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The Storytellers' Trauma: A Place to Call Home in Caribbean Literature

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The Storytellers' Trauma:
A Place to Call Home in Caribbean Literature

by

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The Storytellers' Trauma:
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Very soon she'll join all the others who know the secret and will not tell it. Or cannot. Or try and fail because they do not know enough...She's one of them. I too can wait--for the day when she is only a memory to be avoided, looked away, and like all memories a legend. Or a lie...

—*Wide Sargasso Sea*

Introduction: Fiction of Home

Memories are documented, recorded, and created by an emotional experience and observation—and not to be forgotten. And as such, having an identity and a place that we call home also plays an important role of remembering who you are and where you come from. The trauma of colonialism makes this process of creating a home through memory more complicated, in part because of the horrors of European incursion, including the forced use of the invaders' languages, culture, and literature. Writers growing up in a colonial or postcolonial society are educated with the colonizer's literature, presented to them as to how to write. But this literature represents the colonizer's point of view; it does not represent the experiences or voices of the colonized. Jean Rhys, Julia Alvarez, and Edwidge Danticat rebel against this traditional realistic narrative that has been handed down to them through their colonial education. There comes a point where they are at a stand still, saying, "Wait a minute. This is NOT our culture. This is something that was given to us by the colonizer and doesn't express our reality. This is not our identity."

In order to rebel and find a way to express their own realities, these Caribbean novels, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, and *The Dew Breaker*, use non-traditional narrative structures to retell the story of colonialism in an attempt to heal the trauma and create a new sense of home. The reason why a non-traditional narrative structure enables this process of healing from trauma and allows for a new home to be created is because rather than accepting the stories of colonialism, they instead resist those narratives and create a narrative of their own to create their own story. For these reasons, Rhys, Alvarez, and Danticat need to work through their trauma by telling and retelling their stories in repetitive fragments as part of their healing.

Wide Sargasso Sea deals with the madness that results from the long history of racism during and after slavery in the Caribbean; *In the Time of the Butterflies* challenges the oppression and mistreatment of women and men in the Dominican Republic, addressing the brutal murder of the Mirabal sisters and a different kind of trauma, the difficulty of feeling at home in the midst of suffering under the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo; and *The Dew Breaker* considers the possibility of healing and forgiveness after the violent dictatorships of François and Jean-Claude Duvalier in Haiti, even though the traumatic past cannot be forgotten. After these traumatic experiences, there is really not a safe place that would appropriately make the authors and the characters feel at home. What unites these novels is a desire for home, and part of the definition of home is identity. The long history of colonialism, racism, misogyny, and oppression has fractured the identity of these characters, making it even harder for them to feel at home. It is a challenge to come up with an ideal theory that would be adequate in capturing the complicated process of identity formation in the Caribbean among these

three novels. But in order to understand Caribbean literature, it is important to gain an appreciation of the complex identity processes at work in the region. Works in the fields of postcolonialism, feminism, and postmodernism grapple with this complex, layered identity formation and the way it can leave people feeling that they have no identity or no place to call home.

Postcolonial theorists examine the way identity is affected by colonialism and imperialism. Just like North, South, and Central America, the Caribbean was also colonized by different European powers—English, French, and Spanish. The Caribbean was forever changed by the slave trade from Africa. In other words, the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean were largely destroyed by Europeans, so African people were captured and brought there as slaves. Therefore, the idea of identity and home is founded on trauma and violence in the Caribbean. This colonization lasted a very long time. For instance, in Jamaica and Dominica, the setting of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, colonization lasted until the 1960s. This was a traumatic experience that robbed Caribbeans of their identity through forcing another language and culture on them, making them feel inferior and not at home in their own region, and this sense of unhomeliness comes from the way Caribbeans have been silenced and had their narratives written for them.

Frantz Fanon started examining this trauma of Black identity in a white world in his 1950's book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. The title itself suggests that a black person can assimilate into a different identity with language, education, and how one conducts oneself, thereby putting on a “white” mask: “The black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites. A black man behaves differently with a white man than he does with another black man” (Fanon 1). Fanon grew up in

Martinique, a French colonized island that is part of France, and he identified himself as French. He fought with the free French in World War II and as a veteran later went to medical school in Paris, with an attitude as being a French man just like the Caucasian French people. The psychological trauma that resulted in Fanon's life emerged from the harsh reality of racism. Regardless of his educational background, how he spoke, how he conducted himself, he would always be seen as a black man, and the deception of the white mask he was wearing was damaging to his psyche, as he describes in his book. Fanon's idea of wearing a mask in White culture shows how difficult it is to be accepted and fits with the complex identity struggles going on in the novels under consideration. Beyond racial identity, there are masks of martyrdom and masks of shame. Dedé from *In the Time of the Butterflies* has to wear her own mask as well as those of her sisters, telling their story over and over, and the unnamed father in *The Dew Breaker* wears the mask of his wife, Anne, and his daughter, Ka, to attempt to hide and escape his past.

From a contemporary perspective, postcolonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha expands on Fanon's idea of masks, describing this masking tendency that colonized people have as "almost but not quite, almost but not white." Here he describes the feeling of never completely fitting into society, always wearing masks. Bhabha further discusses this lack of fitting in and uses Freud's concept of the uncanny in "The World and the Home" to describe the somewhat dismal state of postmodern belongingness and the sense of home: "To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and the public spheres" (Bhabha 141). For Bhabha, the unhomely is expressed in the sensation that your home is not yours, and he broadens Freud's discussion from personal to political causes.

Bhabha, who is from India, speaks from the postcolonial point of view of the legacy of colonialism—the aftermath of having to adopt British language and culture, of adopting their attitudes and trying to be one of “them.” He describes the impossibility of fitting in when skin color marks difference and the resulting sense of unhomeliness. Bhabha also uses this idea of masking in another way by wearing a mask as a disguise to be subversive in achieving purposes of one’s own—to deceive and make someone uncomfortable. Writers use this same kind of masking and subversion when they write narratives that are not linear and not told in narrative, chronological order. Often times there is no clear or satisfying ending to the novels. There are a lot of contributing factors to this type of rebellion.

For example, the narrators can sometimes be unreliable due to the fact that their identity is in flux as they struggle with understanding who they are. Another struggle is the way languages are being used in the narrative. Caribbean writers received a traditional European colonial education, so they learned standard English, Spanish, French, etc. This is the language of power, the colonial language instead of the languages people use in their daily lives, at home, and away from school/work. What happened in the Caribbean to a far greater extent than in the United States was the formation of Creole dialects, which are sometimes so unlike the colonizer’s language that it is difficult for readers to understand them. The Creole dialect happens in the Caribbean because it is the contact zone of all different types of languages. For instance, there are different African languages brought in through slavery as well as European languages, creating a grammar and syntax and vocabulary of all of these languages merging into something new and different. And the government has suppressed these languages by not recognizing them

as being legitimate, as being broken and dirty. So, a struggle for these writers is if they use this colonial language, they question themselves if they are selling out because this is not their identity.

Rhys, Alvarez, and Danticat use languages unfamiliar to English-language, North American/British readers in order to rebel, since those are the locations where the books are published. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette's servant, Christophine, uses broken-English and patois, *In the Time of the Butterflies* uses Spanish, and *The Dew Breaker* uses a mixture of Creole and French. Readers might not see themselves, their point of view, or their world in these books—an important argument these writers are trying to make. As storytellers, they don masks of looking like English-language novelists, but then they take on a subversive identity since their novels have been written to *de-center*, making readers uncomfortable and ambivalent because these writers are trying to get audiences to see and understand what it is like to be colonized. And through their storytelling, the writers use their novels as a way to work through their trauma as the characters work through theirs through the use of non-traditional narrative structure. Another method they use to de-center the narrative is the way they wear their masks. Whether by design or accident, a homeless person who knows where he or she belongs can *own* his/her masks—if he/she chooses to. But with unhomeliness, a mask is worn to fit into a culture or society or language. No matter how many times a person wears it, he/she will not be accepted. In these novels, the writers and the characters attempt to come to grips with their identity and find a sense of home, but often are left struggling with this feeling of unhomeliness—of not truly belonging anywhere.

Likewise, the authors of these novels, Caribbean women, struggle to be taken seriously, to fit into the literary landscape, and to get their work published. For them, writing is resistance and a way to heal the trauma. In their theories of Caribbean literature, several writers emphasize resistance to the oppressive regimes of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and dictatorships and the racial injustice these regimes create through narrative and storytelling. In the preface to *Out of the Kumbula: Caribbean Women and Literature*, scholars, Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, reflect on themselves in sharing how they interact with their work on a personal level: “Sometimes is it important to be personal. Despite the calls in the scholarly world to retreat to a safe distance from subjectivity, we know, as women, that it is the submerged life which orchestrates both our strengths and our difficulties” (Davies and Fido ix). Davies and Fido weave the idea of voicelessness throughout their work to suggest that women have been silenced from a literary standpoint because they must speak through the master’s language, fighting against cultural limitations regarding gender—underscoring the necessity of personalizing the dialogue regarding important issues on women writers and critics in the Caribbean in the hopes of ending oppression and exploitation of all women. In these novels, the writers all have personal experiences with trauma and unhomeliness and use their voices to counter the master narrative.

Another example is found in *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, where Rachel Blau DuPlessis examines the types of narrative options for female characters and the gender implications of narrative style. She describes the conventional narrative endings for women in novels as marriage, death, or madness. She then examines several twentieth century works by women that alter the

narrative conventions to critique social and gender norms. For example, she shows how *Wide Sargasso Sea* rewrites the successful white woman narrative to show the forgotten West Indian woman's point of view. For these women writers, it is important to tell their stories and to use their voices to resist the dominant narrative and speak back to the trauma. Instead of telling the typical stories female characters are relegated to such as romance-centered plots, these novelists tell of complex characters in complex situations, working through trauma. This form of resistance through literature helps the reader understand the narrative structure that results from trauma and a sense of unhomeliness. The characters in these novels often find themselves at the boundaries of identity categories, not completely accepted anywhere, homeless. This sense of not fitting into just one identity category resonates with another form of resistance, *métissage*, a mixing of different races, cultures, and classes, which Françoise Lionnet introduces in her essay, "The Politics and Aesthetics of *Métissage*," as being crucial to understanding the diversity of the Caribbean experience. *Métissage* challenges either-or thinking, that everyone fits neatly into an identity category, and, in this way, *métissage* addresses the long history of how a Caribbean person had to take on the identity of the colonizer, as well as his/her language. From a postcolonial perspective, using language of the colonizer for some writers results in a sense of selling out one's native culture or ultimately silencing the voice of the colonized, as Lionnet points out in her example of Edmond Laforest, the Haitian writer, who drowns himself with a Larousse dictionary around his neck (Lionnet 1). This demonstrates the power and the danger of having an either/or mentality about cultural influence, which can be both productive and devastating.

Lionnet suggests that a person's cultural experience is more of a both/and situation in which both the native culture and the colonizer's culture impact a writer's personal experience and narrative voice. By "initiating a genuine dialogue with the dominant discourses they hope to transform," they can engage in more of a cultural exchange of ideas as opposed to conflict (3). By limiting one's self to an either/or mentality, writers are forced to work within the boundaries of a single language—such as the colonizer's language; whereas, the same writer who has a both/and mentality can benefit from a blending, or braiding as Lionnet describes it in terms of *métissage*, of cultures and language in an effort to capture meaning more deeply. Because of the diversity of the historical and cultural impacts of colonization on the Caribbean, adopting *métissage* is essential for writers to begin to understand the Caribbean experience. *Métissage* in these three novels is the way these women writers use the colonial language against itself, to disrupt the colonial narrative.

In this way, these writers are acting the role of tricksters as presented by Ifeona H. Fulani, who writes from the perspective of a scholar and a creative writer in her essay, "Caribbean Women Writers and the Politics of Style: A Case for Literary Anancyism." She effectively uses the extended metaphor comparing Caribbean women writers to West African folk traditions of a trickster spider, Anancy. One way these novels take on the role of trickster is through non-traditional narrative structure. Readers are used to a linear narrative structure and a unified point of view. These novels undercut these expectations repeatedly. This structure is also a journey away from unhomeliness, working through trauma to find a unique sense of identity that the characters can call home. For instance, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is structured around the repetition of images, words, and dreams—not

exactly around a narrative, linear plot line. Similarly, *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Dew Breaker* use multiple narrative perspectives to tell the story, creating a fragmented or patchwork quilt narrative. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, and *The Dew Breaker* reveal the trauma inflicted by a long history of colonialism, suggesting that no one can escape the past, but that the power of literature, particularly when it tells the harsh truth, can be a form of resistance. Storytelling, in other words, takes the “history” of the invaders and turns it into a fiction of home. They must tell their stories in their way—*this must happen*.

To the best of my ability, I am confident that I have applied ideas for each novel about trauma and storytelling while exploring *métissage*, unhomeliness, and narrative structure. And it is my hope that what I am proposing is a positive method of rethinking a definition and identity in Caribbean literature by not only acknowledging the fact that the authors are personally involved in their work through trauma, but that also they have created characters partly in order to make their novels tell their personal story as a coping mechanism, creating a place to call home.

