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Haitian Life, Traditions, and Culture in the Works of Edwidge Danticat

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Bridgewater State University

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Introduction: Haiti, Kay Mari, and Me

Throughout the past couple of years of my life, Haiti has become increasingly significant in terms of how I see myself and how I see the world around me. My interest in Haiti began on my first mission trip to Kay Mari in 2015 through an organization, Haiti 180. Haiti 180 was created by Sean Forrest, who's first trip to Haiti was in 2002, providing medical services to the poor. While in Haiti, Forrest visited an orphanage and was moved by the heartfelt compassion and heroic efforts of the caretakers. It disturbed him to notice, however, that for most of the day the children had little activity or physical contact. When Forrest returned home to the States, he asked God to let him build an orphanage for the children of Haiti that would be a true home. The problem was ... how could this be done, with no land, no resources, and no funding. With the help of an amazing team, Forrest produced a powerful concert that raised \$20,000 for the poor of Haiti, and then dedicated the proceeds of two summer camps to purchase the land and a home for an adopted Haitian family. Today, the orphanage, Kay Mari, is complete and bursting with happy children, the world-class school is full of life and learning, the chapel is a beautiful anchor for spiritual life in the village, a warm and inviting elderly home, Kay Martina, and the medical facility is standing strong.

Since my first trip, I have traveled back to Kay Mari seven times. Experiencing and seeing Haitian culture made me more aware of my life back in the United States. The mission of Haiti 180 is to create the opportunity to form well educated leaders of faith for the future of Haiti and to make sure every child in Kay Mari's care has a childhood that is filled with love and happiness. Haiti 180 is truly turning Haiti 180 degrees around to make it a better home for those who live there.

I created a reading list that specializes in my content area of these subjects of Haiti. I focused on Edwidge Danticat in particular because of her life in Haiti. Her past life explained a lot about her writing and different outlooks on Haiti. With her parents leaving her to venture to the United States, she was left in Haiti, without her parents, just as many children I interact with have done. Her present outlook on Haiti is to write the truth about Haitian traditions and culture to not only inform readers of these aspects in Haiti, but to serve a purpose. Danticat's future of writing will be to carry out this journey of hers to serve a purpose to Haiti. Besides the facts of Danticat's writing, I feel personally connected to her. Although I have not gone through the events as she has, I have witnessed them first hand in Haiti. She could easily have been a child in Kay Mair's school or community in the village. Her views on religion and Catholicism are also common amongst us. I feel as though Danticat speaks to me to go to Haiti and work the way I do. I am not going there to change what Haiti is or stands for, but I am going there to have those in Haiti fulfill me.

A large problem that this thesis addresses is the way that the world sees and treats Haiti. The goal of this project is to inform readers that Haiti is more than just a victim of natural disasters and a foreign world. Haiti is a country full of loving, open-armed people. My first chapter I will introduce Edwidge Danticat, the author of the works I read. Her background and life are important because it defines her writing. Every work is different in terms of storyline, but they all are impacted by her life in Haiti, showing readers Haiti's true self. In chapter two I will inform readers about Haiti's past dictatorship and governments ways. This history of Haiti is a cause for some of Haiti's problems today. In chapter three, Danticat's memoir will help readers understand not only her sense of writing, but the events that have happened to her and many other Haitians like her. Chapter four will go into detail about the job of a mother in Haiti from a

religious standpoint. Religious and cultural norms will be discussed as well as a mother's duty for herself and her child. The fifth and final chapter explore a different take on Danticat's writing, a children's story. This chapter is important because it not only focuses on children, my main mission while traveling to Haiti, but it explains the act of storytelling that is done in Haiti leaving readers with a greater insight of the Haitian life, traditions and culture.

Chapter 1:

About the Author: Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti's capital city, in 1969. As Haiti's most populous city, Port-Au-Prince tends to be the busiest, its streets filled with vendors, burning trash, traffic, and wild animals such as pigs, goats, dogs, and cats. In 1970, Port-Au-Prince's population was around 460,000. Today the population is around 900,000. Although Danticat did not experience Port-Au-Prince at its busiest or dirtiest, she was living in this city as it developed into what it has become today.

By the age of two, in 1971, Danticat's father, André, immigrated to the New York City, United States of America. In the 1970's, New York City had a rather high crime rate and social disorders. The 1970's were such a low point in New York City's history that the labor unions warned would-be visitors from Haiti and elsewhere to stay away. The one high point was in 1972 when the World Trade Center was opened. Haitians looked to America as a place to begin a new life that was sustainable for themselves and their family. Two years after Danticat's father left Haiti, her mother, Rose, followed.

With both of her parents now living in New York City, Danticat was left in Port-Au-Prince, along with her younger brother, André Jr. Danticat and André Jr. were left by their parents to be raised by their aunt and uncle. In an interview about her childhood in Haiti, Danticat emphasized the importance of storytelling, church, and studying. Although Danticat spoke Haitian Creole at home, at school she was taught to speak French. In Haitian school systems, even today, students are taught to speak and write in French. French is looked at as a more elite language, showing that the person speaking French is more educated or of a higher

class. This can cause problems in homes due to the lack of knowledge the parents or community have with French. But for Danticat, this education benefited her significantly. It was because of Danticat's education that she began writing at nine years old. By the age of 12 she moved to the United States to reunite with her parents in Brooklyn, New York, in a heavily settled, Haitian-American neighborhood.

After graduating high school, Danticat entered Barnard College in New York City, initially pursuing a career in nursing, but her love of writing and literature led her to graduate with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in French Literature. Following the completion of her BA, she received her Master's in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Brown University in 1993. This education in creative writing was the first step along her path for success, and it eventually led to the important works she has published to date.

Edwidge Danticat is the author of several highly acclaimed books, including *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, *Krik? Krak!*, *The Farming of Bones*, *The Dew Breaker*, *Create Dangerously*, and *Claire of the Sea Light*. She is also the editor of *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*, *Best American Essays 2011*, *Haiti Noir* and *Haiti Noir 2*. She has written six books for children and young adults, *Anacaona*, *Behind the Mountains*, *Eight Days*, *The Last Mapou*, *Mama's Nightingale*, *Untwine*, as well as a travel narrative, *After the Dance*. She has been nominated for or awarded prizes such the National Book Award in 2007 and was the 2008 winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award ("Edwidge Danticat | Penguin Random House").

