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LEGENDS OF LACERATION AS PORTRAYED IN CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

Dr. Priyadharshini C.P.C
Assistant Professor
Department of Arts and Humanities
Christ Academy Institute for Advanced Studies
Bengaluru

Dr. Priyadharshini C.P.C , Assistant Professor of English at Christ Academy Institute for Advanced Studies at Bengaluru has a deep passion in writing and research. She colours her vibrant vignettes of works with authenticity and profound emotional insights which urges the readers to envision her portrayals.

Abstract

The Dew Breaker is a story of burdened past, turmoil, physical brutality and psychological terror. It addresses the conditions of traumatic experience the conflict of internal memory between the tormentor and survivor. In the novel both the victim, and tormentor conceal within themselves the past, resulted as the aftermath experience of trauma, which devastated both the physical and emotional wellbeing of the characters.

Index Terms: Trauma, Agony, Psychological terror, Violence and History

I. Introduction

In the unique work of fiction, *The Dew Breaker*, Edwidge Danticat the celebrated Haitian novelist of the contemporary literary trend continues her indulgence into the disturbed history of her homeland. She nevertheless fails to scrutinize how the buried history extends its influence both inside and outside Haiti echoing even in a diasporic ambience. *The Dew Breaker* a novel composed carefully as a short story holds the aftermath of the brutal regime of a dictatorship at its center. The novel is peculiarly patterned as interconnected stories spanning the period between 1967 and 2004 in Haiti, the regime of the Duvaliers.

II. Review of Literature

Numerous academics have examined the various facets of Edwidge Danticat's fictional works. Research projects including the fictional works of Danticat are confined and limited in the data they may choose from as it encapsulates the struggles of Haitians and their success attained from those agonies that suppress them.

Traumatic Realism in the Fiction of Edwidge Danticat is conducted. The author of this study has examined the elements of trauma found in the works of Danticat who greatly represent the realistic agonies of her characters.

The Individual and Collective Trauma in Danticat's works are brought to analysis. The author has investigated how trauma is used by Danticat as a narrative device in their research.

III. Research Methodology

This qualitative study focuses specifically on Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Dew Breaker* and the study utilizes textual analysis as the primary methodology.

IV. Discussion and Analysis

Francois Duvalier, seized power in 1957 announcing himself president for life. He had the country under his cruel and violent control for fourteen years with the support of the "Tonton Macoute" (216), a paramilitary force consisting of merciless murders and torturers.

During the years of his rule Haiti's population grew, but the standards of living dropped. Francois Duvalier radically changed the culture, social and potential landscape of Haiti, while maintaining the country's tragic tradition of using violence to initiate change.

Edwidge Danticat, brings in her early childhood days during the Duvalier's dictatorships in the novel. She intertwines the ruthlessness of his regime, through the rendition of interconnected stories. *Dew Breaker* is a peculiar title which refers to the members present in the tonton macouts, who without hesitation and inhibitions inflicted torture and merciless assassination against the Haitians obeying the order of the Duvaliers.

Danticat's central character of the novel, is known for his barbarity and gruesome nature. Due to the fragmentation of his master Duvalier's regime, he escaped to New York City, but every day he was tormented by the painful memories of his vicious deeds which roasted him with the burden of his past and the guilt arising due to his heinous acts. The burden of the past thrust's deeply into every character of the novel, where they have a dreadful story of their own rendered in *The Dew Breaker*. The immigrants though trying to evade from the clutches of tormentation, again attribute to it through their traumatic memories even in a new land. The wounds of their influential past do not heal and oscillates within them as harrowing tragedy. The brooding shadow of their dusky past conceals the present happiness, as an intruder in their life's.

Bringing the character of dew breaker to cynosure, Danticat integrates his personal story with the stories of those who survived his profound cruelty and those who were victimized because of it. The stories swiftly glide between past and present and returns to its original place proving Danticat's mastery over the construction of plot and its regulation revealing suspense shielding the incumbrance of the past in all the pages of this poignant story.

Danticat explores a peculiar intimacy in the novel, before terminating it with a witty twist where she directs the once diabolic dew breaker to marry his last victim's sister. Such surprising acts in many of her works makes Danticat to earn enormous acclaim as the most competent novelist carrying credits to her craftsmanship. The title story *The Dew Breaker* introduces us to the protagonist, a nameless character, whose identity and name is hidden in suspense. He was born in Leogane, Haiti. His family loses its land when army officials decide to build summer homes there just after Francois comes to power.

Edwidge with the description provides a glimpse into the early life of the tormentor, which was a solid pavement to his later life of misery. It also extends a glance into the wretched life of the Haitians brooking under the punishment of the dictator. Their way of life and living was wholly fragmented and they constantly led lives of insecurity.