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I come so far I lose myself on that journey.

—Jean Rhys, “Let Them Call It Jazz”

Chapter One: The Narrative of a Mad and Lonely Woman in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Trauma that leads to madness is the central focus of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the madness that results from the long history of racism during and after slavery in the Caribbean. Antoinette, especially, experiences a sense of trauma and unhomeliness, unable to feel at home in her identity. Her home is not her own. She is othered by her own mother, her servants, and finally her husband until her identity becomes so unstable that she descends into madness.

Jean Rhys certainly understood the complexity of identity. The daughter of a Welsh doctor and a white Creole mother, she grew up during the last days of England's colonialism period in Dominica. And like Antoinette's experience with the black servants in the novel, Rhys was also cared for by black servants, who heavily influenced her with language and religious customs. These experiences helped Rhys understand the relation between trauma and narrative, an understanding she manifests in *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Published in 1965, *Wide Sargasso Sea* rescued Rhys from the obscurity she had fallen into, addressing her own race and identity by seeking to recreate the story of Bertha Mason, the Jamaican mad wife of Edward Rochester in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In telling Bertha's story (under the name of Antoinette Cosway), Rhys allows readers to

travel inside the skin of Antoinette in exploring the complex relations between white and black West Indians, and between the old slaveholding West Indian families and the new English settlers in the post-emancipation Caribbean. There are some important themes worth exploring from Rhys's novel: the way prejudices are created, how people from different cultures and racial backgrounds get along, and how race, insanity, gender, and geographical location demonstrate how isolation and trauma undermine lives in the Caribbean. The major characters throughout the novel experience isolation, partly as a result of prejudices. The first part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* deals with the narrative of Antoinette's fragmentary memories, focusing on her own isolation as a child, the natural landscape, and descriptions of Annette. Having both her parents as former white slave owners further isolates her family because they were abandoned by former black slaves who hated their oppressors.

Antoinette's trauma manifests itself in the style of the narrative, non-linear and fragmented. Reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* compels the audience to return to the repetitive rhythm of dreams and mirroring images, with each of the three parts spilling out spells of broken promises, chaos, and anxiety. Trauma theorists Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Chris van der Merwe explain this phenomenon: "the experience of trauma splits and fragments the self and therefore the 'structure' of trauma, as such, is disjointed, non-linear, dreamlike (or, rather, nightmarish) and fragmented" (qtd. in Samuel 367). *Wide Sargasso Sea* is divided into three parts, consisting of three different narrators: Antoinette narrates the first; Rochester narrates most of the second until Antoinette takes over; in the third, Antoinette's nurse at Thornfield Hall, Grace Poole, narrates until Antoinette returns. *Wide Sargasso Sea* also has a violent, nightmarish, and exotic tone to it—

another important connection to trauma and narrative: “I dreamed that I was walking in the forest. Not alone. Someone who hated me was with me, out of sight” (15). This repetitive dream haunts and threatens Antoinette. The tense shifts between present and past in the sections Antoinette narrates, making it hard to find her in time and giving her a disembodied, apparition-like appearance, whereas Rochester delivers his narration in consistent past tense in a testimonial fashion:

I was tired of these people. I disliked their laughter and their tears, their flattery and envy, conceit and deceit. And I hated the place. I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain. I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost before I found it. (103)

Although Rochester expresses his feelings of his hatred of the island and Antoinette, he always remains in control, as evidenced by the uniformity of style in this narrative passage. The fact that Rochester has a more secure relationship to the island than Antoinette does, which is the place of her birth, emphasizes her sense of unhomeliness.

Isolation is another factor that adds to Antoinette’s and her mother’s experience of unhomeliness. Coulibri Estates, a plantation that is far away from Spanish Town and the center of white civilization in Jamaica, is where the Cosway family resides in isolation. Coulibri serves as a physical representation of isolation. The novel opens after Antoinette’s father, Alexander Cosway, has died, and Antoinette’s mother helplessly

feels like a prisoner at Coulibri Estate, as we see through the repetition of the word “marooned” (10). Towards the end of the novel Antoinette also feels a sense of imprisonment by relying on and loving her husband, Rochester. Figuratively speaking, this dependency conveys a type of slavery that eventually becomes a reality in Antoinette’s captivity in Rochester’s attic in England. Antoinette’s self-imprisonment is that she can never be what Rochester wants her to be. Rochester wants her to be a white English woman, but she is a white Creole, an other to him. These identity problems Antoinette suffers cause her trauma and unhomeliness, not fitting in anywhere and not feeling at home.

Her unhomeliness stems in part from the complexity of racial identity in Jamaica’s hierarchy as a result of colonialism. It is important to gain an appreciation of the complex identity process at work in the region. Stuart Hall, a cultural studies scholar, “describes the Caribbean as ‘the first, the original and the purest diaspora’ since ‘everybody there comes from somewhere else’” (27). There is a difference in treatment between whites born in England and white Creoles, who are descendants of Europeans having lived in the West Indies for several generations. White Creoles are looked down upon by the English people, with money being a factor. For instance, her family is looked down upon by the white Jamaican landowners and the black Jamaican children shout out insults whenever they see Antoinette: “White cockroach, go away, go away. Nobody want you. Go away” (Rhys 13). When Antoinette attempts to fit herself within both cultures, her character starts to diminish as a white-Creole woman—robbing readers of an understanding of her unique voice. Like Rhys, Antoinette knows that, even though she is white, racially, she doesn’t feel at home and is othered due to the non-acceptance

of her identity. To Rhys, this is very important and personal because through Antoinette Cosway her novel shows her empathy in understanding how identity and racism works in a discriminating world.

Not only does Antoinette not fit in with the whites, she does not fit in with the former slaves or some of her servants and even with her gender because she cannot achieve the concept of *métissage*. *Métissage* is a blending of culture and language, something that Antoinette can never be a part of. This is evident in her relationship with her servant, Christophine, who has been staying with the Cosway family after emancipation. Antoinette loves and trusts her as the mother figure she never had (her mother, Annette, is emotionally unavailable, caught up in her own losses and trauma)—loving her songs, recognizing the power of her *obeah* (a spiritual healing process) and speaking with the hybridized language of patois. Christophine is originally from Martinique—standing apart from the Jamaican servants: “She wore a black dress, heavy gold earrings and a yellow handkerchief—carefully tied with two high points in front. No other negro woman wore black, or tied her handkerchief Martinique fashion” (12). Interestingly, although both Antoinette and Annette don’t speak of their disgrace in the eyes of other whites, they acknowledge their dependency on the black servants who care for them with a respect that constantly stands between resentment and fear. The environment in which Antoinette is brought up exacerbates her condition, feeling rejected and not having anyone to love her. For instance, Christophine informs Annette about this: “She run wild, she grow up worthless. And nobody care” (15). An intertwining effect with regards to the trauma of womanhood and issues of madness envelopes *Wide*

Sargasso Sea. In other words, there is also conflict between Antoinette's personality and the expectations for young women.

When Antoinette is a young girl at the convent school, she learns the importance of feminine deportment from two other Creole girls, Miss Germaine and Helene de Plana, who demonstrate feminine virtues along with proper manners, chastity, and beauty: "Like everyone else, she has fallen under the spell of the de Plana sisters and holds them up as an example to the class. I admire them" (32). Praise of the poised and imperturbable sisters by Mother St. Justine creates an ideal of womanhood that is at odds with Antoinette's nature of being fiery, and her passion leads to her being misunderstood and silenced, contributing to her madness. The trauma of madness spills out images of female sexuality, fire and heat. This madness also represents Antoinette's inheritance due to the fact that both of her parents were mad.

Marriage diminishes Antoinette and her mother, as it does not allow them to be themselves and be married. Marriage is a contributing factor in losing their identity, as this is the cause of unhomeliness. After the death of Antoinette's father, her mother's marriage to Mr. Mason, an Englishman, is seen as an escape from Coulibri and a way to regain her white social status so she can be acknowledged as white. However, when men in the novel get married, their wealth increases, allowing them to have access to their wives' inheritance. For both Antoinette and Annette, womanhood is closely associated with a kind of dependence on the closest man, diminishing their power. When Antoinette and Annette marry white Englishmen, hoping to alleviate their fears of being outsiders, the men eventually abandon and betray them. From a racial perspective, power structures in *Wide Sargasso Sea* have a way of appearing to go in reverse. Instead of regaining

social status, they lose their identity. Antoinette is othered by not meeting the expectations for women, by the men around her, and by her racial and social position, leading to trauma.

But for Antoinette, her racial and gender unhomeliness is insurmountable. In this culture made up from elsewhere, the concept of home is in question. *Wide Sargasso Sea* explores both what unites women of different races and what divides them. There are moments of unity across racial divides as when Antoinette is playing with Tia, the daughter of a black servant. Tia is Antoinette's only childhood friend, and the two girls are doubles. Almost like sisters when they play, they are mirror reflections of each other. But their difference always asserts itself, and they cannot be joined in bridging the racial divide.

Tia and Antoinette would spend all day together walking through the plantation, swimming, and sharing green bananas that Tia would prepare and cook over the fire. Tia's betrayal of Antoinette occurs when she makes a bet that Antoinette would not successfully make a somersault in the pool. When Antoinette does complete her somersault, Tia tells her that she did not do well and steals the pennies that Christophine gave to Antoinette. The friendship between Antoinette and Tia ends abruptly when Antoinette calls Tia a derogatory name: "'Keep them then, you cheating nigger,' I said, for I was tired, and the water I had swallowed made me feel sick. 'I can get more if I want to'" (14). Antoinette then hears Tia saying: "Plenty white people in Jamaica. Real white people, they got old money. They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us. Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than

white nigger” (14). What is complicated and part of Antoinette’s unhomeliness is that she is not the unchallenged, dominant white person.

Beginning as friends, their respective cultures are compromised with the use of stereotypical insults, ending with staring at each other, creating this mirroring effect. This is evident when after swimming, Antoinette wears Tia’s ragged dress, while Tia defiantly wears Antoinette’s dress. Another example is also evident when a rock is thrown by Tia, causing blood to stream down Antoinette’s face—reflected by Tia’s tears streaming down her face. This type of reversal in the lives of Tia and Antoinette is beyond their control, and cultural identity can cause them to hurt one another, even though they are not proud of themselves for their actions. And the trauma of the identity crisis and racial inequality hurts them both.

Another facet of Antoinette’s identity problems stems from her isolation and gender entrapment. *Wide Sargasso Sea* uses examples of animals to convey this through metaphor. During the first part of the novel, Antoinette finds a rotting, poisoned horse that is swarming with flies, belonging to her mother, Annette. Annette warns her daughter, ““Now we are marooned, my mother said, ‘now what will become of us?’” (Rhys 10). Antoinette’s discovery of the dead horse is the first indicator and a foreshadowing moment of Antoinette’s abandonment by her family and horrifying end. Another example of this is Annette’s beloved parrot, Coco, her most prized possession. Coco is the only thing Annette tries to rescue from the fire at Coulibri Estate, which demonstrates that women are held captive and without voice: “Our parrot was called, a green parrot. He didn’t talk very well, he could say *Qui est la? Qui est la?* And answer himself *Che Coco, Che Coco*. After Mr. Mason, Annette’s second husband, clipped his

wings he grew bad tempered” (25). This notion of the bird not being able to talk very well clearly echoes the idea that women do not have the ability to speak in a dominating male society and Mr. Mason’s disturbing reason for clipping Coco’s wings suggests the dominant, white English male needing to be in control. More importantly Coco’s repetition in questioning, *Qui est la?*, meaning “Who is there?” incorporates the troubling issues of identity to both Antoinette and Annette. In addition, Coco’s death by falling from the burning house foreshadows Antoinette’s own death at the end of the novel.

Antoinette’s final identity crisis occurs when she marries Rochester and becomes totally dependent on him. After she meets Rochester, the narrative switches to his point of view in the second and longest part of the book. Rochester’s arranged marriage to Antoinette and arrival in Jamaica is foretold in Part One by Mr. Mason. Rochester is on a mission in getting his fortune through a Creole heiress. Using Rochester’s point of view allows Rhys to fully describe the effect of the exotic Jamaican culture and landscape, and how this impacts the newly arrived white English people. Rochester feels a strong sense of being overwhelmed by the bright colors and rich scents. Upon meeting Antoinette, suddenly he becomes ill, which is a foreshadowing of his obsession with her and his troubling future. Rochester arrives in Jamaica with the hope that his position in society would be financially secured in his marriage, but he quickly feels that there are elements of the marriage arrangement hidden from him, as seen in his description of Antoinette: “Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English of European either” (39). He begins to notice that people are gossiping and whispering about him with an expression of ridicule or pity. However, time is limited for him to assess the situation, finding himself already married to Antoinette before the end of his culture shock:

And when did I begin to notice all this about my wife Antoinette? After we left Spanish Town I suppose. Or did I notice it before and refuse to admit what I saw? Not that I had much time to notice anything. I was married a month after I arrived in Jamaica and for nearly three weeks of that time I was in bed with fever. (39)

In all of its threatening power and romantic splendor, this is how the character of Antoinette is represented in the novel. This attracts and repels Rochester because Antoinette is unlike anyone he has ever known. Because of this, he hates her when he falls under the spell of her charms. Like her, he too, feels a sense of unhomeliness with his identity being compromised, a feeling of being exiled from England. This feeling causes Rochester to hate something he doesn't understand. Rochester, too, feels alienated and bombarded by its beauty and excess, whereas Antoinette and her servants can comprehend the meaning in their surroundings. In Rochester's mind, his anxiousness and desire in locking Antoinette in the attic in his home in England will allow Antoinette to become "only a memory to be avoided" (103).