Danticat uses her power as a writer to be a voice for the voiceless. Although her stories often betray a lugubrious tone, she does not want pity from her audience. The words she uses, and that scenarios and events which Danticat writes about have the power to motivate readers to

go to Haiti and make a positive contribution to its history and culture, but that is not Danticat's intentions. Her intentions are to make an impact on the reader so that she can help prevent these situations such as dictatorship, cruel living situations, and severe poverty and homelessness from happening again, while showing how others live. Overall, Danticat's work does not demand pity for the Haitian people but hope to effect change. A blurb about *Brother, I'm Dying* from the *Washington Post*, describes the novel as, "Powerful...Danticat employs the charm of a storyteller and the authority of a witness to evoke the political forces and personal sacrifices behind her parents' journey to this country and her uncle's decision to stay behind." The *Washington Post* also noticed Danticat's need to create a political view that effects change and the ways Danticat calls attention to events happening outside of the United States. Danticat's works helps put readers in her shoes as well as her mindset throughout her life in Haiti and the impact that it has/had on her. From my personal experiences in Haiti, these texts speak volumes about life in Haiti. Throughout this thesis, I will reveal the ways in which Danticat's works illuminate key aspects of Haitian history and culture, and how that history and culture shape life in Haiti today.

Danticat's bilingualism gives her more opportunities to express particular points of view and thus reach a wider audience. She holds in high regard Haitians, Haitian-Americans, and others who want to change the world. Erik Gleibermann, in "Inside the Bilingual Writer," writes, "Danticat's dance between languages, and between selves, illustrates the creative artistic and identify flow many bilingual writers experience" (30). This quotation gives readers a greater insight into why and how Danticat writes, as well as her influences. The diverse languages and cultures fuel Danticat's inspiring writing. In the following chapters, I argue that Danticat's novels give readers an important insight into aspects of her life that are important not only to

herself, but the country of Haiti, while revealing the ways in which her works illuminate key aspects of Haitian history and culture still shaping Haiti today.

Chapter 2:

Dictatorship and Prisons in *The Dew Breaker*

The Dew Breaker (2004), a deeply moving work of fiction, explores the world of a “dew breaker,” a torturer, a man whose brutal crimes in the country of his birth lie hidden beneath his new American identity. Readers are introduced to the Dew Breaker later in his life as a quiet man, a husband and father, a barber, and a landlord to a man who lives in his basement. From the outside, other than the terrifying scar on his face, he seems to be an average man. Ka, the narrator as well as Dew Breaker’s daughter, begins to find out more and more about her father’s past, making sense of why he is the way he is. Through the novel, Ka explains her father’s actions, thoughts, and history as she discovers them for herself. As the book unfolds, flashing back from Haiti in the 1960’s to New York City today, readers dive into the everyday life, as well as the past life, of Dew Breaker. Dew Breaker exploits readers’ emotions with love, remorse, and hope, while connecting both personal and political issues throughout his life.

Danticat explores Dew Breaker’s personal and political rebellions, as well as the compromises that people must make in order to forget and move on from their personal and political history. Dew Breaker’s experience as a prison guard under François “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s, “Papa Doc”, dictatorship leads to a lifetime of obstacles for himself and his family to overcome. Through Dew Breaker’s experience as a prison guard, Danticat exposes the cruelty of Papa Doc’s regime and his use of the Haitian people as his personal cult. In *The Dew Breaker*, the conditions of the prisons represent the unjust and inhumane experiences all Haitians endured under Papa Doc’s dictatorship.

Haitian inhumane prison conditions were unjust to prisoners under François “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s dictatorship. At one point in the novel, Claude a minor from New York, USA, who has been exiled back to Haiti for killing his father in a rage, fortunately escapes the possibility of being trapped in an inhumane prison. Although he murdered his own father, he is not imprisoned. Expressing his excitement. Claude states,

I’m the luckiest fucker alive...If I hadn’t been a minor, I’d be locked up for the rest of my life. They might have even given me the chair. And if the prisons in Port had more room, or if the police down there were worth a damn, I’d be in a small cell with a thousand people right now, not sitting here talking to you. (119)

Claude’s excitement over avoiding prison helps readers understand the scene of a Haitian prison. Claude states that if he were older, he may receive the “the chair,” or he would have been shoved in a Haitian prison for life. He also explains in the same quotation that the prisons did not have enough room to even hold him nor keep him. Due to the small space for holding inmates, the government’s procedures are the reasons he was set free. Claude paints a picture of a cell packed with “a thousand people,” protected by guards who is not “worth a damn.” Readers may have heard that prisons in places such as Haiti and Mexico are unbearable, but readers may not truly understand the damage that can be done to a minor locked up in an unsanitary prison. Guards do not care about his well-being but, in fact, despise the prisoners. Prisoners are crammed into a tiny cell with thousands of other people, and the only reason why Claude was not put in a prison in Haiti is because of the lack of space. This leaves readers to understand that if a criminal commits a deadly act, s/he is set free because the prison cannot hold any more criminals. This lack of prison space shows that there is a problem within the justice system. The dictatorship is

responsible for these accommodations within the prisons, putting the responsibility for poor prison conditions squarely on Papa Doc.

Haitian prisons stand in for the larger inhumane conditions that affect everyone in Haiti. The prisons are used as a type of metaphor for what is happening in society in Haiti within the government. To better understand the conditions in Haitian prisons, Massachusetts Legal Help did an investigation in 2011. Mass Legal Help found that "... children 16 and older were confined with adults. Minors and adults sometimes occupied the same cells due to lack of available space..." ("Prison Conditions in Haiti"). Although this study was done in 2011, from personal observation, conditions have not seemed to improve all that much. In a small village in Haiti, way beyond the mountains, there is a man whom I have met on several occasions named Jean Marc. Jean Marc had been in prison for 5 years due to his hunger for bread and lack of money, causing him to steal. Jean Marc was recently let out in 2018 and told inhumane stories of events that happened behind bars with children. One story that stuck with me, told through a translator, was about a small boy, around the age of ten or twelve. Because he was so overwhelmed with emotion, Jean Marc's story was told with few details. While in prison, there was an older male inmate, who was there for multiple accounts of murder and child-related incidents. This older male took this small boy as his own, making the small boy not only sleep with him but act as a personal servant, and be punished when not fully satisfying the older man in physical or mental events. One example of this was when the boy was singing for the older man but did not know all the words; the older man physically assaulted him until he "fell asleep" as Jean Marc explained.

As of 2018, it doesn't seem like prison conditions changed much in terms of safety or health since 2011. A Haitian prison is not a place for a minor, especially if the chance that that

minor will be housed with adult inmates. Besides the factor of the inhumane actions of cramming bodies into a cell, it is not safe to house a minor inmate with an adult inmate because of the obvious risk of sexual assault. Readers now better understand Claude's relief at not being sent to a Haitian prison. The barbarity of cramming bodies into small cells with a mixture of adults and minors has a dehumanizing effect. Haitian prisons that haunt not only prisoners but prison guards as well.

