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“Our voices will not be silenced”: Edwidge Danticat, Haiti, and the Silences of History

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from  
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by

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In the opening pages of *The Imagined Island*, a book that considers relational histories of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Pedro L. San Miguel asserts that recorded history is the true past sifted through the “poetics” of narrative, which are determined by the recorder (4). Though all the facts in a given history text may be true, what the historian deems worthy of inclusion and emphasis determines how the reader views the past. Furthermore, San Miguel argues that the “attitude” of the historiographer toward the event is directly imposed on the reader of history, who is unlikely to question that attitude and is generally unconscious of the intrusion (4). In this way, recording history is “an exercise in power” (32). He goes on to argue that fiction, on the other hand, may actually be “truer” than history, at least because it is honest in its meaning (5). Dominick LaCapra agrees with this distinction in stating: “[N]arratives in fiction may also involve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible ‘feel’ for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods” (13). Indeed, while history texts purport objectivity, works of fiction are assumed to contain biases and opinions; thus the judgment a reader—often unconsciously—acquires when reading a nonfiction history is assumed to be unprejudiced, while the perspective gained from a fictional story is generally understood to be quite limited. Such assumptions are problematic from both angles: on the one hand, no written work can be entirely objective and no historical text can relate an entire story, and on the other hand, literature is an aspect of history that can reveal much about the past, even while straying from the strictly factual.

When San Miguel states that one writes about history either out of nostalgia for what is no more or as a means of “struggle and resistance” against accepted norms (33), in the latter he captures Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat’s basic motivation for her writing. Histories that are widely read because they are accepted as objective and true are written by those who hold “power” in society (San Miguel 5; Trouillot 25). These histories, according to Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, invariably are produced in the West due to the “classification of all non-Westerners as fundamentally non-historical” (Trouillot 7) or without the objective perspective or analytic abilities to record history. Those who possess such power in the West are white men of a high socioeconomic status and thus possess the power and the wherewithal to produce and participate in histories.<sup>1</sup> Because history has traditionally been related in terms of military and political events and trends, as historian Joan Wallach Scott argues, the historical record has been almost exclusively focused on men as well and then only those who possess property or power (Scott 9). Until relatively recently, then, the dominant historical record has not generally considered those of non-European heritage, those of a low socioeconomic status, or women, and excluding these groups is both a result of their historical isolation and a cause of their oppression. And because readers of history are not made aware of those outside of this traditional historiography, by overlooking the stories of groups who have been abused, exploited, and oppressed, one can view an idealized past with nostalgia; in the words of literary critic Nancy Peterson, “Collective

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Joan Wallach Scott asserts that only in the 1990s did a substantial women’s history come into being, and even now it is restricted to just that: women’s history, rather than simply history (*Gender and the Politics of History*, 15-16).

historical memory in America has always been more attracted to the mythic (the heroic stories of Paul Revere's ride and of George Washington and the cherry tree, for example) than to the realistic," the realistic being the experiences of everyday people (5).

Despite historiography's traditional Western perspective, Caribbean history has traditionally been marginalized or ignored. In Alfred N. Hunt's words, "The influence of the Caribbean, particularly of Haiti, on the United States remains a neglected area of historical scholarship" (1). Haiti is notoriously known as little more than poorest country in the Western hemisphere, and "a place of continuous political unrest," despite its being, in the words of Edwidge Danticat, "the first Black Republic, home to the first people of African descent to uproot slavery and create an independent nation" ("We Are Ugly"). While there is clearly more to the Haitian past than just poverty, its reputation for turbulence is far from unfounded—Haiti's history is exceptional in its abundance of tragedies and violence. From its beginnings as a wealthy sugar-producing French colony, through its long fight for independence and its contemporary political turmoil, what is now the nation of Haiti has a rich, complex history that from Columbus's discovery has been filled with struggle that can often be defined as trauma. Taken from the Greek word meaning wound or injury, trauma is a term used to describe, as Nancy Peterson argues, "the (re)experiencing of a wound that has not been forgotten but has been missed at the original moment of infliction; trauma occurs when the wound cries out belatedly, after the fact of the original wounding" (Peterson 13). The tragic elements of the Haitian past continue to affect Haiti and its citizens today, and so that past can be defined in terms of trauma, of belated wounds that continue to cry out.

