitian victims who lose a loved one at the hands of the tonton macoutes of the oppressive Duvalier regime. Haiti, therefore, becomes a site of trauma which they can only long and/or belong but never return to. Ironically, one of them wonders: "Jackie Kennedy can go to Haiti anytime she wants, but we can't" (179). Estranged from both family and place of origin, they have but corrosive memories of the past as the only companion in America. These are memories that take the shape of scars stigmatising their life.

However, as the three women meet in a course to learn English, they also learn to see their trauma in a new light; a way in which "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (Caruth *Unclaimed* 8). They get to understand the importance of being together to face and let go of their trauma. In this respect, Judith Herman states that "[r]ecovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (133). Although alienation is the address of their setting in America, they manage to establish their own small community: "[t]onight we cook an entire meal together. ... We talk about what brought us here" (172). Clearly, this is a community that is based on remembering, creating connections, sharing stories, "and slowly we'd parcel out our sorrows, each walking out with fewer than we'd carried in" (170). In an attempt not to be paralysed by past trauma, the three women tell their tales as if they echo Danticat's words: "[i]t is not our way to let our grief silence us" (*Brother* 266). The deeply-stricken victims decide to defy alienation, as a sign of metaphoric death, by narrative which, as Homi Bhabaha puts it "is not simply a social virtue; it is a moving sign of ... life" (181). In a word, this is a community in which narration dissipates alienation.

Rézia tells the other two women that she leaves Haiti after she has been raped by "a uniformed man" (173) or a tonton macoute. Mariselle leaves Haiti because her husband, a painter, paints "an unflattering portrait" (172) of the president and displays it in a gallery show. She remembers and says: "[h]e was shot leaving the show" (172). Freda, the narrator, is expelled from Haiti because she refuses an invitation to sing at the national palace. She could not sing for the

type of people who killed her father. Freda remembers: "[o]ne day, one macoute ... took my father away. When my father returned, he didn't have a tooth left in his mouth. In one night, they'd turned him into an old, ugly man" (172). Significantly, in *The Dew Breaker*, the arbitrary violence each character undergoes on the personal level cannot be separated from the country's history since "[t]he history of personal violence in Danticat's characters intersects with Haiti's violent history" (Pulitano 28). With a deadly feeling of oppression and humiliation, the father decides to disappear: "[t]he next night he took his boat out to sea and, with a mouth full of blood, vanished forever" (172). In the funeral, Freda sings "Brother Timonie," one of her father's fishing songs "[s]o he could hear me singing his songs from the crest of the wave" (173).

It is important that while Freda narrates the trauma of losing her father, she also narrates the trauma of Haitian people collectively. Danticat is concerned to highlight Haiti's trauma as a nation crushed under debilitating economic conditions. The writer manifests the duality of the personal and the historical through the text that exists between "a sanctioned narrative of history and personal memory" (Sturken 119). Freda remembers that on New Year's Eve the president of the republic would drive through her town and "throw money from the window of his big shiny black car" (170). They would clean the house and her father would stay home from the sea in case the president chooses to give them something extra: "[a]s if this sack of rice, this pound of beans, this gallon of cooking oil were the gold, silver, and bronze medals in the poverty Olympics" (171). Significantly, personal narrative fragments

can function on the collective level to reflect the suffering of Haitian people at large as competitors in a race of poverty and destitution.

As the process of remembering/telling goes on, each woman exhales her pain and puts down her past suffering. Herman explains that "[r]emembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (1). The three characters are no longer crippled by scars of trauma that have weighed them down for long. A process of healing accompanies their act of narration that opens a door towards the future. For example, Mariselle finds a job at a gallery and "will be selling paintings, some of them are her husband's" (180). When the other two women fail their English practice tests, she assures them: "[y]ou have so much time ahead to redo these things, retake these exams, reshape your whole life" (174). Ultimately, Danticat, through Mariselle's words, calls upon Haitian victims to negotiate the future affirming the possibility of "reshaping" life.

The chapter ends with the three women singing and laughing. They laugh at Freda's idea to go back to Haiti and join a militia and they suggest helping her to sing her own funeral song: "[w]e sing until our voices grow hoarse, sometimes making Brother Timonie a sister. When we've exhausted poor Timonie, we move on to a few more songs, happier songs" (180). It seems as if they want to interpret the Haitian saying Danticat mentions in her first novel: "[o]nly a mountain can crush a Haitian woman" (*Breath* 198). Danticat confirms the idea of women's strength and draws a different portrait of trauma

showing that rays of light can disperse layers of dense fog. The narrator continues, "[a]nd for the rest of the night we raise our glasses, broken and unbroken alike, to the terrible days behind us and the uncertain ones ahead" (181). In the encounter between "the terrible days behind" and "the uncertain ones ahead," a process of self-(re)formation is established. Danticat is keen to highlight the dogged perseverance the three women show in the face of trauma. This is a meaning Danticat always emphasises when referring to Haitian women: "they always seem to have one foot over burning coals and the other aimed at solid ground" (*Walking* ix). In *The Dew Breaker*, not only does Danticat examine the condition of victimisation, but she also focuses on victims' orientation towards redemption.

Duality of hope and despair, therefore, shape the lives of Danticat's characters, victims and victimizers alike. The scars they have dramatise such duality exactly as they dramatise the duality reflected upon in the title of the novel. Whereas the word "dew" signifies a state of peace and tranquility, the word "breaker" follows as a signifier of death and destruction. However, characters, in *The Dew Breaker*, as well as their creator realise the need, which Mehta stresses, "to reconcile with the past as a primary step to imagine a better future" (63). Trauma, thus, is not necessarily a unilateral volcanic experience with the eruption of past memories that haunt survivors to consume them. A traumatic experience can be reclaimed and Danticat's characters do not forfeit their right of healing. Perhaps, the dew breaker's confession, Dany's journey, Beatrice's new move, Nadine's shrine, the couple's reunion, and the three women's narrative are all attempts towards what

Borzaga calls "post-traumatic growth and the survival strategies creatively imagined and practiced by people" (47). By examining traumatic suffering as well as post-traumatic growth, the text opens up a possibility towards hope and transformation.

Finally, it could be said that the whole text is coloured by duality of signification. A scar of trauma on a man's face or psyche signifies both erasure and visibility. It is a telltale imprint of a healing rather than a crying wound. In *The Dew Breaker*, Edwidge Danticat treads new ground of exploring a trauma narrative and blurs the boundary between apparent opposites so that they can reconcile, rather than, collide.

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