In recent years, prison guards in Haiti were haunted by an event that they committed and then attempted to cover up. In 2010, a newspaper reporter discovered that there was a "cover up" in a Haiti prison. The article was titled "Haiti Prison Killings Cover-Up." Haitian police ended up killing several inmates in the prison of Les Cayes. The prison guards claimed that a prison ringleader, Ti Mousson, who police claimed shot inmates who refused to flee the compound with him, was to blame for the massacre. This is not the first-time prisoners have witnessed murders. A former inmate, Kesnel Jeudi, told police what used to happen while he was an inmate in Les Cayes. Jeudi stated,

"...police made prisoners lie down and 'while the prisoners were lying down, they began firing'. Jeudi told the daily the police shootings involved some score-settling: 'There were people they selected to kill.' Most accounts put the number of dead from 12 to 19, with up to another 40 inmates wounded. The bodies were buried in an unmarked, common grave, the daily said." ("Haiti Prison Killings Cover-Up" US Washington, Sunday)

Numerous journalistic accounts show that Haitian prisons are still places of torture and murder, as they were under Papa Doc's dictatorship. Prison guards believe that they can act with

impunity. But, for those guards who then leave these prison walls, they experience the negative effects of terror and torture witnesses inside over years.

Traumatic moments inside prisons cause unbearable recollections that prisoners and prison guards, as well as their loved ones, must relive for the rest of their lives. In *The Dew Breaker*, Ka explains her father's traumatic flashbacks to when he worked in the Haitian prisons. Ka states,

My father has had partial frontal dentures since he fell off his mother's bed and landed on his face ten years ago when he was having one of his prison nightmares. I mention that too. Just the dentures, not the nightmares. I also bring up the blunt, ropelike scar that runs from my father's right cheek down to the corner of his mouth, the only visible reminder of the years he spent in prison in Haiti. (4-5)

Although Ka is not quite sure about the specifics of her father's experience in prison, she bears witnesses to his nightmares, a symptom of post-traumatic stress. Ka's father's nightmares are so powerful that he leaps out of his bed during the night and falls to the floor. This physical symptom of his trauma is noticed by those around him. Ka begins to understand her father's past, or so she thinks. Regarding the scar on Ka's father's face, she just assumes that it is from his years in prison, thinking he was an inmate. Ka later finds out that the scar was caused by an incident that was her father's fault due to his position as a guard. Her father was part of a government group that instructed him to kill a preacher. The preacher fought back and ended up cutting Dew Breaker's face with a shard of broken wood, leaving a scar. In "Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration," Jennifer E. Henton explains the symbolism of Ka's father's scar. Henton writes, "The scar initiates Dew Breaker as a victim... Breaker now has a wound that symbolizes his loss. His power drained, he is subjected to domination and

oppression... (Henton 6). Some readers may not agree that the Dew Breaker is a victim since he was the one who committed acts that were inhumane. The scar, however, represents this overall general fear of dictatorship as well as the consequences on an individual. Dew Breaker had to commit harmful acts on others in order to please Papa Doc, leaving the scar. The people who chose to work as corrections officers in Haiti now live with disturbing memories of their time working under Papa Doc. The scars from this time are visible and obscured.

The reason why the dictatorship was so effective was due to a manipulative leader, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier. François “Papa Doc” Duvalier was given the title, President of Haiti, after the previous president, Figinolé, was deposed by the army and forced into exile in 1957 (Danticat, *Brother, I’m Dying*, 33). Papa Doc’s dictatorship is characterized in *Brother, I’m Dying* as unruly and unjust. Danticat addresses Duvalier’s dictatorship, writing,

Papa Doc Duvalier...refused to step down or allow new elections, despite a growing dissatisfaction with his increasingly repressive methods of imprisoning and publicly executing his enemies. Instead created a countrywide militia called Tonton Macoutes, a battalion of brutal men and women aggressively recruited from the countries urban and rural poor... (51).

Duvalier’s unjust decisions and corruption lead the country of Haiti into despair by imprisoning and brainwashing, and, in many cases, killing, his people. Papa Doc abused his power by not allowing new elections, executing his enemies, and creating a militia group for his own enjoyment and needs. Papa Doc Duvalier victimized his enemies, his workers, and his government. Although dictatorship under François “Papa Doc” Duvalier made life in Haitian unbearable, Haitians did not always fare much better in places like the United States of America where they emigrated for a new life.

Although many Haitians may move to other parts of the country such as The United States, they can still be targeted by the government and discriminated against. In *The Dew Breaker*, there was an incident in a nightclub in New York City between a Haitian man and the police. Danticat writes, “In the old days, they had often gone dancing at the Rendez Vous, which was now the Cenegal nightclub. But they hadn’t gone much since the place had become famous- a Haitian man names Aber Louima was arrested there, then beaten and sodomized at a nearby police station” (38). This event occurred due to police brutality within the government because of Louima’s race. Although Louima was not under the rule of Papa Doc or facing Haitian prisons, he was still abused and assaulted by the government. Both Louima and Ka’s father face incidents where dictatorship is similar in the ways of physical assault.

In a *Newsweek* article “The Lessons of Abner Louima” Ellis Cose discusses the Louima case and how it led to progress in the battle against police brutality. Cose describes those who tortured Louima as having “a narrow sense about innocence and guilt... Whoever physically participated in the depraved assault ...an entire station house stood by and let it happen--and then clammed up about what had taken place” (Cose). Showing that these guards had no remorse for what they did, they will not be haunted. Just as the police had no remorse due to his Haitian background. The government and society brainwash these officers to have a vision of what their society should, or shouldn’t be, leaving them to dismiss the “shouldn’t be.” Later in “The Lessons of Abner Louima,” Cose discusses the officials who go against their “brothers.” Cose writes, “The case was brought by a prison guard who was attacked after snitching on other guards for taking sexual liberties with female inmates” (Cose). Even though not all of these government officials are on board with these inhumane acts against the public, they have to go along with it due to the fear of being reprised if they do not participate. Haiti’s prisons and

United States' prisons may not be that different after all due to the government brainwashing its people.

In *The Dew Breaker* Papa Doc's dictatorship was unjust and inhumane, especially for those in prison. Not only did Haitian prisoners suffer under Papa Doc's rule, but prison guards such as the "Dew Breaker" were left with the unbearable memories of their time in prison. Since Duvalier's dictatorship, Haitian prisons have not advanced or changed in terms of safety, sanitation, and humaneness. Haiti needs to adapt resources that can help aid political power, resources such as the United States serving as an ally. Prisons in *The Dew Breaker* stand in for the imprisonment of all Haitians under the tyranny of Papa Doc's dictatorship.

Chapter 3:

Separation and Loss in *Brother, I'm Dying*

Brother, I'm Dying (2007), Danticat's emotional memoir, focuses on separation that she has faced. At the age of four, Danticat's parents left her in Port-Au-Prince to move to the United States. Danticat was placed in the care of her uncle Joseph, a charismatic pastor, to whom she had become profoundly attached and upon whom she looked as her "second father." At the age of twelve, Danticat reunites with their parents and her two younger brothers in New York City. While she was excited to see them, she was sad to leave her uncle Joseph and the only home she has ever known in Haiti. Danticat recounts her family's trouble to show the world what terrifying experiences she encountered in 2004. This tale is terrifying because it shows how easy it is for good people to get caught up in events beyond their control. The story leaves readers with a deep sense of separation and loss for those Danticat loves most.