The Funeral Singer is a prominent tale that explicitly explores the experience of the characters to profoundly examine Haiti's own difficulties in breaking the barriers of violence and vengeance that continues even in the present scenario. The story intactly encapsulates the experience of three women characters living in

New York as a part of the Haitian diaspora. They are struggling stubbornly to foster a new life holding hard to the grave traumas which had left a firm imprint in their day to day lives, even in the present.

Collective recollection of the trauma and their shared experiences of the agony undergone in their native country serve as a solace to these troubled women. They cook dinner and sit down together occasionally one night to confide to each other the reasons for their migration. Each woman had a different troubled past which was painted in grey by their threatening experiences in their mother land under the cruel regime of Duvalier.

Mariselle's husband has been brutally assassinated after painting a portrait of the president Duvalier which failed to convince him. He was shot in a jiffy after leaving the gallery show where the portrait was displayed and miserably failed to secure an appreciation from the president himself. Freda, the narrator of the story, forcibly fled from the country when she explicitly refused to sing at the national palace after her father who was a fisherman, was deprived of his business and brutally tortured and agonized by a Macoute. Danticat records the cruel incident as, "The next night he took his boat out to sea, and with a mouth full of blood, vanished forever" (172). The life events of Rezia the third member of this female trio, was by no means pleasant when laid in comparison with the others. She was brutally raped in her childhood by a paramilitary man and this incident had tormented her emotional well – being for the rest of her life.

The reciting of the agony is a significant tactic adopted by the agonized women to cope up with their painful past. Their entire existence has become so colorless and senseless because in their vision, the past is never hibernating. It reappears to them in various forms characterized in glowering menacing manner. The hostile confrontation of the past, do not depart politely from their routine. It appears as an uncongenial visitor, bearing unfriendly accord, to tamper their peace. The horror of the past and its influence do not leave the characters in peace, even if they try to fudge them with crudity.

The three women Rezia, Mariselle and Freda, of *The Funeral Singer*, share the same traumatizing experience of their individual lives revealing their distinctive Haitian traumas. All three have experienced a traumatic event, which determines a certain pattern of behavior after the immigration to the United States. The trio has regular meetings after school, in which they get drunk and talk about their losses during the Duvalier era. They find consolation and a way to deal with their troubled past, instead of suppressing their memories. The

crucial difference is that the three women have a collective experience, in which they not only can share their pain and secrets, but also fully understand each other.

It took years for the three women to comprehend each other's agony. Danticat divides their stories into chapters and sub chapters and attempts to enhance the idea by stressing the fact that it needs a long elaborate process to empathize with each other and develop a companionship to overcome a traumatic experience. At the beginning of the meetings the three were unfamiliar, even uncomfortable with each other.

The physical distance Mariselle needs to put in between her and the others at first vanishes after several weeks boldly showing the growing closeness of the trio. In the seventh week, the women reveal their traumatic experiences to each other. After the expression of their traumatic memories which played a havoc in their lives they slowly exhibit their sorrows, as Danticat states, "each walking out with fewer than they carried in" (170). Passing high school equivalent in the United States is a significant turning point in the lives of the three women and also represents the starting of overcoming their troubled past.

The women have become helpless victims of the cruel clutches of the past even at their younger age. Erasing the burden of their past and building a new life in the new shore has become a tedious task these survivors. The three of them have serious problems in trying to comprehend their lives with a whole meaning even in a new country. Though they try to accept their past, as a part of their life, memories, and remembering, arrive as a daily visitor, in their day-to-day life. Apart from the victims and survivors seriously portrayed in the novel by Danticat, the onlookers, who are the residents in the Duvalier regime also holds to the unbearable anguish of the past which in turn adversely affects their present.

The story entitled *The Bridal Seamstress*, details in a detailed manner about the seamless encounter of two remarkable women. It retells the experience of a journalist, who encounters a survivor of the Duvalier regime. The story is about a character named Aline Cajuste, an intern at the Haitian American Weekly. She as a part of her work is sent by her superior to interview Beatrice saint fort. Beatrice had spent her entire life making wedding dresses and is now renouncing her trade.

At first, the young journalist intern thinks it is a regular interview with a seamstress, at a local prominence, at the end of her long career of making wedding dresses. However, it turns out that Beatrice's story contains more than Aline's assignment since she was asked merely to write about the retirement of the Bridal Seamstress.

When the two women encounter each other, they were separated by a gulf of cultural distance. This was clearly evident in the first part of their conversation. Aline at several points during the conversation as per her editor's warnings had clearly felt that the conversation is slipping out of her control and the elder woman exerts an ardent influence over the conversation by firmly holding the reins.