The only character that is true with her race and identity is Christophine. The reader can better understand the characters' unhomeliness through Christophine's strong homeliness and secure identity. Christophine was a wedding present to Annette from her first husband. In contrast to Annette, Christophine is a commodified woman, but her strong self-willed personality allows her to demonstrate complete independence from men and their untrustworthy motives: "I thank my God. I keep my money. I don't give it to no worthless man" (66). Christophine's voice of authority explains Antoinette and her world to the reader. Like Antoinette, Christophine is an outsider and a black woman

experiencing a “double-consciousness.” According to W. E. B. DuBois’ *The Soul of Double Consciousness*, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (qtd. in Bressler 210).

Christophine lives in this world twofold—a white world necessary for survival (as a servant to Antoinette) and a black world (being part of the servants and living her life free and unmarried outside her workplace). In addition, she is an outside because she is from Martinique and not from Jamaica—dressing and speaking differently from the natives of Jamaica. Christophine lives her life by accepting the burdens of reality of what it means to be an Afro-Caribbean woman in a world that is not racially accepting, even though she is a free woman.

Christophine crosses boundaries of race and gender, and her assertiveness and authority helps her to transcend double-consciousness. Christophine plays a part in giving Antoinette advice in the second part of the novel: ““Speak to your husband calm and cool, tell him about your mother and all what happened at Coulibri and why she get sick and what they do to her. Don’t bawl at the man and don’t make crazy faces. Don’t cry either. Crying no good with him. Speak nice and make him understand”” (69).

However, the idea of Afro-Caribbean and European womanhood clashes in the conversation of Christophine and Antoinette. Antoinette cannot break free from her husband, on whom she is dependent financially, whereas Christophine urges independence. Because of this, Christophine feels she is at home, yet like Annette’s bird, Coco, Rochester has clipped Antoinette’s wings. Christophine’s assertive role increases in protecting Antoinette from Rochester when Antoinette’s sanity begins to be

challenged. She does this by letting him know that everyone is aware of his reason for marrying Antoinette: her wealth. She also accuses Rochester of mentally breaking Antoinette down due to his jealousy of the way Antoinette lived her life before meeting him. Christophine continues her confrontation with Rochester, asking him why he abandons Antoinette when she became obsessed, and why he makes Antoinette love him. After Antoinette begs Christophine to help her restore her marriage, Christophine tells her to leave Rochester: “When man don’t love you, more you try, more he hate you, man like that” (65). All of this leads to Christophine’s doubting Rochester and the existence of England, which echoes an earlier conversation with Antoinette and Christophine about whether England exist:

I don’t say I don’t *believe*, I say I don’t *know*, I know what I see with my eyes and I never see it. Besides I ask myself is this place like they tell us? Some say one thing, some different, I hear it cold to freeze your bones and they thief your money, clever like the devil. You have money in your pocket, you look again and bam! No money. Why you want to go to this cold place? If there is this place at all, I never see it, that is on thing for sure. (67)

This doubt from Christophine urges Antoinette to escape from Rochester, but Antoinette is never rescued from the trauma that she can *see*.

The final part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* gives readers the final result of trauma and lack of identity. The narrative voice of the outsider, Grace Poole, is Rhys’ focal point. Antoinette’s voice is briefly taken away by Rochester when they are in Jamaica. However, when they move to England in the third part of the novel, Antoinette’s experience in Rochester’s narrative is now over: her voice begins to come back. What

this means is that with Rochester's narrative no longer in the picture, he now plays an eerie voyeuristic role in looking at Antoinette and what she thinks about her cardboard imprisonment: "When I woke, it was a different sea. Colder. It was that night, I think, that we changed course and lost our way to England. This cardboard house where I walk at night is not England" (107). What happens next is when Antoinette overhears a conversation by Poole about Rochester's sexual encounter with a servant in their house in Coulibri. Being an outcast during most interactions, Antoinette has never been invited to share her own version of her opinions: "So there is still the sound of whispering that I have heard all my life, but these are different voices" (107).

Antoinette is now alienated and loses her sanity while being held in captivity in the attic in Thornfield Hall, and she is desperate to find a mirror to search for her existence in a reflection of herself. While looking in the mirror, Antoinette expresses her feelings of being confused. An example of this confusion is Antoinette's loss of memory when her stepbrother, Richard Mason, comes to visit. Although Rhys adapted this part from *Jane Eyre*, the perspective has changed. This scene no longer exists from Jane's point of view seeing Antoinette as a monster. Rhys brings Antoinette's voice back by allowing her to reveal her confused state. The extent of her fragmentation comes to light when she has no recollection of attacking Richard Mason with a knife. The very fact that Mason does not recognize Antoinette is the most troubling part of this visit: "I remember now that he did not recognize me. I saw him look at me and his eyes went first to the one corner and then to another, not finding what they expected. He looked at me and spoke to me as though I were a stranger" (109). Antoinette cannot see her reflection in order to

confirm her identity, slowly becoming Bertha Mason—Rochester’s creation and Antoinette’s transformation to madness.

The horror that Richard Mason witnesses in Antoinette makes him realize that he has seen a similar madness in her mother. A poignant moment in the novel is Antoinette’s attachment to her red dress when she believes that her dress is hidden away from her. She believes that Richard Mason would remember her if she is wearing it: “‘Have you hidden my red dress too? If I’d been wearing that he’d would have known me’” (109). The red dress is an important connection in reminding Antoinette of her past, so that she can imaginatively smell the Caribbean landscape: “The scent that came from the dress was very faint at first, then it grew stronger. The smell of vetivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain” (109). When she stares and touches her dress, she begins losing herself in her memories of the natural world of the Caribbean: “‘As soon as I turned the key I saw it hanging, the colour of fire and sunset. ‘The colour of flamboyant flowers. ‘If you are buried under a flamboyant tree,’ I said, ‘your soul is lifted up when it flowers. Everyone wants that’” (109). Beauty and passion have a way to Antoinette, but the trauma steals them from her. The color red is a symbol of destruction and passion, which leads her to her captivity. When it comes to wealth and time, they do not mean anything to Antoinette. She has no concern for these things since she lost all of her wealth in marrying Rochester. In addition, time is not relevant to Antoinette because in her mind it does not matter. The exception is her red dress—the only memory of time that she is aware of that makes her feel at home: “‘On the contrary,’ I said, ‘only I know how long I have been here. Nights and days and days and nights, hundreds of them

slipping through my fingers. But that does not matter. Time has no meaning. But something you can touch and hold like my red dress, that has a meaning. Where is it?””(109). Antoinette’s red dress is an important metaphor that brings her back to her beginning and eventually ending with fire: “But I looked at the dress on the floor and it was as if the fire had spread across the room. It was beautiful and it reminded me of something I must do” (111). The repetition of language with regards to dreams and mirrors plays an important role throughout the novel, leaving the audience with important questions of identity, which are central to Rhys’s characters.

Antoinette’s reality of that illusion is something she cannot see or touch: “There is no looking glass here and I don’t know what I am like now. I remember watching myself brush my hair and how my eyes looked back at me. The girl I saw was myself yet not quite myself. Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. But the glass was between us—hard, cold and misted over with my breath” (107). In desperation, Antoinette looks for her own mirror reflection by envisioning peace within herself in solving her identity, which has been eluding her during her entire life, but never finds it. Rhys grants Antoinette a final triumphant moment by preventing her fatal fall foretold in *Jane Eyre*. To ease her pain and suffering by defiantly enacting her dream, Antoinette finally speaks, forcing Rochester to listen. Her burning of Thornfield Hall is her voice of rage and a way of symbolically fighting her oppression in her marriage; she burns Rochester’s house to free herself, just like the former slaves burn her own house.

Wide Sargasso Sea uses repetition to depict Antoinette’s anxiety about being watched and followed. When she dreams of looking at herself in the mirror but sees herself as a ghost, this horrifies Antoinette. Rhys creates scrutiny as the audience looks

at Antoinette from different viewpoints of Grace Poole, Rochester, Antoinette's—and even the reader's viewpoint of *Jane Eyre*. This narrative continues to grow outward like a web in providing many competitive voices and perspectives. What this means is that the trauma of anxiety that Antoinette suffers is that she is constantly being watched.

An example of this oppression through trauma is found in “‘New Words, New Everything:’ Fragmentation and Trauma in Jean Rhys,” where Maren Linett focuses on Rhys' characters' powerlessness as a function of trauma. One scene that Linett discusses is a repetitive dream of Antoinette about her following a man in the forest with a face “black with hatred,” “I follow him, sick with fear but I make no effort to save myself; if anyone were to try to save me, I would refuse. This must happen” (qtd. in Linett 443-444). Linett argues from a psychoanalytic perspective that traumatic repetition serves a purpose of highlighting a series of painful events that entrap the traumatized. Antoinette makes herself an accomplice to her own trauma by choosing to be helpless at crucial points in her life--she should not have married Rochester, she should not accept his infidelity, she should listen to her heart, and refuse to go to England. Linett's interpretation of Antoinette's behavior explains this as “a helpless acceptance of the repetition of trauma” (458). Antoinette struggles with coming to terms with the trauma she is experiencing in her life, with an expectation of abuse of not only her life but her mother's as well. Linett points out that: “Helplessness is a condition of trauma in that the fewer means a victim has to try to save herself from a life-or body-threatening experience, the more likely she is to be traumatized by that experience” (Linett 439). Even the title, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, alludes to the unhomeliness of the text and trauma of the natural and human conditions.

In the Norton Critical Edition of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, an essay, “The Sargasso Sea,” by Rachel L. Carson, who was not a literary critic but a marine biologist describes the Sargasso Sea: “It is so different from any other place on earth that it may well be considered a definite geographic region” (117). Unique from the Atlantic Ocean, it exists “in the heart of the Atlantic” (119). Carson describes further that: “The Sargasso is a place forgotten by the winds, undisturbed by the strong flow of waters that girdle it as with a river” (Carson 117). Carson further argues: “The Sargasso, with all its legendary terrors for sailing ships, is a creation of the great current of the North Atlantic that encircle it and bring into it the millions of tons of floating sargassum weed from which the place derives its name, and all the weird assemblage of animals that live in the weed” (117). Carson continues to describe other animals, plants, and organisms as “needing no roots or holdfast for attachment” (118). Without any roots, there is no stability. Without a home, there is no stability. Finally, Carson writes that “for the plants that reach the calm of the Sargasso, there is virtual immortality” and that “only plants that die are the ones that drift into unfavorable conditions around the edges of the Sargasso or are picked up by outward moving currents” (118-119).

What this suggests is that, like the Sargasso Sea, Antoinette drifts into unfavorable conditions of unhomeliness in England. This means that, perhaps, Antoinette drifts in her search for the hybridized home—a place where the varied elements that are shaping her life can together exist. This would never be. As the setting of unhomeliness, the sea in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is an important factor in the novel, drawing attention to Antoinette’s identity crisis, foreshadowing how everything begins to clash: “They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their

ranks” (Rhys 9). However, danger brews in all the scenes and the tone set by Rhys has a dark and eerie appeal in the West Indian landscape—the beginning of racial violence. As the Caribbean is seen twofold as a threatening paradise, Carson informs readers of not only the historical perspective of the ocean and the complexity of the variety of life within it, but also evokes the importance of connections between the ocean and human beings by showing the extent of the clash between the British and the Caribbean and the harsh effects they had on the region. As this is illustrated through the experiences of Antoinette’s family, and the degeneration and the complex English colonial lifestyle is represented by Coulibri Estate as the failure of the colonial empire: “All Coulibri Estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery—why should *anybody* work? This never saddened me. I did not remember the place when it was prosperous” (11).

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette’s entrapment in binaries, her inability to escape racial identity categories, is the fact that she is a Creole, born in the West Indies of European and African descent in the English Caribbean. Antoinette is neither *this* or *that*, and her struggle with unhomeliness in finding a rightful place in the world lies not only with her race, gender, and identity but also as a colonization by her husband as well as renaming her, Bertha, to fit his idea of her, since Rochester epitomizes this clash with nature when he can’t adjust to the island climate and must return to England: “This place is very beautiful but my illness has left me too exhausted to appreciate it fully” (Rhys 63). His unease is symbolized in the descriptions of dying, rotten, and dead animals that are in abundance in the first two parts of the novel, which creates parallel between the natural world and the characters in it. As the narrator, Antoinette’s trauma is her being

occupied with decay and morbidity. In addition, the atmosphere of sickness in the Caribbean portrayed in *Wide Sargasso Sea* reflects a negative domination of former black slaves by whites and of women by men. The trauma of repression blows up into fits, fever, eventually leading up to madness that the action of the body speaks louder than the mouth does.