Danticat's first experience of separation was when her father left her and their family in Haiti and moved to the United States. Danticat states, "because he had a job, a wife and two children as incentives to return to Haiti, my father was granted a one-month tourist visa. But he had no intention of coming back" (Danticat 54). Traveling from country to country for a long period of time is not as suspicious if the person traveling has a wife, job, and family back home. The new country trusts that the visitor will soon exit their country and return home. But Danticat knew that her father had no plans to return home, even though he left some of the most important people in her life behind.

Danticat experienced separation for a second time when her mother followed her father to the United States. While Danticat is dropping her mother off at the airport, she has a sudden fear:

“But what if our mother went away and never came back? Just like our father. Panicked, I leaped out of Uncle Joseph’s arms and ran right to my mother, pressing my face against her legs. I pushed him back as he tried to grab me again...she could not bear to look back” (Danticat 57). Danticat realizes that her mother is not simply going to visit her father but is leaving Haiti behind to start a new life in the United States. As a child, this sense of separation and loss affects her future, particularly her ability to grow close to another.

Danticat experiences similar effects of the fear of separation and the fear of a bond due to the experience of both her parents moving to the United States. The fear of bonding was shown at the end of the novel, following the birth of Danticat’s baby. She states, “She was leaving my body and going into the world, where she would spend the rest of her life moving away from me” (Danticat 253). In an article in *World Literature Today*, Robert H. Jr. McCormick explains Danticat’s outlook on the birth of her daughter and the reason behind her daughter’s name. McCormick writes, “The idea of separation has embedded itself so deeply into the consciousness of Danticat that she conceptualizes the birth of her daughter as a kind of separation. Perhaps the need for family cohesion prompted her to name her daughter Mira” (McCormick 72). Instead of looking at this new child being happily brought into the world, Danticat feels her daughter growing away from her, instead of with her. While most women and their newborns begin to create an unbreakable bond, Danticat dismisses the happy events and can only push her daughter away, because, in her mind, that is what will happen in the end anyway, leaving her alone.

Danticat’s fear of separation was developed with her Uncle Joseph. In “A Conversation with Edwidge Danticat and Jonathan Demme” for the *New York Amsterdam News* in regard to *Brother, I’m Dying*, Misani, the moderator of the conversation tells us that,

At the same time, the psychological impact borne by the children who are torn from their nuclear family and in this case placed into an extended family setting is also delved into. Danticat gently explores the children's initial reactions at the departure of their parents, to settling into their uncle's extended household. This separation brought Danticat and her Uncle Joseph very close to each other, intensifying the pain she felt about his horrific death (Misani 20).

In the beginning of Uncle Joseph and Danticat's relationship, there is a lack of connection due to her fear of growing closer to someone. After years of him being a father figure to her, she became attached to him at the hip. By the end of the memoir, Uncle Joseph dies in a difficult way, leaving Danticat not only heartbroken but lost. Following his death, she gives birth to a baby girl and holds the same fear of separation towards her. Although Danticat's uncle was her source of kinship and then loss, Uncle Joseph deals with his own loss of self.

After Danticat moves to the United States in 2004, Uncle Joseph was exiled from his own home. His life threatened by an angry mob, forced to flee his church, the frail, eighty-one-year-old Uncle Joseph, who years earlier had lost his voice from cancer, decides to move to the United States like his brother where he thinks he will be safe. Instead, he is detained by U.S. Customs, held by the Department of Homeland Security and brutally imprisoned for being uncertain about the length of his visit. Uncle Joseph is stripped of his name and given a number. Danticat explains her uncle's identity loss, "My uncle was now alien 27041999" (Danticat 214). A name is very important due to its representation of who the person is, a number is not a person, a number does not have a face, a life, a family, but a name holds those qualities. By giving him a number, the government is dehumanizing him, causing Uncle Joseph to lose himself. While being detained, his medicine, a traditional medicine in Haiti, was taken away from him because it

was seen as a “voodoo-like potion” (Danticat 227). This cultural difference creates a separation of human races and a lack of understanding cultural practices. Following his detention, he ends up dying just a few short days after. Demme Demme, in his conversation with Danticat, says, “This transcends a family tragedy...that your Uncle can die at the hand of Americans... because he was honest (when asked how long he would stay in the U.S and he said he did not know), he was incarcerated and died because he wasn't given the proper treatment” (Misani).

Misani, reflecting on Demme's comments, writes,

The audience also learned about the intolerance, prejudice and stereotyping that her uncle experienced during his last few days as a detainee of the U.S. government. Danticat divulged that when Joseph had asked for the bush medicine he had been taking for an ailment and which he had brought with him from Haiti, the immigration officer had responded to the elder by saying that the medicine was not really medicine, just before going on to label it as Voodoo medicine (Misani).

Uncle Joseph's death is ironic because he fled Haiti so he wouldn't die, yet he died because of the Americans. Without his medicine, he could not survive making the Americans at fault due to them banning his “Voodoo medicine.” His honesty while entering the United States caused his suffering as well. If he lied and made up an amount of time he was to stay, he may have been set free. What makes his loss even sadder is that he did not want his body sent back to Haiti when he did pass; he wanted to be buried in the United States (Danticat 239). Uncle Joseph was so segregated from Haiti after his exile, he wished to be cremated in an unknown land rather than be buried in his home land of Haiti. Uncle Joseph did not only lose a part of his identity but a large part of his religious self as well. Being cremated is not a religious standard that he would usually follow. A standard funeral and proper burial for a Haitian Catholic are what a typical religious

man like himself would expect. Uncle Joseph's body after he died was not used for religious norms but rather an unethical Catholic belief. Another person who did not follow his religious norms and was sent to exile was Marie Micheline.

Marie Micheline is Guillermo Hernandez's daughter, but she was raised by Uncle Joseph and his wife, Tante Denise. Alongside Danticat, this relationship resulted of which was a sister-like bond. Marie Micheline was another person that Danticat had to say goodbye to. Marie becomes pregnant at a young age and the father of the baby refuses to take responsibility for his actions, making Maria look like a mockery. Tante Denise sends the young woman to live with her mother in a distant part of town. At a young age, Danticat is not fully aware of what is happening and why she has to be sent away. It seems that everyone who Danticat comes to love ends up being sent away or distanced from her. While being away Marie marries Pressoir Marol, a Macoute who beats her and ends up separating Marie from her family. Although Uncle Joseph rescues her and brings her back home to him and Tante Denise, Marie was put into exile separating her from a life she could have succeeded in. With Marie having an impact of separation on Danticat, other people such as Granmé Melina created a larger remembrance of loss.