Beatrice seems to be reluctant to answer the interviewer's questions and replies with counter questions, which prompts Aline to suspect that the seamstress is keeping a secret. The journalism intern is startled when Beatrice asks her directly, if she wants to know her secret. The interview escalates to an interesting level while strolling around Beatrice's neighborhood. The elder woman anxiously declares about the Haitian Prison Guard who owns a house in the neighborhood.

As the conversation proceeds the elder woman unveils the stigmas imprinted in the soles of her feet which are the vicious gifts of whipping, she received in prison when she refused to dance with the Macoute. The journalism intern is at first hesitant to question the elder woman about the identity of the man but she stills inquiries about how she was convicted about his identity even after so many years.

To which Beatrice says, "No one will ever have that much of your attention. No matter how much he'd changed, I would know him anywhere" (132). Aline finally informs the results of the interview is disappointing and adds that her report is not worthwhile.

Her superior who refuses to accept the statement states, "I didn't send you there to judge her state of mind. Come back and write what I sent you to write, Bridal seamstress retires, simple" (133). Aline who hurries back to the office to finish the report is constantly preoccupied with the expression of fear exhibited by the old women. She urges her inner self to excavate the truth. She takes note of the prison guard's abode and begins to wonder about the rumination of the profound story haunting the life of the old woman to see whether the old lady's fears were credible and justified. After a thorough inspection of the house she discovers the truth the owner of the house is a Colombian woman, who is ineffectively trying to sell it from Bogota.

The intern then returns to Beatrice to explain the truth in vain. The elder woman insists the guard only uses the vacant space as a hideout to keep watch on her constantly. The conversation also reveals the real motive of Beatrice quitting the business. She is constantly in anxiety that being in business the prison guard can easily track her and continue with his incessant cruel treatment. When Danticat concludes the story Aline is clearly

convinced about the paranoia of Beatrice and exhibits sympathy towards the troubled soul. She understands that the women even after the long passage of time is unable to recover from the psychic wounds she received in her youth. The intern ultimately develops an unexpected empathy with Beatrice and comprehends the her trauma of her harrowing past which has ardently refused to grant her peace.

Apprehending about the threatening past, Martin Munro opines that “past creates a kind of restlessness, and anxiety about stopping for even an instant, and they both work constantly to escape the phantoms” (88). The interview not only reveals the troubled past of the interviewee, but also the interviewer. They complement each other in a way that coaxes them to remember their past, exposing the memories of the seamstress just as much as those of the young intern.

The severe physical pain Beatrice suffered because of her loyalty and deep affection for her boyfriend caused her trauma. She hides her harrowing memories behind a rehearsed pattern of behavior, but the troubled past continues to surface in her everyday life. Beatrice’s retirement is also forced by her unwillingness to hire help, because she never accept anyone or any intruder in her house for a long time. It also mirrors her inability to have a healthy relationship in the long run. Furthermore, it prevents her from having a husband, children or close friends because she moves on a regular basis. She compensates for his emptiness in her life with her work. She lets her clients call her mother and in turn she addresses them as her girls. Beatrice uses these terms of endearment also to conceal her being unmarried. Nevertheless, renouncing her profession, which is her greatest pleasure in life, shows how merciless the past is burdening Beatrice and determining her present.

The Paranoia, of Beatrice reveals her powerlessness to control her own life, since it is driven by the past, filled with tremendous agonies. Danticat promptly explains the significance of the collective memory of Haitian immigrants, who are agonized and tormented by their past and its common characteristic is the rumination of the pangs inflicted on them. The intern feels a natural bond to that group and its history, which is illustrated in the coffee scene.

Beatrice tries to connect with Aline, however the young newspaper intern cannot comprehend the full impact of Beatrice’s traumatic past. Beatrice on the other hand finds solace in sharing her past with Aline, which in turn participates with the collective memory shared by the Haitians in common.

Beatrice, Freda and Dany are the illustrations of people escaping far from the clutches of the past which has unleashed a deep impact inside their psyches. Their Haitian past is etched in their memory which forces them to imprint the indelible image of the cruel macoute who cramped their lives by executing their parents, and deeply threatened them with warnings of murder if they revealed the truth.

The taints of murder, destruction, bloodshed and dislocation incessantly haunt the victimized Haitians generations after generations thereby resulting in a present life which is nonetheless the rebirth of a central loss and dispossession leading to eternal tormentation. This statement stands true not only to the victims who was fragmented with the cruelty of violence, abuse and harassment of their own flesh, but it was applicable even to those who witnessed it explicitly or heard about it indirectly.