The power of trauma runs like a thread throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*. From race, gender and social class, Antoinette experiences a wide range of othering, which is often reflected in her narrative. Although Rhys' novel is set in the mid nineteenth century, in style, it is very close to the present in how it is using a psychological, first-person narrator that lacks structure, while philosophically being disruptive, leaving the audience with unanswered questions of trauma and identity, failing to provide any answers or healing.

The Storytellers' Trauma:

A Place to Call Home in Caribbean Literature

A chill goes through her, for she feels it in her bones, the future is now beginning. By the time it is over, it will be the past, and she doesn't want to be the only one left to tell their story.

—*In the Time of the Butterflies*

Chapter Two: Trauma Too Close to Home in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*

Similar to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in which Rhys portrays the mental and emotional fall of Antoinette Cosway, Julia Alvarez in her novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, evokes sympathy from the reader engaging with the hearts and minds of the Mirabal sisters while the narrative builds to its tragic end in which three of the four sisters were killed by the Trujillo regime. *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *In the Time of the Butterflies* both end with death and tragedy. Both Dedé Mirabal, the protagonist and surviving sister in Alvarez's novel, and Antoinette are heroines of a different sort; however, in contrast to Dedé, Antoinette is a far cry from the conventional heroines of the twentieth-century. Antoinette is exiled within her own family—a “white cockroach” to her servants, and a stranger in the eyes of Rochester (Rhys 13), whereas Dedé has *never* left home but, nonetheless, feels homeless because guilt and trauma make her feel she is living in exile. Because of this, Dedé, like Antoinette, never finds peace within herself, although the repetitive working out of the trauma through telling her story brings her closer to peace.

The author of *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Julia Alvarez, like her characters, lived in the Dominican Republic under the dictator, Rafael Trujillo. She was born on

March 27, 1950 in New York City. Her parents moved their family to the Dominican Republic shortly after Alvarez was born, to join an underground movement to topple Trujillo. They left the Dominican Republic and moved back to New York when Alvarez was 10 years old. The Alvarez family suddenly had to flee, escaping possible death and imprisonment because the movement had been discovered. Alvarez understands the trauma of leaving one's country, not being able to escape the past, and the difficulty of feeling at home.

In the Time of the Butterflies challenges how Dominican Republic society views oppression and treatment of women and men, addressing the numerous murders of the Dominican people and the difficulty of dictatorship as causing unhomeliness. The home that Dominicans know has turned into an oppressive environment. From 1930 to 1961, Trujillo ruled the island nation. Defined by greed, his dictatorship demonstrates an unspeakable brutality as well as an inflexible control over the Dominican people. *Las Mariposas*, or The Butterflies, are two important code names, belonging to Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa Mirabal—key members of an underground movement to depose Trujillo. The sisters' experience with Trujillo haunts them throughout their lives. Through their different narrative styles, each sisters' unique personality traits come to life.

Alvarez provides a array of narrative techniques in each chapter. The first three chapters are narrated each by Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa. For instance, there is a third-person limited omniscient narrator in the first, fifth, and ninth chapter that focuses on Dede; the second, fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth chapters are told in first person by Patria and Minerva respectively; Maria Teresa's chapters are also in first

person but are written in the form of a diary. The family relationship between the four sisters is the heart of the plot, making Alvarez's novel a family drama. Examining each sister's point of view helps the reader understand all of their strengths and weaknesses. This fleshes them out as complete human beings and not martyrs.

Patria Mercedes Mirabal Reyes is the most religious and the oldest of the Mirabal sisters. Her chapters are like memoir-style narrative, using figurative language of natural imagery. regarding both her life and entrapment. As the narrator, Patria describes the way she believes in God, loving "everything that lives" automatically, "like a shoot inching its way towards the light" (Alvarez 44). When Patria was young she has her heart set on becoming a nun, but that soon changes after she notices a violent storm—an important metaphor for a complex situation to fulfill a more earthly calling than the purity of a nun: "Entering that sombre study, I could see just outside the window the brilliant red flames lit in every tree, and beyond, some threatening thunderclouds" (45). Her calling arrives when she meets and marries Pedrito Gonzalez at the age of sixteen: "I had seen the next best thing to Jesus, my earthly groom" (48). At first, like her sister, Dede, Patria is against the underground movement.

However, when Patria is pregnant with her third child, she discovers that Minerva rebels against Trujillo and is no longer going to church, claiming that a few priests are on Trujillo's payroll: "It was dangerous the way she was speaking out against the government. Even in public, she'd throw a jab at our president or at the church for supporting him" (51). Unbeknownst to Patria, her third pregnancy would be a sign that she would face trauma head on when she has a stillborn baby: "Well, the first two bellies were simple, all I craved were certain foods, but this belly had me worrying all the time

about my sister Minerva” (51). Patria is traumatized by the shock of losing her baby, which eventually leads her to losing her faith—something only Minerva realizes. Minerva notices Patria looking at a photograph of Trujillo next to a picture of Jesus, saying: “They’re a pair, aren’t they” (53)? Although Patria’s family has not been hurt by Trujillo personally, she blames Jesus for the loss of her baby. While Patria reflects on the horrible things Trujillo has done, she has a hard time understanding why God would allow such a man to do these horrific things. The juxtaposition of the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd beside the required portrait of Trujillo symbolize that the Lord and the Benefactor were at least visually on equal standing, even if they were not in the hearts and minds of the people. When Patria challenges God’s goodness and position as a loving Father who could allow his children to suffer, the faces of Jesus and Trujillo merge (Alvarez 53). The line between a God who seems to be silent and powerless against a man who seems to be all seeing and all knowing is blurred to the point that no one can see truth or hope in his or her situation.

What this means to Patria is that she looks at Trujillo as a God-like figure, playing with the minds of the people. In addition, this makes Trujillo omniscient due to the fact that his agents are his disciples—spying on everyone in the country, controlling what is being said and done, and how the people are being provided for in the country.

However, Patria regains her faith, which manifests in a different way that would impact the rest of her life as she hears the Virgin speak to her directly: “And I heard her answer me with the coughs and cries and whispers of the crowd: *Here, Patria Mercedes, I’m here, all around you. I’ve already more than appeared*” (59). From this point onward, Patria joins the movement with Minerva because she witnesses the young men in

the rebellion being killed, at a religious retreat, and joins the rebellion out of a sense of mothering and caretaking for the young people of the country, creating a better life for them. Through the narrative style, the reader gains insight to Patria's religious personality in all its complexity, including its flaws.

Maria Argentina Minerva Mirabal Reyes is known for her outspoken and rebellious nature in the novel. Told in first person in her sarcastic voice, the second chapter entitled "Complications" shows how important freedom is to Minerva, both freedom from patriarchal control and freedom from Trujillo's oppressive regime. Her desire to leave home is symbolic of the overall feeling of the lack of home by the Dominicans. In addition, Minerva's freedom is an important revelation when she attests that she and her sisters had to get their father's consent for everything they want to do: "The four of us had to ask permission for everything: to walk to the fields to see the tobacco filling out; to go to the lagoon and dip our feet on a hot day; to stand in front of the store and pet the horses as the men loaded up their wagons with supplies" (11). Minerva's father represents the patriarchal control of women that existed before Trujillo's regime. Minerva is astonished as to how she and her sisters were able to successfully persuade their father to allow them to go away to school: "I don't know who talked Papa into sending us away to school. Seems like it would have taken the same angel who announced to Mary that she was pregnant with God and got her to be glad about it" (11). Another example of Minerva's desire for freedom is when she reflects on her observation of the family's rabbits in their pens, with a feeling that she was like them: "Sometimes, watching the rabbits in their pens, I'd think, I'm no different from you, poor

things” (11). However, when Minerva tries setting one of the rabbits free, the rabbit would not move, and she soon realizes that the rabbit is nothing like her.

Since Patria wants to be a nun, she is given permission from their father to attend Inmaculada Concepcion, and Minerva asks if she could go with her. Minerva becomes defiant when her father asks her to stay behind to help out in his store, but Dedé volunteers to stay behind instead. Minerva’s freedom not only means leaving her home—a small world—for the capital but also gaining some personal freedom that leads her to learn how the whole country lacks freedom: “And that’s how I got free. I don’t mean just going to a sleepaway school on a train with a trunkful of new things. I mean in my head after I got to Inmaculada and met Sinita and saw what happened to Lina and realized that I’d just left a small cage to go into a bigger one, the size of our whole country” (13). Through Sinita and Lina, Minerva feels their trauma.

While at school at a new pupils’ meeting, Minerva first meets Sinita Perozo and the two quickly become friends. Minerva’s *complications* with trauma is forever compromised twofold—emotionally and physically. This complication involves Minerva learning about the evil of Trujillo on the night she begins her period. She feels trauma physically because she is coming of age as a woman and becomes emotionally drained when Sinita tells her story about how all of her uncles and her brother were murdered at the hands of Trujillo: “The aching in my belly was like wash being wrung so tightly, there wasn’t a drop of water left in the clothes” (19). Minerva’s physical coming of age mirrors the changes her country is going through.

In the section of the chapter, “*¡Pobrecita!*” Minerva also meets Lina Lovaton at school and witnesses another destruction by Trujillo. He took Lina away by giving a

donation to the convent in exchange for her. Lina was sent to live in his mansion. Sadly, Lina became pregnant and Trujillo's wife attempts to attack Lina with a knife. Trujillo was forced to send Lina to Miami where she would be safe, but she is living alone.

Minerva is oblivious to the extent of the damage Trujillo can cause until it is too late when one her classmates' lives is tainted: "The country people around the farm say until the nail is hit, it doesn't believe in the hammer" (19). When Minerva considers what has become of Lina Lovaton, figurative language is used once again hearkening back to the country: "Downstairs in the dark parlor, the clock was striking the hours like hammer blows" (24). Minerva's language continues the violent imagery throughout her sections of the novel.

At the start of the sixth chapter, unlike her sisters, Minerva didn't pay too much attention to boys: "It's true that I never paid much attention to the ones around here. But it wasn't that I didn't like them. I just didn't know I was looking at what I wanted" (84). Minerva does not know what she wants, often referring to herself as if she were sleeping. But she wakes up when she meets a revolutionary, Virgilio Morales (Lio), and tries to decide if the revolution is more important than romance. Deep down inside, however, Minerva desires both: "The givens, all I'd been taught, fell away like so many covers when you sit up in bed" (85). The irony of this conceit is that Minerva is not the stereotypical woman of a fairy tale, waiting for her life to begin once a man comes and wakes her up. Minerva was not in love with Lio but was devastated about his leaving the country without saying goodbye. Three years after graduating from convent school, Minerva is bored and becomes jealous of her friends, Elsa and Sinita, who are at a university in the capital. That soon changes for Minerva when she wants to pursue a law

degree and practice law afterwards. From here, Minerva has another interaction with Trujillo that eventually establishes trouble for the family moving onward.

It begins with the Discovery Day Dance, a dance party in Trujillo's honor that Minerva and her family are personally invited to, and how her independence gets the better of her. Minerva is bothered when she notices paper fans being thrown by Trujillo to the girls, with the *Virgencita* on one side and Trujillo on the other—a theme of Trujillo's conflation with God: "Sometimes it was El Jefe's probing eyes, sometimes it was the Virgin's pretty face I couldn't stand to look at" (90). A rainstorm starts shortly their arrival, mirroring the events of the party. Minerva shows defiance when she dances with Trujillo, soon slapping him when he tries to seduce her. Slapping Trujillo is like a thunderclap that begins the storm: "and then the rain comes down hard, slapping sheets of it" (99-100). To make matters worse, two tragic things happen: her family commits a crime by leaving the dance early before Trujillo does, and Minerva accidentally leaves her purse containing letters from Lio, that would be considered treason. Minerva defiantly steals a decorative ship for her baby sister, Maria Teresa, who was too young to attend the dance. With the family escaping the rain, the ship moves safely through the rainstorm. From a metaphorical standpoint, Trujillo can be easily looked at as the captain of a ship that is doomed, with a proper protocol of the captain leaving last. However, at this time, the regime is very strong, declaring that the person who must be allowed to leave first is the nation's captain. With this in mind, the resistance is just the beginning. A breaking point for Minerva is when her life is shattered and challenged when she is denied by Trujillo the license to practice law upon graduating law school. She is the first to join and start the militant resistance movement against Trujillo after marrying another

revolutionary, Manolo Tavaréz Justo, becoming Butterfly # 1. Her narrative style reveals her trauma but also the complexities of her identity.