Granmé Melina is Tante Denise's mother, who acts as a grandmother figure to Danticat. Granmé Melina came to live with her daughter and Uncle Joseph in 1979. At the time, she is between ninety-seven and one hundred years old. She is a very popular woman, people from the neighborhood gather and listen to her tell folktales in the evening. Granmé Melina ends up dying in her sleep, and Danticat finds her. Granmé Melina's funeral was Danticat's first. At the funeral her Uncle's words filled Danticat with a sense of loss. Her Uncle states, "Death is a journey we embark on from the moment we are born" (Danticat 73). This saying made her realize that death

is inevitable. Yes, this may be true, but during a Haitian funeral, these dark words would not be commonly used for a woman of Granmé Melina's age. As her Uncle progresses through his sermon, Danticat thinks about why Uncle Joseph is as sad as he is. She states, "Granmé Melina's death perhaps a reminder of how close he [my uncle] himself had come to dying...he mouthed one word: Good-bye" (Danticat 74-75). Again, funerals in Haiti, especially for the elderly, are a celebration of life, not a time to grieve. Because this is Danticat's first funeral, this is all she now knows.

Having spent considerable time in Haiti, I have seen and heard many funeral processions. In the streets of Port-Au-Prince I have seen large groups of people carrying a casket singing and dancing to celebrate a beautiful life. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Danticat, funerals are described as "People with gourd rattles and talking drums joined in. Others chimed in with cow horns and conch shells" (Danticat *Breath* 237). Haitian funerals entail singing, making music, and celebration, rather than sitting around a casket stating somber thoughts on death. Despite the emphasis on celebration Danticat's experience with funerals leaves her with a sense of sadness and loss, just as another event or places in her life: airports.

Like Haitian funerals, the Port-Au-Prince airport is a fun and loud environment to be in, expect for Danticat. As a child, she had to say goodbye to both of her parents in this airport, and now that she is older, she will say goodbye to her Uncle Joseph in this same spot. As Danticat is leaving for Miami, she states, "My mother was right about my plane ride to Miami that July 2004. It was going to be the most lonesome of my life" (Danticat 58). After separating herself from the only family she knows, to travel to her true family, she is sitting on a plane, knowing no one, sad, alone, and nervous. Airports are a site of escape, yet no body belongs. In airports,

everyone is coming and going; they are not a home for anyone, there is no guarantee. Airports are a place for separation.

While airports and planes are means by which we experience new beginnings and adventures, they also loved ones saying goodbye to one another. Events and issues like Uncle Joseph experienced happen every day with Haitians in the U.S. and in Haiti. In November 2018, Haitian airports began to have trouble: gangs, protests, and shootings. Although I was not personally on island when this occurred, friends of mine were. The organization that I travel with, Haiti 180, had to be evacuated, by helicopter. Since they could not reach the airport due to the attacks in the airport, they had to have a personal helicopter escort them out of the country. There is always a sense of loss and separation with airports, just as Danticat experienced. Throughout *Brother, I'm Dying* Danticat ends up losing and being separated from her loved ones.

Chapter 4:

Religious Mothers in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Breath, Eyes, Memory is a narrative by the main character Sophie Caco who relates her experiences and impressions from age 12 until she is in her twenties. Sophie is the product of a violent rape and is raised by her loving aunt, Tante Atie, in a village near Port-au-Prince for the first 12 years of Sophie's life. Tante Atie explains, "in this country, there are many good reasons for mothers to abandon their children" (Danticat 19). Although Sophie was not abandoned but left with her, Tante Atie makes a valid point because many women in Haiti are raped and left with children that remind them of horror or simply cannot take care of the child. In the orphanage in Haiti where I visit, Kay Mari, we have many children that are outcomes due to rapes, unwanted due to disabilities, having parents that are no longer with us, or they cannot be properly taken care of. It is hard to raise a child anywhere, but especially in Haiti due to the lack of resources.

Although Tante Atie is not her biological mother, Sophie looks at her as a mother figure. Sophie states herself as "my mother's daughter and Tante Atie's child" (Danticat 46). Meaning, that even though her mother, Martine, carried and gave birth to her, Tante Atie raised her as her own child. Although Tante Atie is Sophie's maternal figure, Sophie is then unexpectedly summoned by her mother, who lives in Brooklyn, New York, to go live with her. Even though Tante Atie does not want Sophie to leave her, she knows that it is best for a mother and daughter. Early in the novel Tante Atie states, "...A child belongs with her mother, and a mother with her child" (Danticat 14). Tante Atie is not going to do well with Sophie leaving her but she knows that it is best for a mother to be with her child.

While Sophie is living with her mother in New York, she discovers the trauma her mother endures inclusive of violent nightmares of her experience prior to fleeing Haiti. At this point of the novel, Sophie is not entirely sure of Martine's story, but she does know that something is very upsetting to her. While her mother was having nightmares, she would wake her out of it and her mother said "Sophie, you've saved my life" (Danticat 79). This is a drastic response to someone having a nightmare. Sophie soon reveals that her nightmares are due to a violent rape, leading Martine pregnant with Sophie. Sophie may think that she was a reason that Martine's life was ruined, but she was a reason her life was saved. Later in the novel, Martine tells Sophie that her mother tried to make Martine get rid of Sophie while in the womb. Martine states, "When I was pregnant with you, *Manman* made me drink all kinds of herbs, vervain, quinine, and verbena, baby poisons. I tried beating my stomach with wooden spoons. I tried to destroy you, but you wouldn't go away" (Danticat 193). It is obvious that Martine did not want this baby but revealing this to Sophie makes her doubt herself. A mother should never tell a child that they did not want them, or even worse, tried to get rid of them. This gives Sophie a sense of doubt with herself because not even her own mother wanted her while she was carrying her nor when she was born, leaving her with a family member. This causes problems for Sophie later in life.

The major conflict of the novel is the main character's battle with her inner self. Due to Sophie being a child of rape, she is a constant reminder to her mother of the wounds that had been inflicted on her. Sophie states, "It took me twelve years to piece together my mother's entire story. By then, it was already too late" (Danticat 59). Although she now can understand why her mother is overly protective and concerned for her daughter, she cannot stop her emotions or go back in time to fix the events that had happened. This ends up leaving Sophie

with a feeling of shame and ruining rather than saving and helping her mother. While Tante Atie told the story of Sophie's mother being raped she explained how scared her mother truly was. Tante Atie said, "For months she was afraid he would creep out of the night and kill her in her sleep. She was terrified that he would come and tear the child growing inside her. At night, she tore the sheets and bit off pieces of her own flesh when she had nightmares" (Danticat 138). With her mother being a victim of rape, she remains a wounded woman. Although this particular nightmare was over twelve years ago, Sophie sees that she still has severe nightmares in regard to the rape to this day.