Though scholarship on the Haitian Revolution has increased in the past few decades, there are still large gaps in what is published and discussed of the Haitian past.<sup>2</sup> It is these gaps, these continued silences, in which Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat is interested. She writes about important events in Haitian history that receive far less attention than the Haitian Revolution. For instance, many of Danticat's earliest short stories—collected in *Krik? Krak!*—were written during the early 1990s and concern the 1991 violent coup d'état and exile of then-president Jean-Bertrand Aristide (including “Children of the Sea” and “The Missing Peace”). Political unrest, often erupting into violence, has been an integral part of Haiti's history during Danticat's lifetime, and Danticat herself often focuses on this violence and its effects on Haitian civilians in both her fiction, as in *Krik? Krak!*, and her nonfiction, such as *Brother, I'm Dying*. *The Farming of Bones* describes the 1937 Haitian Massacre, and *The Dew Breaker* is about a member of the infamous Duvalier-era Tonton Macoutes. *Brother, I'm Dying*, though not specifically about the early twentieth-century United States occupation of Haiti, discusses that nineteen-year period and its lasting effects.

Moreover, Danticat writes from the perspectives of the most marginalized individuals, both by society and history. She writes her stories from the viewpoints of women, who are expected to be invisible in the highly patriarchal societies they inhabit. Danticat's narrators also almost exclusively belong to a laboring or peasant class, rendering them even less visible because of their lack of economic influence. When her stories take place in the United States, they are told from the perspectives of immigrants,

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<sup>2</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot cites the 1970s as the beginning of significant scholarship on Haiti and its Revolution (*Silencing the Past* 98-99).

who are invariably a largely ignored minority; anthropologist Paul Brodwin describes being an immigrant as “often a harrowing situation of marginality and racialized stigma” (385). Thus Danticat writes about events and people that do not hold much import in traditional histories in order both to subvert the misleading optimism of recorded history and to give voice to those silenced and ignored by accepted historiography. Because Caribbean, immigrant, and minority history as a whole is, and always has been, marginalized or silenced altogether, it is more alive in narrative than in history. In Peterson’s words, “only literature in our culture is allowed the narrative flexibility and the willing suspension of disbelief that are crucial to the telling of these histories” (7). Kathleen Brogan argues that the reason both women and ethnic minorities frequently turn to history in their fiction is because their stories are not “properly remembered” in history (27). Danticat furthers this tradition and brings it into U.S. consciousness by writing about Haiti in English and concentrating on Haitian/United States relations with a decided emphasis on immigration and exile. Her work further examines the effects that repressing the past has on those who are silenced in that representation—namely, she illustrates how a silenced past traumatizes its victims into the present. In short, Danticat uses fiction as a way to relate a people’s history that is too often marginalized or ignored by both traditional history and popular culture. However, the deep infiltration of Haitian historical events—such as the United States Occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and the Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic in 1937 —into Danticat’s work reveals that the presence of the past in her fiction is more than just an intentional commentary; instead, it reveals how deeply the traumas and silences of the past haunt the collective

memory and experience of the present, of which Danticat, as a Haitian and as an immigrant to the United States, is a part.

Therefore Danticat explores the silences of the Haitian past in order to give voice to oppressed peoples both of the past and present. As a young female Haitian-American immigrant, however, Danticat must find her own voice through her writing in order to do so; the trajectory of her career demonstrates that as Danticat gives voice to her characters, she simultaneously finds her own voice, and after doing so she is able to write about the silences in history herself. Because Danticat is a U.S. American citizen<sup>3</sup> and has resided in the United States for the majority of her life, she is most specifically interested in the silencing of Haitian immigrants and the historical causes for such silences—such as the United States occupation of Haiti. Therefore, after examining silence broadly, as Danticat does, I will discuss her use of the U.S. occupation more specifically and the ways that particular event correlates with her concentration on the immigrant experience.

The island now known as Hispaniola, made up of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was originally populated by the Tainos. Columbus arrived at the island in December of 1492 and dubbed it La Española. He started to settle the island immediately upon his arrival, and sugar plantations were being developed by 1500; around the same time, the Spanish began importing African slaves. As the European and African

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<sup>3</sup> In this usage, I borrow from Mary Renda: “I use the term “U.S. American” to acknowledge that the United States constitutes part but not all of America and to address the problem posed by the word “American”” (*Taking Haiti* xvii).



populations grew, the native Tainos quickly began to vanish, and were entirely eliminated by the middle of the sixteenth century (Dubois 13-16).