Antonia Maria Teresa Mirabal Reyes, known as Maria Teresa or Mate, is the youngest who looks up to her older sister, Minerva. In a manner of speaking, it is fair to say that Minerva is Mate's voice and medium, since the diaries are gifts from Minerva. These entries create a far more fragmented narrative than do the chapters narrated by her sisters. Like Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Alvarez's novel also deals the narrative of Mate's traumatic repetition and fragmentary memories, serving a purpose of a person's fate with a series of painful events that is inevitable. In addition, through Mate's diary entries, the audience learns many important events that occurred in her family's life—Patria's stillborn child, Minerva's involvement with the movement, and the death of their father. Mate's diary narrates the effects of trauma in her life, and it contains drawings revealing her psychological and emotional progression. For instance, Mate draws her new shoes, Minerva's new swimsuit and purse in her first journal (35); a drawing of a ring, Minerva's house, and a bomb in the second journal; and a drawing of the cell she shares with Minerva in the third (229). These drawings show how Mate moves from an innocent girl to a political prisoner. Mate is the most playful and seemingly the most carefree of the sisters until the trauma of recurring dreams and her prison experiences physically and emotionally force her to mature quickly, ending her complacency of being the sweet sister.

Interestingly, death is prevalent throughout the seventh chapter, with entries from Mate's diary starting from 1953 to 1958. The seventh chapter begins with her father's funeral dated December 15, 1953. Mate's recurring dream revolves around seeing her

father in his coffin underneath her torn wedding dress. In time, she begins seeing most of the men she has known in place of her father at the bottom of the coffin, where she uses language calling death to mind: “I feel like dying myself!” (118). Another example is when she returns back to her diary on July 3, writing: “Diary, I know you have probably thought me dead all these months” (127). This dream can be considered a premonition of bad times for the sisters, causing Mate to fear for their safety. Like in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, dreams and repetition (as of the white dress) as well as the sense of doom or menace pervade both novels. Tragically, while the lives of the men that appeared in her dream were spared, ironically, it is the sisters themselves who succumb at the hands of Trujillo’s regime. Mate’s dream works as an omen in a way of foretelling the troubling times ahead, but it is not certain who will face those difficulties. However, unlike Patria who joins to protect others and Minerva who joins to fight for justice, Mate joins the resistance movement when she falls in love with Leandro Guzman, code name, Palomino. Through Guzman, she finds out that Minerva and Manolo are also part of the revolution. When Mate joins the movement, she feels for the first time that there is purpose in her life—highlighting her growth. Mate’s eyes are wide open to the reality and struggles of life under Trujillo’s regime.

In the eleventh chapter, Mate and Minerva are imprisoned for political reasons. Mate’s incarceration represents the difficulty in remaining strong in the face of confinement and torture: “The fear is the worse part. Every time I hear footsteps coming down the hall, or the clink of the key turning in the lock, I’m tempted to curl up in the corner like a hurt animal, whimpering, wanting to be safe” (226-227). Mate’s narrative includes little asides in parentheses. She discusses how most of the women break down

and cry, for instance, by explaining: “The alternative is freezing yourself up, never showing what you’re feeling, never letting on what you’re thinking. (Like Dinorah. Jailface, the girls call her.) Then one day, you’re out of here, free, only to discover you’ve locked yourself up and thrown away the key somewhere too deep inside your heart to fish it out” (231). Dinorah is a nonpolitical prisoner, who is always mean and lacks emotion, but Minerva understands that Dinorah is an oppressed victim of a corrupt system. Mate puts herself down for breaking down in her cell, but Minerva reminds her that breakdowns are the best for coping and healing. The alternative is bottling inside sadness and hatred. Once a person is free from prison, often times they are found in another prison of their own making. Another example with the use of parentheses is when Mate is questioned the second time regarding the movement: “The second time, they didn’t even threaten that much except to say that it was too bad a pretty lady would have to grow old in prison. Miss out on...(A bunch a lewd comments I won’t bother to repeat here)” (232). The audience understands that Mate’s inclusion of parenthetical notes means her diary must be hidden from the guards, reflecting secrecy. Throughout this chapter, Mate uses rhetorical questions. Although this is Mate’s narration, she uses these sections as a special window in asking herself questions without speaking too loudly: “And it’s certain now—Leandro is not here with the rest of us. Oh God, where could he be?” (236). Mate’s use of exclamation points shows the intensity of her emotions. For instance, she writes the date after her arraignment: “Wednesday, May 25 (125 days-1,826 days to go-Oh, God!)” (242). The following entry, she writes, “Wednesday, June 15 (I’ve decided to stop counting-it’s just too depressing!)” (243). Mate learns that she and Minerva are sentenced a five-year prison term. Mate cries upon

hearing her sentence, whereas Minerva's reaction is to laugh. The intimate bond between Mate and Minerva grows strong and evident in this chapter, and throughout the novel respectively. A poignant moment occurs during the Crucifix Plot where Minerva refuses to turn in her crucifix to one of the prison guards as symbol of her solidarity with the Dominican people. Voices from the cells is heard throughout the corridor crying out *¡Viva la Mariposa!* as Minerva marches down the hall to solitary confinement. Upon witnessing Minerva's bravery and strength, Mate blossoms into a *Mariposa*: "Tears came to my eyes. Something big and powerful spread its wings inside me. Courage, I told myself. And this time, I felt it" (238).

Finally, Dedé Belgica Adela Mirabal Reyes is the only surviving sister who refuses to join the movement. After her sisters' deaths, Dedé is forced into martyrdom having to speak for Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa, to keep their memories alive—a medium for the butterflies. For the rest of her life, Dedé would live in their childhood home, help raise her own children as well as her sisters' children, and share to the world their story. Sadly, on November 25, 1960, Trujillo's agents ambushed their car and the sisters, except for Dedé, were beaten to death.

Since their deaths, Patria, Minerva, and Maria Teresa have been recognized as becoming symbols of strength and courage in their country. Alvarez tells the story of trauma of the sisters and how they are national heroes. Alvarez brings to an American audience the Mirabals' story by personally involving herself in her work in writing it. Her connections to this story go deep because her own parents were also involved in the underground movement, fleeing to the United States before being arrested. Alvarez's voice provides fictional voices to the Mirabal sisters, depicting their lives through the

voices she creates for them. Alvarez includes Dedé Mirabal, the protagonist and surviving sister in the novel, and a voice of the present reflecting on the past. Through her characters' trauma, Alvarez stresses the importance of remembering the past, even though it is painful, while struggling to be happy in the present and future. In addition, Alvarez stresses an important need to view people not necessarily as superhuman, but as human beings fighting injustice through their own fears.

The narration shows readers that these are complicated women, more than just one-dimensional heroes. Dedé's story is never publicly told, and she is condemned to constantly telling her sisters' story in public. It is important to Alvarez to give Dedé her voice as well, showing readers how trauma impacts her life. The role that Dedé has to play in preserving her sisters' memories also informs readers that her choosing not to fight creates separation between her and her sisters. Dedé desperately searches for her identity and her place to call home while telling her story not only through her own eyes but her sisters' eyes as well. From a narrative perspective and out of all the sisters, Alvarez made Dedé more engaging and complicated in the novel due to the fact she did not give her life for an important cause. Because of this, Dedé's unhomeliness demonstrates a fine line between courage and cowardice. Dedé's cowardice is her own doing by giving in to her husband, Jaimito, who adamantly does not allow her to be involved with her sisters' revolutionary activities: "She had always been the docile middle child, used to following the lead...Miss Sonrisa, cheerful, compliant. Her life had gotten bound up with a domineering man, and so she shrank from the challenge her sisters were giving her" (Alvarez 177). Her guilt of not supporting her sisters, of course, intensifies her feeling of unhomeliness, her sense that she does not belong. And through

Dedé, interestingly, Alvarez shows how failures of courage can lead to unhomeliness: Dedé's refusal to oppose Trujillo makes her feel responsible for her sisters' deaths, maintaining authenticity without falling into the trap of being representative, or stereotypical of a whole culture. In other words, by telling her story, Dedé can talk back to the stereotype of the submissive Latina who is silent, giving her character authenticity. Dedé seems *real* to readers. This is painfully personal for Alvarez because through Dedé's own experience with unhomeliness, her novel is an inspiration of her own reflection of a ten-year-old girl escaping from her own country with her family as survivors, whereas the Mirabal sisters are murdered. Alvarez, like Dedé, feels less "Dominican" than the sisters because she did not suffer.

For Alvarez, it is very personal on so many levels because she uses her writing as a way to depict characters haunted by trauma and as a means to work out her own trauma. Elaine Savory in her essay, "Ex/Isle: Separation, Memory, and Desire in Caribbean Women's Writing," describes Caribbean women's writing as a space to work out trauma and explains what it means not only to feel at home, but what trauma and narrative structure mean to her: "This creative space which we call Caribbean women's writing is not and should not be predictable or easily definable" (Savory 169). Perhaps, this creative space that Savory is referring to is *home*—a personal endeavor as she explains: "Caribbean women's writing of whatever ethnic affiliation, is also part of that history in the sense that the construction of subjectivity, desire and love, is achieved in the shadow of consciousness of four hundred years of oppression and resistance" (170). What Savory is suggesting is if anyone can remember and appreciate the harsh and horrible historical realities and experiences that occurred in the Caribbean and can write about

them, maybe all can be forgiven and can have a place to call home once and for all: “I argue here that the desire, which is the origin of writing, and manifests as a result of separation from the Caribbean—as a fractured, complex identification of love—is in effect the writer’s condition of ex/isle” (170). For readers, they cannot help but think about the criticism and ideas that come from the mixing of such conflicting cultures within one’s self.

The trauma in this novel centers on the terror under Trujillo’s rule. By telling the story of the Mirabal sisters through the medium of fiction, Alvarez draws on the universality of fear—influencing self and family safety, courage, injustice, love, and sisterhood--while telling the story of a specific historical event in the Dominican Republic. Alvarez leads Western readers to recognize the forces of oppression condensed in the dictator and his regime, which, according to Ifeona Fulani, “permits the American and non-Caribbean reader access to a Caribbean history about which they need not feel guilt” (77). As a result, we come away from the novel feeling uplifted about the power of humanity to persevere against insurmountable odds and a knowledge of the historical significance of the Mirabal sisters. Her story appeals to our hearts as humans and our minds as non-Caribbeans unaware of the story.

Although Alvarez does not claim any historical accuracy in her novel, what happens, instead, she asserts is “to immerse...readers in an epoch in the life of the Dominican Republic that I believe can only finally be understood by fiction, only finally redeemed by the imagination” (Alvarez 324). In “At the Center of her Art: Ex/Isle, Trauma, and Story-Telling in Julia Alvarez’s First Three Novels,” Emily Rebecca Robbins shows how Alvarez wrestles *In the Time of the Butterflies*, with the trauma

associated with living on and away from the island: “It is the need to reconcile this haunting that prompts Alvarez to write a historical novel about the Mirabal sisters and the trauma of the Trujillo regime” (Robbins 51). She also explores from a psychological point of view the shame and silence of the survivors: “The writing of the book is an attempt to understand and decipher her parents’ silence as she investigates how the ‘concealed shame, covered-up crimes [and] violent histories’ continue to haunt Dominicans” (56). Robbins believes that although Alvarez did not experience the trauma directly, Alvarez is traumatized: “Whether the person experiences the violence first hand or second hand, it is the psychic haunting nature of trauma that affects the individuals and leads to psychic victimization” (52). I believe that this traumatic experience is important for Alvarez because writing *In the Time of the Butterflies*, is her way of coping with the violent past by reliving it through Dedé Mirabal:

Those who physically lived through the violence are revisited by it and must work to understand what was taken from them; they need to grieve for what was lost through traumatic events. If this trauma is not worked through, the relatives who hear the stories of the original violence psychically re-live the trauma, for they are too troubled by the violence and want to understand it. (Robbins 52)

Alvarez gives us a historical story through the medium of fiction, more interesting in human truths than accurate facts as she explains: “A novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart” (Alvarez, Epilogue 324).

Alvarez is American and yet, she is also Dominican, a fact that has been troublesome for her identity while transitioning to American life. Growing up in New York, it was important for Alvarez to perfect her English so she began to find solace in

reading whenever she would feel alienated, while adjusting to life as an immigrant. Writing this novel helps Alvarez in knowing where she belongs, where “home” is, and what is *hers*. It is quite evident that her message is clear and has not been forgotten: “To Dominicans separated by language from the world I have created, I hope this book deepens North Americans’ understanding of the nightmare you endured and the heavy losses you suffered—of which this story tells on a few” (Alvarez 324). This idea allows Alvarez not only to be concerned with the Mirabal sisters, but with an era and the way they lived as their contrasting personalities are explored through trauma and narrative. *In the Time of the Butterflies*, as Alvarez indicates in her title, allows the audience to not only be aware of the significance of the Mirabal sisters and the impact of Trujillo’s reign, but also to understand the nation they lived in. Creating a sense of the atmosphere of her country, its people, its landscape, and its institutions is important for Alvarez. In addition, political environment is one of Alvarez’s main topics as well as Trujillo’s regime, which dominates this time period. Alvarez’s focal point of the country’s tribulations over a long period of time is to communicate the disastrous consequences of Trujillo’s rule on a nation and its citizens.

The epilogue provides a backdrop of the traumas the country has endured, the changes that have occurred since Trujillo’s assassination, and the importance of remembering and learning from the *butterflies* as Dedé explains when she discusses visitors who want to honor her sisters: “They all wanted to give me something of the girls’ last moments. each visitor would break my heart all over again, but I would sit on this very rocker and listen for as long as they had something to say. It was the least I could do, being the one saved” (Alvarez 301).