The rape not only put shame on her mother, but to her family as well. Besides being a victim of rape, Martine had to go through, and perform the act of testing. In an article of The New York Times "At Home with Edwidge Danticat; Haitian Tales, Flatbush Scenes" by Garry Pierre-Pierre, he explains testing in the Haitian culture. Pierre- Pierre defines testing as,

a mostly rural practice in which a mother inserts her fingers in her daughter's vagina to ascertain that she is still a virgin... Sitting in her living room, Ms. Danticat said that among Haitian-American women, "'-there is a great deal of rage toward the book.'" - At readings across the country, she said, some of the strongest opposition comes from middle-class Haitian-American women who consider themselves modern and liberated. They are ashamed of things like testing, she said, and some, raised in cities, are shocked to learn that it is exists (Pierre- Pierre).

Testing in the Haitian culture is seen to be some of the most painful and hidden Haitian tradition due to the embarrassment that it puts on women. As a woman who lives in a small town in Massachusetts, USA, an act such as testing is horrifying to think of and sends shivers down my spine. The embarrassment that not only the daughter entails but the mother is overwhelming. In

Breath, Eyes, Memory, Sophie finally “understands why she had screamed while her (Martine) mother had tested her...*There are secrets you cannot keep*” (Danticat 83-84). Sophie copes with her sexual violation with religious imagery as she “mouthed the words to the Virgin Mother's Prayer” while being tested (Danticat 83). Besides the uncomfortableness, the act seems to be painful and disturbing for these pure young women. But, when the women are no longer pure, the real embarrassment sets in.

If or when a daughter “fails” this test, the mother usually has a sense of abandonment towards the daughter, feeling as if she has betrayed her, causing both women to have a battle with their sense of womanhood/ motherhood. For Sophie, the way she failed her test was not natural. Sophie, despite her mother's warnings to focus on school and not men, falls in love with Joseph, a musician who lives next door to them. After being caught with Joseph, her mother in turn begins testing her constantly to make sure she is still a virgin. Depression causes Sophie to act irrationally. While being ashamed and embarrassed after each testing, she decided to insert a pestle into herself, ripping her flesh apart, shining light on her hymen, destroying what was holding her mothers' finger back during testing (Danticat 87). Following the testing, her mother assumes that it is because of the man she is currently seeing, Joseph. Sophie explains her mother's reaction, “‘Go,’ she said with tears running down her face. She seized my books my clothes and threw them at me. ‘You just go to him and see what he can do for you’” (Danticat 87). With Martine believing that Sophie is no longer pure, she immediately holds a dismay by her. After she is kicked out of her home, Sophie elopes with Joseph and gets married. Since Sophie's mother disowning her, it causes Sophie to grow into the same type of woman as her mother, a woman who fights a battle with herself as a woman, wife, mother, and daughter.

Sophie's frustration and confusion begins to set in following her marriage and expectance of a baby girl. She begins to feel overwhelmed both by anxieties and responsibilities. To get away from it all, she flees to Haiti along with her infant daughter, without a word to her husband, Joseph. This idea of a recurring abandonment is due to her mother leaving her in Haiti as well as making her leave after the failed test. This negative emotion from abandonment impacts and is affecting her duties as a mother and a wife. Sophie states her "duties as a wife" in terms of sexual favors for her husband (Danticat 128). But these duties are larger than just physical intimacy with Joseph, they include other portions of what a wife entails, including not running away with their child to a different country without any notice. Sophie's emotional breakdown is caused by Martine's past and present actions towards her daughter, Sophie. Sophie does not want her motherhood to correspond with her mother's.

While in Haiti, religion begins to really help with Sophie's coping mechanisms about herself and her past with her mother. Although religion is throughout the whole novel, this portion of Sophie's beliefs and Haitian religion are very deep. Pierce clarifies the relationship between the biblical version and the Haitian version of Erzulie. Pierce writes, "it is the ending which has the greatest implication for Sophie's recovery ... Erzulie transforms the woman into a butterfly, into a creature that is free from the constraints of humanity; a world that chose to either ignore or fail to provide for a bleeding woman..." (Pierce 73). In a journal "Restless spirits: syncretic religion in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*" by Yolanda Pierce, this time of Sophie's life is emphasized with religion due to one statue of Erzulie. Sophie states her relationship and outlook on Erzulie,

As a child, the mother I had imagined for myself was like Erzulie, the lavish Virgin Mother. She was the healer of all women and the desire of all men. She had gorgeous

dresses in satin, silk, and lace, necklaces, pendants, earrings, bracelets, anklets, and lots and lots of French perfume. She never had to work for anything because the rainbow and the stars did her work for her. Even though she was far away, she was always with me. I could always count on her, like one count on the sun coming out at dawn (Danticat 59).

Later in the journal, Pierce explains why this Virgin Mother is so insightful to Sophie and how she gave Sophie a sense of strength and encouragement. The statue represents of the pain that her family has been through and the fact that both of Sophie and her mothers' innocents were taken from them in violent events.

Although Sophie's fear of abandonment and rejection causes many problems in her marriage due to her mother, Martine is the one who returns to Haiti to talk to Sophie and bring her home. At this point of their mother daughter relationship, it has been two years since the failed test and the last time they had spoken. It is during this trip to Haiti where both Sophie and Martine reconcile with one another. Sophie ends up traveling back to the United States with her mother to rejoin her own family. All seems well in New York until Martine becomes pregnant by her fiancé, Marc, and ends up committing suicide in attempt to abort her unborn child.

This bloody death was caused by Martine was not only taking the baby's life, but her own. Marc stated, "She stabbed her stomach with an old rusty knife. I counted, and they counted again in the hospital. Seventeen times" (Danticat 229). For Martine, this was not an easy pregnancy. If this baby was to live, she could not. Prior to the suicide, Marc told Sophie that her mother was "hearing voices" from the baby and needed an "exorcism" (Danticat 223-224). This traumatic incident is due to her last pregnancy. Martine could not overcome her last experience of being pregnant, with Sophie, due to her nightmares of the rapist acting upon her once again. Although this baby is not because of a rape but rather from love, the same emotions and

nightmares reappear, making the rape feel as if it was the reason for this baby. All trauma has a trigger and this fetus is what reminds Martine of her rape when she was younger.

By the end of the novel, Sophie is distressed; she was conceived due to rape, she took her own innocence away, followed in her mother's abandonment, and now lost Martine because of the reminder of the rape once again. Erzulie is once again stated in comparison with Sophie due to her experiences. Sophie finds light at the end of the tunnel through religion and those who surround her. Sophie is turning into a beautiful butterfly just as Erzulie, the Virgin Mother, does. With religion and her loving family by her side, she is on a new path that does not follow in the steps of her mother.