Eventually hostility arose between the French and Spanish settlers on Hispaniola, and in 1697 they divided the island in an effort to pacify relations between the two European powers. The French gained the westernmost portion and called it Saint-Domingue, which today is Haiti. There the production of sugar and coffee thrived resulting in quickly accelerating importation of African slaves. The majority of plantation owners continued to reside in France and hired overseers to supervise the slave labor. Both property-owning and working whites were far outnumbered by the slave population, which formed the vast majority of those inhabiting Saint-Domingue (Dubois 35-9). A third racial group was formed by those of a mixed racial background, sometimes called mulattos, but more often referred to as *gens de couleur*, free-colored. The majority of this population were products of relationships between white men and enslaved women, and though legally free, they held a highly undefined social status often marked by racism and resentment on the part of the white population (Dubois 62).

In the late eighteenth century, there were approximately a half million slaves on Saint-Domingue, around two thirds of which had been born in Africa. The colony imported up to forty thousand slaves a year during this period, and until the middle of the eighteenth century French colonists found it most cost efficient to continue importation rather than to encourage slaves to reproduce; in fact, about half of the imported Africans died within their first few years on Saint-Domingue (Dubois 40-2). The brutal conditions experienced by the enslaved population caused increasing unrest in the colony that eventually broke out into organized slave revolts across the colony in August 1791. On

the twenty-seventh of August an estimated ten thousand slaves were involved in pillaging plantation houses and setting fire to cane fields (Dubois 97). France soon sent troops to combat the insurgents, but when Spanish forces from the other side of the island joined the slaves in their struggle, France was forced to abolish slavery on Saint-Domingue in 1794 (Dubois 170). Following abolition, many slaves under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture joined the French army in defeating the Spanish and British and expelling them from the island (Dubois 179). Saint-Domingue subsequently remained under the rule of France until 1801, when L'Ouverture named himself "governor for life" and created a constitution that declared an autonomous black republic. Napoleon Bonaparte soon responded by sending the French army to the island with the intention of restoring slavery. The troops convinced L'Ouverture to join them by promising his freedom but soon after sent him to France where he died in prison (Diederich 24). Toussaint's following was now led by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, who guided his forces to victory against the French in 1803. Dessalines renamed the new nation Haiti after the original name of the island given by the Tainos (Diederich 25).

Dessalines ruled the newly formed Haiti until his assassination in 1806, when the country was divided between Henri Christophe's kingdom and Alexandre Pétion's republic. It was reunified by Jean Pierre Boyer in 1821, who ruled until 1843 (Diederich 26). A series of coups and revolts followed his ousting, and many factions of the nation struggled for rule of the country the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. The United States cited this unrest as cause enough for their intervention and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934. The U.S. officially entered Haiti under the pretext of its responsibility in facilitating democracy in a country that seemed unable to do so itself.

Mary A. Renda discusses this delineation through the metaphor of paternalism; by framing Haiti as an ignorant child in need of guidance and the United States as the experienced, benevolent father figure, U.S. policy could be illustrated—and presented to the public—less as intervention and more as necessary leadership (Renda 22). Though the U.S. estimates approximately three thousand Haitians were killed during the span of the occupation, “a more thorough accounting” calculates over eleven thousand (Renda 10).

The U.S. also intervened in border disputes with neighboring Dominican Republic during the occupation, thereby causing longstanding tensions between the two countries to rise. When the U.S. left Haiti in 1934 dictator Rafael Trujillo was in power in the Dominican Republic and his anti-Haitian campaign culminated in the 1937 Massacre. In what is now sometimes referred to as the “Parsley Massacre” because of the method Trujillo used to differentiate Haitians from black Dominicans, Trujillo’s forces killed up to twenty thousand Haitians over a three-day period. Trujillo and his troops hid the massacre particularly well, and to this day details concerning it, such as the exact number of Haitians murdered, are unknown; historian Bernard Diederich states that “[f]or about a month the world was unaware of the Dominican dictator’s incredible blood-letting” (48).