The trauma and guilt that haunt Dedé fractures the narrative into multiple points of view. The Mirabal sisters' stories are being told by Alvarez through their eyes. As Alvarez describes in her postscript to the novel, she points out the reason in writing the story of the Mirabal sisters to understand what inspires them to give them courage in opposing Trujillo's regime. Patria, Minerva, and Mate demonstrated their courage in different ways as part of the revolution, whereas Dedé's courage came after her sisters' deaths in keeping their memories alive. Dedé Mirabal, the protagonist and the surviving sister, searches for her identity and her place to call home while telling her story not only through her eyes but her sisters' eyes as well.

Opening the novel in the present, November 25, 1994, the reader immediately travels into the world of an individual—the tragedy Dedé has to cope with in losing her loved ones. For Dedé, her trauma is the fact that she can never have a quiet life because of the *Mariposas*' fame. Each year since 1960, marking the anniversary of her sisters' deaths, there are numerous interviews, events, and tours she has attend to, and her childhood home is now a museum. Moving from 1994 to the past, a foreshadowing moment occurs in the first chapter, set in family home in 1943—Dedé's premonition: "A chill goes through her, for she feels it in her bones, the future is now beginning. By the time it is over, it will be the past, and she doesn't want to be the only one left to tell their story" (Alvarez 10). This happens after her family goes inside from relaxing under the anacahuita tree when her father unfavorably mentions Trujillo's name. As Dedé reflects this moment, the first chapter ends with an acknowledgment that she is the sole survivor to tell her sisters' story.

Another example of Dedé's unhomeliness demonstrates a fine line between courage and cowardice. To some extent, her sisters, Patria, Minerva, and Mate accept and are fully aware of their cowardice while fighting for courage. While Dedé understands that not participating with her sisters is a contributing factor of her cowardice, part of her cowardice or guilt is knowing that the only reason she did not join was because of her husband—and not because she did not disagree with her sisters or their ideas. In the ninth chapter, Dedé tries to save her own sanity by saying to herself: "Courage! It was the first time she had used that word to herself and understood exactly what it meant" (198). What this means for Dedé is survival and strength for herself and her family. She had to keep the family together by raising all of her sisters' children, keeping their mothers' memories alive for them, since many of them were very young when their mothers were murdered. Although Dedé demonstrates her courage by being there for her family, she is also cursed with the guilt of not joining the revolution.

Another point of trauma in the novel is the way women are subjugated. What resonates throughout the novel is the expectation of women to be at home serving their husbands and taking care of the children as Dedé did. In Alvarez's narrative, beautiful women, such as Lina Lovaton and Minerva Mirabal, known for their character and beauty, are subjugated to the sexual advances of powerful men with little choice other than to submit to their lust. This sexual subjugation not only affects the women themselves, but also their families and communities, proving that those who function in the role of "dictator" may not only exploit land and resources, but also the innocence and purity of women. When these women do not fulfill the expectations of those powerful men, their freedom and lives are exponentially endangered. In the novel, the indisputable

male in power is Trujillo. As a native Dominican he is in the unique position of being a cross between the super-male and the “real” male archetype usually held by the colonizer. In “The Erotics of Colonialism In Contemporary French West Indian Literary Culture,” A. James Arnold describes the traditional archetypes of characters in Caribbean literature. The super-male is traditionally a rebel, one who epitomizes heterosexual manliness and often maintains his position “at the expense of an under-male, who must however exist for the super-male to be able to affirm himself” (Arnold 178). Because of his cultural connection to the Dominican Republic, his hypersexual appetite and uncanny ability to make any under-males who oppose him disappear, Trujillo exhibits traits of the colonized super-male. What is interesting about his narrative role, however, is that his position as tyrant also puts him in the position of colonizer, or as Arnold describes it, “real” or productive male—the master (172). Perhaps this blending of super-male and productive male is the most dangerous combination of masculine figures because he is one who oppresses his own people, subjugating them to pledge their loyalty and support him or face losing everything—family, possessions or life itself. This blended male figure compounds his power, and in contrast to being dually marginalized, he is dually privileged to the point that he is deified—in his own eyes, and at least superficially, in the eyes of his people. The Mirabal sisters did not accept the traditional roles dictated to them by the super-male.

The Mirabal sisters have a hard time living their lives as traditional women. For instance, Dedé states: “‘Back in those days, we women followed our husbands.’ Such a silly excuse. After all, look at Minerva. ‘Let’s put it this way,’ Dedé adds, ‘I followed my husband. I didn’t get involved’” (171-2). Dedé’s unhomeliness is feeling the guilt in

knowing that living her life traditionally has been her excuse in not supporting her sisters. In the epilogue, Dedé uses first person, whereas throughout the novel, her point of view is told in third person. And for the first time in her life she acknowledges her choices she has made with regards to the revolution: “I’m not stuck in the past, I’ve just brought it with me into the present” (313). What this suggests is perhaps these flashback moments in the novel question whether or not Dedé is at home. And she is caught between a rock and a hard place in wanting to keep the memories of her sisters alive, as well as wanting future Dominicans to forget the brutal past. While this novel is an attempt to exorcise the ghosts of the past and heal from the trauma, Dedé—along with Alvarez—realizes that, to an extent, she will always be haunted by the past.

The Storytellers' Trauma:

A Place to Call Home in Caribbean Literature

Maybe this is the beginning of madness...

Forgive me for what I am saying.

Read it...quietly, quietly.

—Osip Mandelstam

Chapter Three: Healing and Forgiveness in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*

Whereas Alvarez chronicles the Mirabal sisters' rise to power to diminish Trujillo, Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* gives the perspective of one person's experience of being on the right and wrong side of power, as well as the consequences that come with those positions. Just as power roles can be reversed in positive ways as demonstrated in *In the Time of Butterflies*, Danticat reveals the danger in the transition from power to weakness after falling out of favor with another powerful dictator. In this narrative, Ka's father experiences the trauma of being both the hunter and the hunted in his role as a dew breaker, proving that one can be not only a victim of a regime when it is powerful, but also when it has fallen. According to Danticat, the title comes from a Creole phrase, "choukèt laroze," referring to the twenty-nine year dictatorship period (1957-1986) ruled by François "Papa Doc" and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. A Creole nickname for torturer, the dew breaker is a macoute soldier that would break into many civilians' homes and take them away against their will during early morning dew—the most peaceful part of the day ("An Interview with Edwidge Danticat"). Danticat unfolds the narrative in a series of vignettes that illustrate the aftermath of Haiti's political turmoil on a variety of victims; these stories are bookended by the frame

narrative of how Ka finds out about her father's past in the first chapter. In *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat believes that no one can escape the past. She structures her 2004 novel into nine short stories by creating and personalizing her characters, threading them together by a common link—Ka Bienaime's father, a former dew breaker during his supporting role under the Haitian dictatorship. This novel invites readers to look closely into the lives of Haitian-Americans and Haitians in the aftermath of the traumatic events under the regime of François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier.

François Duvalier, known as “Papa Doc,” was the President of Haiti from 1957 to 1971. By 1958, his regime quickly became totalitarian. Tonton Macoute, or the dew breakers, are a group of Duvalier's supporters who tortured and killed thousands of civilians indiscriminately. The dew breakers was thought to be an unwelcoming influence that Haitians became fearful—even in private—of expressing dissent during his regime. Jean-Claude Duvalier --“Baby Doc,” succeeded his father as the ruler of Haiti after his death in 1971. Under Baby Doc's presidency, thousands of Haitians were tortured or murdered and hundreds of thousands of fled the country. Poverty among the Haitians remained the most widespread of any country in the Western Hemisphere, while Baby Doc maintained a lavish lifestyle. In 1985, a rebellion broke out against the Duvalier regime, and Baby Doc was deposed in 1986, living in exile in France. Baby Doc died of a heart attack on October 4th, 2014, at the age of 63. Like Alvarez, the author of *The Dew Breaker*, Edwidge Danticat, lived in Haiti under the totalitarian regime and uses her writing as a way to depict characters haunted by trauma and as a means to work out her own trauma.

She was born on January 19, 1969 in Port-au-Prince and moved to the United States when she was twelve. The first twelve years of Danticat's life, however, were spent under the dictatorships in Haiti. For example, Danticat uses her memory of an incident where a minister was arrested by Papa Doc's agents. This incident is something that she fictionalized in the novel, but it actually happened while she was growing up in Haiti. The minister was severely beaten while he was leaving his church. In addition, Radio Lumiere, a religious radio program that the real minister had, is also used in the novel. Danticat's fictional minister in the novel uses words in his radio and live sermons that the real minister never used ("An Interview with Edwidge Danticat"). For Danticat, this is very personal. Unlike Alvarez, who was born in the United States, Danticat is a daughter of immigrants. This personalization helps her to write as a way to depict characters haunted by trauma, as well a means to work out her own trauma and perhaps even her own experience of unhomeliness.

In "The Language of Wounds and Scars in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, A Case Study in Trauma Symptoms and the Recovery Process," Aitor Ibarrola Armendariz explores the representation of a violent and traumatizing past in *The Dew Breaker*. Citing a report in *Time* magazine, "Aftershock," written by B. Walsh, Armendariz discusses how Haiti is brought back into the spotlight when a 7.0 earthquake on January 12, 2010 hits the island and how outsiders were quick to respond to the islanders' aid, but not to the reality of the horrific past, created by European imperialism:

Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere, can't and shouldn't simply be restored to what it was before the quake. The catastrophic death toll was a result not so much of the earthquake's strength but of Haiti's history

of corruption, its shoddy buildings and ultimately its poverty. As we have seen in the aftermath of previous disasters, rebuilding takes time, commitment and sustained funding - and in Haiti's case, they're especially important. What's at stake goes beyond that nation's shore. (qtd. in Armendariz 25)

Metaphorically speaking, this *earthquake* devastates the country the way corruption and traumatic experiences devastate the characters in *The Dew Breaker*. Danticat's novel centers around the lives of the Haitians, forever traumatized by the Duvalier regime, which drove them out of their country. What this means is that through a novel in stories, as readers, we too are reliving trauma through the characters.

Therefore, the narrative structure of *The Dew Breaker* and what it is truly about is a community of Haitian immigrants in America struggling to live and cope with the past. This novel is an important connection to unhomeliness because unhomeliness can certainly rise from the experience of immigrating elsewhere. Some of the types of unhomeliness the novel depicts include immigration, living under dictatorship, Ka as a daughter of immigrants, and in the second chapter, "Seven," marriage as a place of unhomeliness due to immigration and separation caused by the dictatorship. From a narrative point of view, the characters in these chapters vary depending on the situation: "The Book of the Dead," is told in first-person point of view from the perspective of Ka; "Seven" and "The Dew Breaker" are told in third-person. The "Book of the Dead" and "The Dew Breaker" show the effect of trauma on Ka and her father and the sense of unhomeliness that results. "Seven" is a look at the unhomeliness inherent in the immigrant experience. Like Alvarez, Danticat uses multiple points of view to show how

trauma has fragmented the narrative into multiple versions of the truth. In an interview, Danticat explains why she wrote her novel in the way that she did:

I wanted to add layers upon layers to the central figure, the dew breaker.

I wanted the reader to be introduced to the dew breaker from different angles, and for those who love him, and even for him, to see himself from various perspectives. (“An Interview with Edwidge Danticat”)

Danticat connects the characters by demonstrating the complex relationships between Haitian-Americans and Haitians. In particular, the fragmented nature of life for the survivors, left no one unharmed or untouched. For instance, totalitarianism in art, fatherhood, community, and family, among others are important themes of this novel. In addition, Danticat creates a complex intersection of individual lives by including recurring tropes of scars, doubles and double lives, and the betrayal of women by men.

In the second chapter, “Seven,” Danticat portrays that while family means everything, coming to America for a better life for Haitians sometimes doesn’t work in their favor, indicating that, with unhomeliness, identities are perhaps lost. This chapter is important with regards to the overall structure of the novel by introducing characters struggling with separation and immigration. Narrated in third person, this chapter shifts between the perspectives of the husband and wife. An important symbol, the number seven provides very little meaning, with the exception that readers are forced to closely examine the length of time the couple spent apart. “Seven” deals with a male character living in the basement of a single-family home with two other men, Michel and Dany, waiting for the arrival of his wife from Haiti. He has not seen her in seven years.

For this unnamed character, seven is an important number because of the way it is being represented: “Seven—a number he despised but had discovered was a useful marker. There were seven days between paychecks, seven hours, not counting lunch, spent each day at his day job, seven at his night job. Seven was the last number of his age—thirty-seven. And now there were seven hours left before his wife was due to arrive” (Danticat 35). Seven is the number that shows that his life is beyond his control.