Chapter 5:

Storytelling and the Strength of Children in *Krik? Krak!*

Edwidge Danticat's novel, *Krik? Krak!*, tells nine different stories that are about women trying to understand their relationship with their families, as well as Haiti. While there are several different themes in these nine stories, one major theme is the diversity of suffering. At one point or another, all of these Haitian women have experienced suffering in her own way. Although this novel focuses on these nine women's stories, I will be focusing on the act of storytelling itself. Storytelling is a cultural tradition in Haiti. In "Storytelling Defines Your Organizational Culture," William H. Brady and Shar Haley define storytelling as being "a traditional and even ancient means of passing on wisdom and culture. Stories anchor an organization's past to its present" (Brady and Haley 40). From centuries ago until today, stories function as a way of presenting information from the past to the present, making storytelling a valued amongst many cultures. Stories offer a historical perspective and are entertaining. Although not all stories have to be non-fiction, they are usually based off of "true" events, people, or situations. Storytelling is a cultural norm in Haiti that benefits everyone from children to the elderly.

On one of my first trips to Haiti, my group and I went on a house visit to an elderly woman named Facil. Facil refuses to leave her home and come to our elderly home, the Kay Martina Elderly Home, despite her blindness, because her husband, who passed during the earthquake of 2010, built that house with his bare hands when they were only 20. Since building that house, they raised five children together. These children now have families of their own and have left Facil to fend for herself. Facil was the first person to introduce me to the storytelling

tradition in Haiti. One day, while sitting on her porch during a home visit she yelled out “Krik?”, to the fifteen of us sitting with her, and a few villagers in nearby huts, responded “Kra!” We had to ask someone to explain what she meant because we noticed that she did that for every story. It was explained to me that yelling “Krik!” was a way to get others engaged in the story, or to inform others that a story was about to begin. In “Edwidge Danticat” Deborah Gregory, she asks Danticat to discuss her childhood and life in Haiti. The first thing that Danticat brings up to Gregory is the ritual of storytelling: “‘The Haitian storytelling ritual,’ says Danticat, ‘begins with a call and response: A storyteller questions the audience by asking “Krik?.” If they are ready to hear a story, they shout an enthusiastic “Kra!” (Gregory 56). The use of the phrase Krik? is like saying “story time!” to a group of kids in a room. They now know to run to where you are because you are about to begin a story.

Many think of stories as a device for entertainment. In Gregory’s conversation with Danticat, Danticat affirms this. Gregory states,

After supper the story-telling began, recalls novelist Edwidge Danticat about her childhood in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. “We didn’t have a telephone and only watched TV for a few hours a day because we didn’t have electricity most of the time,” explains Danticat, who was born in 1969 during a dictatorial regime, “We gathered and listened to stories every night instead.”

(Gregory)

Those in Haiti today still have limited, and sometimes no, electricity. In Kay Mari and Kay Martina Elderly Home, we use electricity sparingly, mostly at night, unless an emergency, due to solar panels that reboot during the day because of the substantial sunlight. When school is out or there is a holiday, the children will be rewarded with a movie or show. The families in the village

near Kay Mari have no electricity and rely on storytelling and the company of others for entertainment and wisdom.

Haitians are under the impression that if they do not tell stories, something bad may occur not only to them but the world. In *Krik? Krak!*, a female character explains the majority of Haitians thoughts on why stories must be told. She states, “You thought that if you didn’t tell the stories, the sky would fall on your head” (195). Stories are a way of communication between people in the present and the past. If storytelling was to be stopped, Haitians believe, the world may come to an end. Although many people in countries who’ve lived through the Enlightenment and put their faith in Reason believe that this is an Eurocentric way of thinking which doesn’t value non-western ways of knowing, Haitians believe it because they have been told it their whole lives.

In Danticat’s novels, storytelling often plays a key role. In *Brother, I’m Dying*, there is the story of Rapunzel (Danticat 69), ; in *The Dew Breaker*, there is the story of a woman who cried crystal tears (Danticat 69); and in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, “there was a funny one” about a little girl, grandmother, and a snake (Danticat 17-18). Many other stories found in *Krik? Krak!* are emotional in relation to children. One example of this emotion is the story “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” (Danticat 77). In this story, a woman finds a deceased baby on the street, and she compares her to baby Jesus (Danticat 79). In Haiti, it is not unheard of to see a baby or child abandoned on the street. Many families cannot afford another mouth to feed. Maybe they did not wish for the child, or simply have no interest in him/her. Many children that we have received over the years at Kay Mari were found abandoned in the city streets of Port-Au-Prince. One child, Youri, with whom I have created a strong bond was found on the street. Youri was found at the age of three, alone in the streets of Port-Au-Prince with such severe worms in his stomach

that they were visible externally. And yet, no one had a care in the world when an ill, naked, three-year-old was wondering the streets. In “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” the woman taking this lifeless baby affirms this disposal of children. She says, “In the city, I hear they throw out whole entire children. They throw them out anywhere: on doorsteps, in garbage cans, at gas pumps, sidewalks” (Danticat 80-81). Haiti does not designate “Safe Havens” at a local fire or police station as the United States does. Haiti does not offer safe abortions with a doctor or adoption services as countries like the U.S. do. If a mother cannot afford or does not want a child, she simply leaves it for dead in the streets, rather than at a “Safe Haven.”

Although many of these stories are disheartening, abandonment of children is a recurring theme in Danticat’s work. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Tante Atie tells Sophie, “In this country, there are many good reasons for mothers to abandon their children” (Danticat 19). As I argued previously, women who become pregnant do not have many safe choices. Many cannot afford to feed their children, leaving them with no other choice but to abandon their child, either with another family member, people they may not even know, or on the street. Although I do not support a mother’s decision to leave an infant or child on the streets, I can understand why a mother would do so; there are many reasons why a mother cannot raise a child in Haiti. Sadly, this leaves children with the sense that the one person in this world who should love him or her the most doesn’t.

In *Brother, I’m Dying*, Danticat herself attempts to cope with abandonment after both of her parents moved to the U.S., leaving her with her Uncle Joseph. When Danticat’s Uncle Joseph is telling her childhood stories of her and her parents, she begins to make a connection. Danticat states,

I've since discovered that children who spend their childhood without their parents love to hear stories like this, which they can embellish and expand as they wish. These types of anecdotes momentarily put our minds at ease, assuring us that we were indeed loved by the parents who left. (Danticat 54-55)

Since her parents have abandoned her, she does not feel loved by them. Stories of parents loving a child who have been abandoned are a way to reassure children that even though someone has left you, does not mean that they do not care for you. It may be easy to hear that and find truth in that when you are not the one who has been abandoned. For those who have been abandoned, such as Danticat, that feeling of love may not be reciprocated.