Following the U.S. occupation of Haiti a series of authoritarian presidents ruled Haiti, the most infamous being the two Duvaliers. The first, François Duvalier, also known as “Papa Doc,” gained office in 1957 and remained in power until his death in 1971. He created a police force called the Tonton Macoutes that worked directly under him and had almost limitless power over the general population. The Macoutes helped Papa Doc remain in power and ensured the transference of power to his son, Jean-Claude,

or “Baby Doc,” after his death. Baby Doc ruled until 1986, when he was forced into exile by a violent uprising (Higman 263). A new constitution was soon adopted, but general unrest followed when the Tonton Macoutes violently demonstrated against general elections in 1987. The Macoutes and the military controlled elections and offices until the 1990 election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Aristide, widely popular with the majority of Haitians, was ousted by the military in September of 1991. Aristide returned to Haiti in 1994 after negotiations between the United States and Haitian military leaders and finished his original five-year term in 1996. Former Prime Minister René Préval was elected president in 1995, and then Aristide was re-elected in 2000. He was once again ousted during nation-wide protests in 2004. The United Nations formed a Stabilization Mission in Haiti in response that has been present in the country since. René Préval, elected again in 2006, is the current Haitian president (Higman 264-65).

Despite these profound traumas, Haiti’s struggles have seen considerable successes, such as the emancipation of slaves seventy years before emancipation in the United States. Given such a landmark it is surprising that, until quite recently at least, Haitian history, even that of the Revolution, has not been a focus of historiography. Michel-Rolph Trouillot interrogates this significant absence of Haiti from canonical history and explains it in terms of the importance of power in determining history: “the general silencing of the Haitian Revolution by Western historiography...is due to uneven power in the production of sources, archives, and narratives” (27). The marginalization of Haitian history began at the time of the Revolution; even as it was happening, it was ignored. Trouillot explains this curiosity in saying: “The Haitian Revolution thus entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened” (73).

Because European colonizers and property holders justified the entire institution of slavery with the assumption that people of African descent were fundamentally inferior to themselves, particularly in terms of intelligence and social maturity, they were unable to fathom any sort of organized slave uprising; in Trouillot's words, "resistance and defiance did not exist, since to acknowledge them was to acknowledge the humanity of the enslaved" (83). Therefore when news of the uprising reached property holders in France, the first reaction was disbelief and denial: "planters, administrators, politicians, or ideologues found explanations that forced the rebellion back within their worldview, shoving the facts into the proper order of discourse" (Trouillot 91). Some blamed the mulatto population or abolitionist whites for putting ideas of freedom into the slaves' heads and aiding them in organizing into action, while others denied the evidence that a large number of slaves were involved (Trouillot 91). Thus the silencing of Haitian history actually began at the time of the Revolution, even by those who were directly involved.

When the slave population actually succeeded in winning its freedom and independence from France, the prospect of such a victory was menacing to other slave-holding nations, such as other European empires and the United States. "The general silence that Western historiography has produced around the Haitian Revolution originally stemmed from the incapacity to express the unthinkable, but it was ironically reinforced by the significance of the revolution for its contemporaries and for the generation immediately following" (Trouillot 97). Thus the silencing moved past that of just the Haitian Revolution and began to affect Haiti as a whole:

The international recognition of Haitian independence was even more difficult to gain than military victory over the forces of Napoleon. It took more time and

more resources, more than a half century of diplomatic struggles. France imposed a heavy indemnity on the Haitian state in order to formally acknowledge its own defeat. The United States and the Vatican, notably, recognized Haitian independence only in the second half of the nineteenth century. (Trouillot 95)

The threat of a nation governed by the formerly enslaved caused key nations in the world to ignore its existence completely. Significantly, the United States did not recognize Haiti as formal republic until 1862, after the South seceded and instigated the Civil War (Renda 29). However, the silencing of Haiti did not stop in the political realm; Trouillot asserts that “the revolution that was thought impossible by its contemporaries has also been silenced by historians” (96); this was furthered by the economic and political instability present in the country, which seemed to render the nation unimportant to the outside world (Trouillot 97). And though scholarship on Haiti and its Revolution has increased considerably since about the 1970s, there are still notable exceptions to this attention, such as the “ongoing silence of most Latin-American textbooks” (99) and the continued neglect of French historians (101).