The assorted nature of class, color, education, gender or language also proved ineffective in preserving the community from the perilous penetration of the past amidst them. Even the community who had escaped the native soil to construct a new beginning in an alien land far away from the flavors of their Haitian life was also over shadowed by the defiance of the past in spite of diverting them with good education, allowing the entry of another language. Though completely disconnected from their roots the harrowing past was unwilling to rest in silence even in their lives affecting the formation of a new identity and individual self.

Characters such as Ka Bienaime and Aline Cajuste was also forced to foresee their future in accordance with the painful pasts and have stalked their present life in North America in a different perspective owing to their past. Every anecdote in the novel weaves the painful past and exhibits the trauma experienced by all the characters. The agony of the past results in significant psychological destruction which permanently alters their sense of self and their view of life acting as a great hindrance in the fostering of their self-identities.

The trauma experienced has significantly altered their lives and creates instability in their day-to-day affairs. The victims suffer significantly and the painful past has shaped the way in which they comprehend life and the impact of the traumatic event. Anne the wife of the dew breaker is also severely victimized by the harrowing past. Anne is greatly disturbed by the death of her younger brother and constantly mourns her past. Her brother's death does not heal with the passage of time and is unable to overcome the trauma of the situation that caused his death.

Anne's younger brother had drowned in the ocean in front of her eyes when she was helplessly watching him die and the pathetic incident had turned into a traumatic past in her life.

This painful past haunts Anne, eliminating the element of peace in her life hampering her harmonious existence and making her stagnant hindering her progression in life. Dominick La Gopra opines how a person becomes paralyzed to move beyond a painful experience in life. Anne's situation is an example of La Capra's description of the human mind and body immobilized completely. Anne often recollects and relives the experience of his brother's death and is ceaselessly troubled by the thought of him wandering the earth looking for his own grave. Anne's situation prevents her from re-entering into her past and putting her brother's soul to rest by the performance of the ceremonies. Anne drastically suffers throughout the story numbed by her burdening past without the strength to overcome it.

The presence of the past throughout the novel has become highly influential as it victimizes even the tormentor named the dew breaker. Even the oppressor is hegemonized by the domination of the past. He tries to escape physically and emotionally from his horrific past, but ends in its invocation perpetually. *The Dew Breaker* encapsulates the endless impact of one man's violent career on his victims which has eternally imprints in their lives. His entire existence was blended with permeance of his sufferings even after evading completely from the incurring loss unbridled by the burden of his cruel past. Edwidge Danticat in the novel elegantly exposes how the main character's father, was deprived of human qualities, in his early existence, and how he retrieves a sense of humanity simultaneously threatened by his past.

The novel *The Dew Breaker* has emotionally influenced the deep inner psyche of the readers. He is a man who has handled both agony and love with a simple handshake. His story captures the impact of his past and paints portraits of the tragic events that an entire community shares under the hazardous rule of a homicidal ruler. The story explains how the evil act of one person can influence the life of the victimized individuals forever.

The life of the dew breaker stands as a representation of more than one life, namely the influence of his heinous acts which has impacted the life of his loved ones, the life of his victims and their generations who has suffered the extensive influence of his acts, embracing the stories of people he has not even met. The dew breaker is enormously affected by his racking past, which arrests him ardently.

Both the tormentor and the traumatized, bear an unendurable past and history with them throughout the novel. In many instances they themselves transform as the residue of the past which obstinately refuses to leave them. The dew breaker who hideous an odious past is seen late in life as a quiet man, a lovable father, and a husband with a compact family. He is portrayed as an ordinary man in his Brooklyn neighborhood and is seen as a land lord and barber with a terrifying scar across his face which is an embodiment of his iniquitous life.

The persuasive theme of memory and past in *The Dew Breaker* circles around the idea of traumatic experience. The manifestation of past in the present is offering a scheme to approach *The Dew Breaker*. Every character in the novel, exhibit the potential to embrace their past, with complete acceptance, which finds comfort, in confession. *The Dew Breaker* is immensely victorious in recollecting and precisely presenting the wounds and scars of those Haitians, who suffered and was atrociously agonized under the Duwalier regime.

V. Conclusion

The Dew Breaker on the terminal level displays the collective memory of Haitian immigrants in the United States who fled from the Duvalier regime. The victims share a similar pattern of pain, repression and traumatic experience which characterizes the cruelty of a government and a political set up which has left firm imprints in the annals of history.

Danticat proposes to embrace the past and cherish the important persons one lost to the cruel Duvalier era. She does not belittle the incredible pain the victims of the Duvaliers suffered. Nevertheless, Danticat pictures brave and realistic characters, who are struggling to have a content life after traumatic experience. Some fail and some succeed in their struggle with the burdens of their past.

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