Several types of unhomeliness is portrayed in this chapter. Early in the chapter, he goes up the stairs to find his landlady in the kitchen to inform her of his wife’s arrival. The landlady tells him she does not have a problem, as long as his wife is clean but expresses her concern of having a woman living in a small space with two other men. Upon hearing this, his role as a man is challenged, but he holds his tongue: “He wanted to tell her that it wasn’t up to her to decide whether or not his wife would be comfortable. But he had been prepared for this too, for some unpleasant remark about his wife” (36). He further explains to her his plans of moving out to a new apartment with his wife as soon as he is able. After the conversation, the man feels uneasy about the fact that he addresses the landlady as Madame, having to act inferior to her: “As he walked back downstairs, he scolded himself for calling her Madame. Why had he acted like a manservant who’d just been dismissed? It was one of those class things from home he still couldn’t shake” (36). His unhomeliness is that this sense of inferiority is something he had to carry with him from Haiti to America, even if this means making a sacrifice for his wife. He brings his Haitian culture, customs, and socio-economic beliefs to the United States, and this keeps him from feeling at home in America, not being able to completely

leave behind his entire upbringing. He tries to wear a mask, but he continues to slip, revealing his identity.

Before his wife's arrival, he has a conversation with Michel and Dany, reminding them not to mention any of their late night outings or the women he had many affairs with: "Those women, most of them had husbands, boyfriends, fiancés, and lovers in other parts of the world, never meant much to him anyway" (38). However, things between the husband and wife are not the same after they reunite with each other. His wife's unhomeliness occurs upon arrival at the airport, when all of the gifts she brought with her for her husband had been confiscated by customs: "Into the trash they went, along with the rest of her offerings" (40). When she sees her husband, she is now at *home* with him, but she is not the same: "He charged at her and wrapped both his arms around her. And as he held her, she felt her feet leave the ground. It was when he put her back down that she finally believed she was really somewhere else, on another soil, in another country" (40). Arriving at home and not caring about his roommates, the man and his wife have sex seven times up to the time he has to go to work. As the story now shifts to the wife's perspective, readers learn and understand she is physically unattached to her husband while he is emotionally attached to her. Part of her unhomeliness is living in a new environment with two additional men and living with her husband who doesn't feel like the same man she knew seven years ago.

While adjusting to life with her husband's hectic work schedule and living conditions in their basement apartment, a shadow hovers over her happiness when she reflects back on her husband leaving Haiti right after they got married. Her loneliness is her unhomeliness. She feels the loss of her identity as a wife when she feels a lack of a

sense of belonging in her marriage. She would write letters to her family and friends. She also wrote to a male friend, a neighbor who she found solace with for a few nights by allowing him to lie next to her, three days after her husband left. As a way of feeling emotionally secure for her future with her husband, she contemplates about telling him about the neighbor who slept next to her during those days after her husband left, and the many nights she had spent with thereafter. Their separation represents the masks they both had to wear while they were apart in coping with their loneliness: “Someone had said that people lie only at the beginning of relationships. The middle is where the truth resides. But there had been no middle for her husband and herself, just a beginning and many dream-rehearsed endings” (48).

As the wife thinks about her experience of allowing another man to sleep beside her, the husband reflects on how he and his wife met in the town of Jacmel at Carnival, before preparing to go to the United States. He knew that he was in love with her after he witnesses her passion for the Carnival festivities, and married her so they could be together one day in America. Towards the end of the chapter their first weekend together in New York rolls around, and the wife is excited to go out in the open with her husband. They go to his favorite place, Prospect Park in Brooklyn. The crowd causes them both think to about the wedding tradition that occurred in Jacmel, where couples ask strangers to marry them in order to see how long it will take for the them to recognize the bride and groom. The twist to this tradition is that the bride and groom dress up as one another. Unfortunately, after seven years of anticipation and the finality of reuniting, they truly are strangers to one another. This is evident when things are quiet for the husband and wife on the bus ride back home from the festivities, sitting across the aisle from each other, the

same way they did on their way to the park: “He was watching her again. This time he seemed to be trying to see *her* as if for the first time, but he could not” (52). The wife reflects on the end of the celebration at Jacmel, where she had burned both her wedding dress and his suit, wishing that they had kept them. Their wedding outfits from the Carnival are masks of a different sort. The gender reversal that the couple performs in the wedding tradition suggests that their relationship is also a mask, something that they find necessary in keeping their cultural identity in place. Perhaps in her being able to carry on the wedding tradition with her husband, she would no longer feel a sense of unhomeliness:

They could have walked these foreign streets in them, performing their own carnival. Since she didn’t know the language, they wouldn’t have to speak or ask any questions of the stony-faced people around them. They could carry out their public wedding march in silence, a temporary silence, unlike the one that had come over them now. (52)

“Seven” reminds readers that separation is an important factor in immigration, representing how families feel a sense of unhomeliness when they are separated during the immigration process. Unfortunately, for the husband and wife, they are strangers to one another even after they are reunited. Interestingly, although all of the characters in this novel are strangers, what they all have in common is that their lives are impacted by the Duvalier regime.

In “The Book of the Dead,” we see how the dew breaker, as well as his wife, Anne, and his daughter, Ka are affected by the dictatorship of the Duvaliers. Readers soon recognize that this novel draws on historical events. Similar to Alvarez’s family,

because of the parents having to flee from the dictatorship and immigrate, Ka suffers trauma second-hand. Although the main characters in this story (Ka and her parents) will return in the final chapter, Ka is the only person to narrate this story from her perspective. An important theme in this chapter is the father-child relationship. In addition, Danticat informs readers that Ka's family is an example of Haiti's troubled past and Ka represents the generation of Haitian Americans who has to come to terms with this past. As the daughter of this dark past, Ka's way of coping with trauma and making sense of her father is through art.

Ka and her father travelled from Brooklyn to Miami. Ka is a sculptor and is invited to sell a sculpture to a Haitian-American television star, Gabrielle Fonteneau. The opening part of the frame narrative begins with a missing father, who has gone on a mission to destroy a sculpture that he and his daughter were supposed to deliver. In a panic, Ka calls the police. As she waits for her father, Ka describes the sculpture as being made from a piece of mahogany with several cracks: "I'd thought these cracks beautiful and had made no effort to sand or polish them away, as they seemed like the wood's own scars, like the one my father had on his face" (6). This is Ka's description of her father—a kind and calm older man with a profound scar. When her father returns, however, without the sculpture, everything drastically changes as he reveals his past to Ka.

Ka's father reveals his trauma to his daughter when he takes her to a lake where he has thrown the sculpture into the water. The lake is man-made, a reflection of Ka's father's situation that is also man-made, and his own making. While there, her father begins talking about the meaning of his daughter's name in Egyptian: "A ka is a double of the body, I want to complete the sentence for him—the body's companion through life

and after life. It guides the body through the kingdom of the dead” (17). Ka’s father explains further in Creole, “‘You see, ka is like soul,’ my father now says. ‘In Haiti is what we call good angel, ti bon anj. When you born, I look at your face, I think, here is my ka, my good angel’” (17). According to Ka’s father, her sculpture is his double—his ka. His reason for destroying the sculpture is his desire to die like an Ancient Egyptian, taking it to the afterlife and being buried alongside it. At first, Ka wonders about his explanation, thinking that maybe her father is dying. Instead he tells her that he is not deserving of her artwork. Ka learns about his personal history of not being a victim of the Haitian regime that dominated during his life there, as he points out: “ You see, Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey” (20). He tells Ka that when he was a prison guard, he killed many people. The more Ka listens, the more random pieces of information begin to fit together like a puzzle, so that Ka begins to learn what it means to have been a dew breaker in Haiti.

Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, isolation and trauma undermine the lives of many in Haiti and America. Ka notes that her parents have no close friends, have never had anyone over to visit, never speak of relatives back home, have never returned to Haiti, have never taught Ka anything about Haiti but Creole, and her mother’s devotion to religion (21). Although Ka’s father claims that he was the hunter and not the prey, the fact that he and his family live in such isolation from the greater Haitian community suggests otherwise (20). When he speaks of the proverb “One day for the hunter, one day for the prey,” he emphasizes his role as the hunter, but as the story comes around full circle, we see that he has played both roles in the narrative (21). Ka’s father tells her that he told her mother of these events shortly after she was born. As the discussion ends, Ka

tells her mother about her conversation with her father. Ka's mother tells her that her father has been wanting to open up about his past for a long time, and that she and Ka are the reason he is no longer a torturer, hoping this would offer him redemption. However, Ka is traumatized upon hearing this from her father, and readers learn how the hands of the regime have left deep emotional and physical scars, but it is not until the end that we see how Ka's father has been not only a perpetrator, but also a victim in his role as both the hunter and the prey.

The following morning, Ka and her father drive over to Gabrielle Fonteneau's house to deliver the bad news. As they acknowledge the beauty of Fonteneau's house and the Haitian style landscape with flowers and vegetation, it is a chilling reminder for Ka's father: "Now you see, Ka, why your mother and me, we have never returned home" (27). When Ka explains what happened to the sculpture, before Gabrielle storms out the room, she expresses her disappointment, "'We're done, then,' she says, looking directly at my face. 'I have to make a call. Enjoy the rest of your day'" (31). As Ka and her father leave Gabrielle's house, she sees the shame in her father. Although her father is fond of Ancient Egyptian history, he does not wish to have an Egyptian-like sculpture of himself. At the end of the chapter, Ka thinks about her father's moving to a foreign country, thinking that it might be a welcoming experience. She discovers that his interest in the Ancient Egyptians has to do with an interest in the way they create permanent markers of the past, while her father hopes to live free and unknown to the world as he truly is. Ka believes that she and her mother are his angels, masking his face that prevents him from confronting himself.

The past cannot be escaped. Danticat allows readers to understand that false identities are constantly evolving in this chapter. For instance, Ka's sculpture is the most significant piece as homage to her father. However, when Ka learns about her father's past, she realizes that what she set out to memorialize is a false image. Ka's suffering of trauma and sense of unhomeliness is realizing that once the reality is out on the surface, she will have to think twice as hard before she can even consider creating any kind of work to correspond with her father's past. While art is a means of feeling at home and coping with reality, Ka has to be diligent in understanding the reality of the past, being aware that things are always shifting and in a constant state of change. Readers also examine the importance of Danticat's parallel structure of Ka's sculpture with the Egyptian monuments as works of art, and a devotion to the memory of important people. Sadly, Ka's sense of unhomeliness is that she is not as confident as the Egyptians about the value and meaning of her work because she doesn't know her father.

A final important metaphor that resonates in this chapter is the scar, the physical sign of trauma. Ka's father was scarred by a victim in an attempt to resist him. Readers are informed that Haitians are emotionally scarred by the suffering and history of violence, as well as by its victimization and oppressiveness. Before moving forward, all of these scars will have to be healed. Danticat describes Ka's father as rubbing his scar, and his revealing his past to Ka he shows his scar to her. This surprises Ka because he is constantly hiding his scar. Danticat wants readers to understand that his awkwardness in attempting to hide his scar in order to conceal the horrifying past delays the process of confronting the truth. Where there is truth, there is a range of destinies of Haitian Americans following their flight from Haiti during the Duvalier regime. While Ka and

her father live on a somewhat lower social status, the Fonteneaus are an example of success available to Haitian Americans. Even though there is a difference in social class, Fonteneau's desire in wanting to buy Ka's sculpture demonstrates that there is a shared background among Haitian Americans. In Ka's father's case, unfortunately, his hope in coming to America for a better life in escaping his past is unsuccessful.

Danticat's readers experience firsthand Ka's suffering in learning about her father's brutal past as a murderer and a haunting revelation of what he tells her about his experience working as a prison guard: "'People who go in there,' he said slowly, 'don't come out'" (232). In other words, people come out either dead or are physically and emotionally compromised. He explains further to Ka that he has been doing everything within his power to run away and forget the past. Anne, Ka's mother, assures her over the phone that her husband is a different man. Although Anne has forgiven her husband, Ka begins her journey to a moral crisis and wonders how her mother could possibly love her father. This could perhaps be a more profound way in describing the difference between homeless and unhomeliness. Anne is *homeless* and can choose to wear her mask or not. Her forgiveness of her husband makes her know her place at home, whereas Ka feels a true sense of unhomeliness of not knowing her father. Unhomeliness is not simply a result of having a literal home to live in. Ka's father wears the mask of both his daughter and his wife as a way of disguising his past and his scar.

The scar on his face that he desperately tries to hide with Ka and Anne's mask is a brutal reality and reminder that he can never escape from his past. Armendariz examines the relationship between Ka Bienaime and her father. Danticat's decision to begin the novel when Ka is much older, allows her to demonstrate the way traumatic past

impacts the present: “For a more conventional writer and one less familiarized with the workings of trauma, the natural way to proceed would have been to throw us back thirty years plus in this man’s life to witness what he had done in the old country that explain his way of life, fears, and behavior in the Brooklyn neighborhood in which he lives now” (35). “The Book of the Dead” demonstrates how the traumatic past impacts the present, how Danticat’s decision to start when Ka is an adult is more powerful than starting with her father as a younger man still in Haiti. In other words, readers are shown that forgiveness creates a place to call home. The final chapter, “The Dew Breaker,” brings everything together, coming in full-circle back to Ka’s father. Danticat reveals Ka’s father’s rise and fall as a dew breaker, the murder of the preacher, and how Ka’s mother, Anne teaches her about forgiveness.