Like Danticat, who was left to fend for herself, children in Haiti, in some cases, especially those who have been abandoned, are very independent. In *Brother, I'm Dying*, when Danticat reunited with her parents, Uncle Joseph assured Danticat's parents of her independence. He declared, "These children almost look after themselves" (Danticat 90). From personal experiences, I have seen how independent children in Haiti are. For example, Francesca, the oldest girl in Kay Mari, is now 16 years old and acts as a second mother to the younger children. She does not only help cook and clean for every meal, she makes sure that the younger children have completed simple tasks such as getting dressed, brushing their teeth, and not picking fights with one another, as any mother would. Since Francesca is the oldest, she has taken on a motherly role at a very young age, leaving her with a giant source of independence.

Another example shows how benevolent and even mischievous the children in Kay Mari can be. Four of the children, around the ages of 8-10 at the time, snuck out of the orphanage one night to help a fellow villager. Although sneaking out is strictly prohibited, it was for a good cause. In Haiti no one will venture out into the rain because it is said to cause sickness if it falls

on your head. The children realized that the blind woman who lives near the orphanages, Facil, had not eaten or had anything to drink after a week of rain. Facil, who is blind, cannot get her own food or water and is dependent on those in neighboring huts, and those at Kay Mari. These four children went into their own kitchen, filled jugs of water and plates of food and ran to Facil's side. They brought it to her bedside, kissed her, and ran home. The next morning, they confessed to their actions, but who can punish anyone for doing something like that? The elder's there congratulated the kids on their independence and consideration for others around them.

Besides this independence that I have noticed within the children of Haiti, they have a great deal of strength. Although many of these children and families have been through hell and back, and have very little to show for it, they are the most grateful and happy humans I have ever encountered. Much of that is due to religion and prayers, but another reason is because of imagination. In Danticat's children book, *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti*, a young boy was trapped in rubble from the 2010 earthquake for eight days. When being pulled out of the rubble on the eighth day, many asked him, "Were you afraid? Were you sad? Did you cry?" His response was "I was brave, I told them, but when the earth shook again and again, I was afraid" (Danticat). Although he was afraid, he tried his hardest to put a brave face on. Many children will admit their fears, because they are just children. Haitian children are aware that many others have been the earthquake, as well, and they must overcome and be strong not only for themselves but for those around them. The story *Eight Days* explains that in order to not be scared, the little boy used his imagination and saw himself playing with friends and family. The only time he admitted to his lack of strength was on the fifth day. He says that he was pretending to play soccer with his friend Oscar. Oscar then became very tired and fell asleep, but he never woke up. The boy said, "That was the day I cried" (Danticat). This was the only time his strength was questioned

due to his loss of a friend, as any human being would do: cry over a friend who has passed. The immense strength that Haitian children feature is admirable.

I am grateful to be able to see actions like these first hand. Children in Haiti are beyond independent and strong. Their strength and independence in households, while working, and amongst others is a cultural difference that not many have the chance to witness. Every piece of work that Danticat creates holds a specific purpose to show the world the unique and beautiful traditions and culture Haiti has to offer.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I argued that Danticat's novels give readers an important insight into aspects of her life that are important not only to herself, but the country of Haiti, while revealing the ways in which her works illuminate key aspects of Haitian history and culture still shaping Haiti today. From personal experiences of missionary work, I am aware of the basics of an everyday Haitian culture and life. This thesis and Haitian field of study are significant because it is important for me and others to learn about Haiti from writers who have lived these experiences first hand, such as Edwidge Danticat.

Experiencing and seeing Haitian culture made me more aware of my life back in the United States. Through an analysis of Danticat's novels, readers should be more informed and more aware of history and culture of Haiti. Haiti should not be seen by North Americans as just a foreign world or a victim of a natural disaster; Haiti is a beautiful and unique place. In chapter one, I argue that Danticat inspires others to have a positive outlook on Haiti and not take pity on this developing country. Her intentions are to make an impact on the reader so that she can help prevent these situations such as dictatorship, cruel living situations, and severe poverty and homelessness from happening again, while showing how others live. She uses her power as a writer to be a voice for the voiceless. Danticat's works helps put readers in her shoes as well as her mindset throughout her life in Haiti and the impact that it has/ had on her.

Chapter Two argues that, in *The Dew Breaker*, Papa Doc's dictatorship was unjust and inhumane, especially for those in prison. Not only did Haitian prisoners suffer under Papa Doc's rule, but prison guards such as the "Dew Breaker" were left with the unbearable memories of their time in prison. Since Duvalier's dictatorship, Haitian prisons have not advanced or changed

in terms of safety, sanitation, and humaneness. Haiti needs to adopt resources that can help aid those in power, and the United States should serve as an ally.

In Chapter Three, on *Brother, I'm Dying*, I argue that Danticat uses her emotional memoir to focus on the separation that she has faced as a child. At the age of four, Danticat's parents left her in Port-Au-Prince to move to the United States. Danticat was placed in the care of her uncle Joseph, a charismatic pastor, to whom she had become profoundly attached and upon whom she looked as her "second father." At the age of twelve, Danticat reunites with her parents and her two younger brothers in New York City. While she was excited to see them, she was sad to leave her uncle Joseph and the only home she has ever known in Haiti. This tale is terrifying because it shows how easy it is for good people to get caught up in events beyond their control.

In Chapter Four, on *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, focuses on the identity of women, motherhood, and their place in religion. In Haiti, religion and the lifestyles of women are very important because of their role in society. From personal experiences of seeing the lack of motherhood in children's lives, it is important to view both standpoints of the subject matter. This chapter helps us understand how a child who was a product of rape and was not raised by her own mother can feel a sense of abandonment for years to come. The novel makes a valid point to show that many women in Haiti are raped and left with children that remind them of the horror they experienced and why they cannot take care of the child. At Kay Mari, we have many children who are the products of rape, and, in some cases, are unwanted due to birth defects. Some are orphans, while others have parents who can no longer take care of them. It is hard to raise a child anywhere, but especially in Haiti due to the lack of resources. Danticat helps show this reality of Haiti that many are unaware of.

Chapter Five is about the importance of storytelling in Haiti. Storytelling is a cultural norm in Haiti that benefits everyone from children to the elderly. It is a way of keeping history alive and a source of entertainment. The second portion in this chapter show readers how independent and strong children in Haiti are. Their strength and independence in households, while working and amongst others is a cultural difference that not many have the chance to witness. Every piece of work that Danticat creates holds a specific purpose to show the world the unique and beautiful lifestyles and culture Haiti has to offer.

In "*Brother, I'm Dying*" McCormick writes, "Danticat has written a gripping book, one that teaches us much about Haiti and incites us to learn more...At the end, we hunger to learn more about Haiti and the Haitian American experience" (McCormick 74). Danticat's novel raises awareness about and helps readers better understand government history, religion, women, children, and portions of an individual Haitian's life in Haiti. Danticat, by sharing personal stories and the stories of others living in Haiti, expanded my knowledge of Haitian culture and life.

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