The concluding story of Ka’s father begins in 1967: “He came to kill the preacher. So he arrived early, extra early, a whole two hours before the evening service would begin” (183). Since Ka’s father turned 19, he has been a dew breaker for ten years. He has risen through the ranks and is revealed to be someone thriving on the power from the torture he inflicts on prisoners: “he enjoyed watching his body grow wider and meatier just as his sense of power did” (196). He had a sense of power that he lacked as the son of a peasant, and when given a chance to confront the officials who had taken his father’s land, he replies, “We’re all the same now, but I’ll never forget what you did to my parents. Now I’m the one everyone comes to in the capital” (197). In having both the power of giving or taking life and solving or creating problems for others, he enjoys treating everyone around him insignificantly. For instance, his victims recount his extreme cruelty when they say: “He’d wound you, then try to soothe you with words,

then he'd wound you again. He thought he was God" (198). Ironically, in juxtaposition of narrative point of view and word play, Danticat begins the next section from the preacher's point of view where he opens with: "'I know my God and I'm placing myself in His hands" (199).

The inversion of the lines suggest that although Ka's father thought he was God, a force greater than himself was dictating his future. The preacher of the Baptist Church of the Angels is targeted for death for criticizing the government and preaching political opposition in his sermons. The preacher may have ultimately had his life taken by Ka's father's hand, but Ka's father's loss of power by that decision brings into sharp reality that his perception of power was vastly overestimated.

Danticat foreshadows the dew breaker's fall from favor when, in the second section of "The Dew Breaker" chapter, the preacher notes that nineteen members of the palace guard had been executed the night before (200). The preacher questions that if this could happen to former allies of the government, "how much harder could it be to capture and kill him?" (200). The fact that a fall from favor because of perceived disloyalty or disobedience would result in the same outcome as blatant rebellion against the President highlights the very narrow line between safety and danger for those living under the regime. For instance, the preacher's sermon is quickly interrupted when the dew breaker comes in with the other macoutes, soon arresting the preacher and has him severely beaten. The dew breaker's mistake is learning that he was ordered to kill the preacher. Instead he forces the preacher into a small room to warn him and to let him go. The chair that the preacher sits on breaks, and, in a rage, the preacher grabs a broken wood piece and stabs the dew breaker in his face, creating a long-lasting scar. In anger,

the dew breaker shoots and kills the preacher. When Ka's father disobeys the palace twice, turning away from his role as dew breaker, he has crossed that line and is a man on the run. His power is no longer in the safety of his position as the dew breaker, and he questions where he will go and what he would do (230). The tables have been turned, and he recognizes that perhaps he is in even more danger than most because he is doubly traitorous; he had committed to being the dew breaker, but he had broken that pledge through disobedience. Although the dew breaker has contemplated leaving the country, but wanting to finish this final order, unlike a rebel who had been against the regime from the beginning, he is a turncoat—the worst kind of traitor.

When the dew breaker literally runs into Anne, the preacher's stepsister and his future wife, they both say "Tanpri" (*Je t'en pris*—excuse me or I pray you) at the same time, suggesting that they are both in helpless situations as a result of those in power. They are begging for help from each other, though neither fully knows why the other is in a powerless situation. The dew breaker fully recognizes that his past position of power could now be an albatross for him in his new situation, as he hopes that she was not someone he had once harmed for fear of her rejection of him in his time of need (231). In the context of their meeting, she asks him, "What did they do to you?" to which he replies, in a half-truth, "I'm free. . . I finally escaped" (237). Her perception from that answer would be that he had been a victim of the regime in the same way that she and her family had, but in reality, his victimization is much different. He is free from the life that he had lived and could no longer be a part of, and notably does not want to be a part of anymore (237). Once the President is out of power, people like Anne and her family are morally and politically free, but people like Ka's father, wanted for crimes against the

Haitian people, would never know freedom again. Thus, Ka's father is traumatized twofold—he is branded as a traitor to the regime while the President is in power, then branded as a traitor to his people and community after the regime falls. He can never escape that label—even to his wife. Danticat notes that when Anne and her husband talk about her stepbrother, it would be brief and they would never venture beyond the coded utterances of his “last prisoner” and her “step brother, the famous preacher” (241). This failure to fully reconcile the two “halves of the same person” acknowledges the shame and guilt that he carried for his actions and she carried for marrying one who could cause so much pain, even to her own family (241).

In spite of Anne being blameless for his crimes, she still identifies herself with him as his wife and carries the burden of his fear—of being recognized, of facing punishment for his past, and of being rejected by their daughter once the truth was known. Anne in this situation is unfairly labeled by association to her husband, in the same way that the President's wife shares the infamy of her husband once he had been ousted from power. Though the women have no active part in the crimes of their men, their passive acceptance of their behavior demonstrated in their willingness to love and marry them regardless of their actions labels the women as complaisant in their atrocious behavior; thus, they experience guilt by association. The fact that the dew breaker in the narrative is never given a name, identified only by his role in the regime and relationship to Ka and Anne, suggests that his identity as an individual man is defined first by his relationship to the regime and finally by his relationship to his wife and daughter. In dehumanizing his victims in his former life, he has dehumanized himself to his position as a dew breaker, and in recognition of the past that haunts him, he is only defined by his

relationship to the innocents in his life. Just as destroying the statue of himself erases Ka's work of art based on his likeness, the reader gets the sense that Ka's father will never feel worthy of having any remembrance of himself. As the novel closes through Anne's narrative perspective, she relates: "There was no way to escape this dread anymore, this pendulum between regret and forgiveness, this fright that the most important relationships of her life were always on the verge of being severed or lost, that people closest to her were always disappearing" (242). Although she thinks of this after Ka hangs up on her, one feels that her thoughts are not necessarily about Ka here; perhaps she is also thinking of her husband and the implications of his finally revealing his past to their daughter.

In an odd and ironic twist, Danticat ends the novel with a reference to the preacher and the lie that he had set his body on fire in the prison yard, "leaving behind no corpse to bury, no trace of himself at all" (242). When we parallel this lie with the destruction of the statue in the lake, we see how the dew breaker wants to leave no trace of himself as an individual. He and the preacher have more in common than we think, as they are both victims of the same tensions of power and weakness. In the end, both are traumatized because of where they stand—with or against those in power; however, the preacher gets freedom through death, whereas the dew breaker must continue to live with the memories that haunt him. Although he claims from the beginning that he is the hunter, the proverb he quotes earlier has a deeper meaning for him—as both the hunter of the past and the prey of the present, he has the benefit of knowing both "days" of the proverb, and neither give him victory or peace.

Danticat's novel informs readers that forgiveness creates home. An example of what home means is that even though the past can never be erased from memory, Anne recognizes that her husband is a changed man and completely forgives him for murdering her stepbrother. However, while Anne feels at home in understanding her husband's past, Ka has just discovered her father's past and begins her journey of trauma through unhomeliness.

The doubleness of Ka's father's life that causes trauma can be healed through *métissage*, a blending of cultures and identities instead of an either/or boundary between them. In other words, home is about not forgetting, and through *métissage*, embracing all the facets of identity. Important writers such as Rhys, Alvarez and Danticat successfully incorporate *métissage* through their writing in creating catharsis, causing as Ifeona Fulani calls it, a "compassionate response" for readers (77). Fulani observes that Danticat uses sympathy as a strategy that expands her audience and allow her stories to "enter the American imagination" (77), as well as demonstrating the power of *metissage* to speak to all audiences in an effort to draw on the universality of the human experience while telling the story of specific cultures. Danticat embraces both American and Haitian cultures as she lives in America, but writes about Haiti and supports Haitian causes. Because Danticat accepts classification as American, Haitian, and Haitian-American, she lives by each of those cultures; in addition, she serves as a *storyteller* for her people, not a spokesperson. This distinction is important because it removes her from the unnecessary burden of addressing political and social causes relevant to Haiti. She uses her novel to teach lessons through the characters in an unassuming manner. Stories help us learn more about ourselves and others through an accessible medium. Readers can let their

guard down, allowing stories to speak through them, not lecture to them. Her openness to the inclusivity inherent in the definition of American literature is a reminder of Lionnet's argument on *métissage*—a blending of multiple cultural identities. Danticat sees how her Haitian reality can exist and influence her American identity without sacrificing either. In creating something new, in the broader sense, she appeals to both and exhibits a universality that expands her audience. And like Alvarez, Danticat also embraces both American and Haitian cultures, with each of them being a spokesperson as well as storytellers.

Métissage works as a cure for trauma and unhomeliness as it allows one to accept all the facets of one's identity. In this way, Danticat leaves room for hope and recovery as many victims find ways to come to terms with and overcome those individual and collective dysfunctions. Just as Alvarez did with the Butterflies, Danticat allows readers to see Ka's father in a multi-dimensional way like a kaleidoscope. Like Anne has forgiven Ka's father, embraced all the aspects of his identity and secured her own, readers trust that Ka will work through her trauma and ultimately accept her father in all his complexity. This is Danticat's most personal work of all because even though the past can never be forgotten, she embraces her culture by demonstrating to American readers that being at home means learning how to forgive no matter how emotionally traumatizing one's experience can be.

The Storytellers' Trauma:

A Place to Call Home in Caribbean Literature

Write what haunts you. What keeps you up at night. What you are unable to get out of your mind. Sometimes they are the hardest things to write, but those are often the things that are worth investigating by you specifically...

—Edwidge Danticat

Conclusion: No Place Like Home

The Caribbean is, by definition, a gathering of different people. This thesis is a gathering of different ideas about the people of the Caribbean with regards to trauma, unhomeliness, and the use of non-traditional narrative structure. While literature helps the reader travel inside the skin of the character, the mystery of another human being, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, and *The Dew Breaker*, also help readers to explore the complicated process of identity formation in each work through the lenses of the imperialism, colonialism, racism and sexism that the protagonists experience. Scholar Elaine Savory recognizes the challenge of answering the question of “What is Caribbean literature?” by accepting that “This creative space which we call Caribbean women’s writing is not and should not be predictable or easily definable. There is one essential feature we recognize: a strong attachment to the region, expressed not just in content but in form” (169). She goes on to suggest that Rhys’ term of “love” or her own term “desire” is the emotion that captures the connection between writer and region, but as an outsider looking into the Caribbean, some might ask how they could love in the midst of such cultural and social tensions (169).

Perhaps the answer lies in recognizing the power of looking at literature with a both/and mentality as opposed to an either/or mentality. Maybe the power of Caribbean literature resides in the limitless possibilities available between cultures, genders, races, languages, and power structures. Here is where each person can bridge the gap between diversity by creating something new. Maybe the power of Caribbean literature is more about what is left unsaid in between the lines, and how each person can fill those lines by creating something new that blends the best of both worlds within the text. Based on what has been discovered about Caribbean literature, one could argue that studying the trauma and non-traditional narrative structure in Caribbean women's writing helps readers recognize the problems inherent in a culture war, but looking at the possibilities beyond the endings suggests how we might see reconciliation through *métissage*.

For instance, had Antoinette's husband, Rochester, recognized and valued her culture, kept his promises to her, and viewed her island through lenses unfiltered by his own English privilege, they could have had a happy marriage and children that would feel proud of their ability to function within two communities. Through the lenses of Dedé, although Minerva and her sisters gave their lives in an effort to fight back against the oppression of Trujillo, their sacrifice paved the way for their own children to know freedom and safety in their lifetimes. Their daughters had the freedom to be beautiful without fear of being subjugated by powerful men. Ka and Anne, while not a part of their father/husband's crimes of the past, have the freedom to learn from his example and find the power of forgiveness and reconciliation to build bridges within their family and Haitian community. No one can truly know what could happen beyond the pages of a book, but the beauty of not knowing is that the possibilities are limitless. This is what

home means. Readers are invited by Rhys, Alvarez, and Danticat to braid in their own understanding and write what they imagine beyond those endings. Thus, readers are connected with Caribbean writers through the non-traditional narrative.

Caribbean literature focuses on not just a place, but a love of a community and the people who inhabit it. The stories that belong to these communities have the power to transcend geographical limits and speak to people as a broader part of the human community. As Ifeona Fulani suggests in her essay, “Caribbean Women Writers and Politics of Style: A Case for Literary Anancyism,” stories that are emotionally accessible and inclusive have the power to reach beyond cultural boundaries (Fulani 77). Whether writers compose within the geographical bounds of their island or from the memory of that island across an ocean, the “emotional and intellectual connection to their ancestral islands” is what binds them together as Caribbean writers (67). Caribbean literature itself is most powerful as a blended narrative—whether it is a blending of dominant and native cultures, short story and novel genres, male and female point of views, or history and fiction, breaking from the limits of linear Western traditions. Caribbean writing, especially women’s literature, is unique in that it offers something new—a new perspective, narrative form, narrative voice, and linguistic style. Writers, like Rhys, Alvarez, and Danticat are successful because they are able to navigate *métissage* through writing and engage the reader through sympathy, engendering a “compassionate response” (77).

On a personal note, believing at one point that Caribbean women’s literature was defined more by the geography and gender of the author, it can now be recognized that it relates more to the universal human story framed within the love of a region and a

community. Caribbean literature has a home. And the love for the stories that describe the Caribbean experience writes about how, as members of the human community, are more alike than different. This likeness that is now shared has a place to call home.

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