Edwidge Danticat is interested in many of the same silences of Haitian history that Michel-Rolph Trouillot is, but she explores them through fiction. She is motivated to explore the lives and silences of marginalized groups because she herself identifies with many of the traditionally subjugated social identities: she is black, a woman, Haitian, an immigrant, and comes from a low socioeconomic status. Danticat was born in 1969 in Port-au-Prince. Her family was of a “lower class or poor” background and remained closely rooted to the peasant histories of their ancestors (Munro 13). When Danticat was two years old, her father emigrated to New York and was joined by her mother two years

later. Edwidge and her younger brother were then raised by an aunt and uncle until Edwidge was twelve. The uncle who raised her was a Presbyterian minister, and the children of the family were raised in accordance with Protestant morals. Danticat's years in Haiti spanned the majority of Jean-Claude Duvalier's, or Baby Doc's, authoritarian rule, and though she was sheltered from many of the horrors of the era by her family, she often heard of disappearances, assaults, and executions. Eight years after her mother left Haiti, Danticat and her younger brother joined their parents and two additional brothers in the largely Haitian neighborhood of Flatbush, Brooklyn. While her apartment building provided a comfortable transition due to its large immigrant population, her peers at school were inhospitable due to their negative perceptions of Haitians as "boat people" and their mocking of her accent (Munro 19).

In part due to the hostility she experienced at school, Danticat turned to reading and writing upon her move to the United States, activities that had interested her since early childhood. She spent copious amounts of time at the Brooklyn Public Library where, for the first time, she became aware of Caribbean and Haitian literature, which she had not encountered in either Haitian or U.S. schools (Munro 20). This was also the first time she read a female writer (Lyons). Because publishing fiction was quite dangerous during the Duvalier regime, her parents discouraged Edwidge from pursuing a career in writing. However, Danticat began writing at the age of nine and wrote fiction throughout her adolescence. Her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, grew out of her creative writing master's thesis and was published just a year after earning her Master of Fine Arts from Brown in 1993. That same year, Danticat returned to Haiti for the first time since her departure in 1981. Danticat was twenty-five at the time of the publication of *Breath*,

*Eyes, Memory* and has continued to publish regularly since. In 1996, she released a volume of short stories titled *Krik? Krak!*, many of which had been published elsewhere, including several in the anthology *The Caribbean Writer*. Her next three books, *The Farming of Bones*, *The Dew Breaker*, and *Brother, I'm Dying*, were published in 1998, 2004, and 2007, respectively. She published a collection of essays, *Create Dangerously*, in 2010. Additionally, she has written two young adult novels geared toward adolescent girls, published in 2002 and 2005, and a travel book that details the Haitian celebration of Carnival, published in 2002.

Though Danticat has continued to live in the United States, both in New York and Miami, since she first emigrated, much of her work takes place in Haiti, and all of it concerns Haitians in some way, either living in Haiti or as immigrants elsewhere, particularly in the United States. Though not outwardly autobiographical, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is told from the perspective of a young Haitian girl who, like Danticat, moves to New York to join her mother. The novel describes the experiences of four women of this family, the Cacos, focusing most closely on Sophie, the narrator, and Martine, her mother. Martine was raped in Haiti at a young age and soon after giving birth to Sophie moved to New York, leaving Sophie to be raised by her Aunt Atie. Sophie joins Martine and lives with her until age eighteen, when their consistently instable relationship crumbles due to Martine's *testing* of Sophie for her virginity. To escape these tests, Sophie severs her own hymen, then elopes with an older man. *The Farming of Bones* recounts the story of a young Haitian woman living in the Dominican Republic in 1937 during the mass murder of Haitians ordered by Trujillo. Though Amabelle survives the massacre, her lover and many of her friends do not, and after escaping to Haiti she lives



alone in mourning for the rest of the novel. *The Dew Breaker* addresses the past of a former member of Duvalier's ruthless police force, the Tonton Macoutes. It is a novel told by a series of connected short stories from the perspectives of the ex-Macoute, his wife and daughter, his three tenants, and his former victims. The book demonstrates the trauma suffered by all who lived in Haiti during the Duvaliers' reign, not just those directly affected by the featured former villain. *Brother, I'm Dying* is a memoir dedicated to her family's history and describes the lives and deaths of her father Mira and his brother, her Uncle Joseph, who raised her as a child in Haiti. Danticat's most recent publication, a collection of essays titled *Create Dangerously*, considers a broad spectrum of topics ranging from the recent earthquake in Haiti to the immigrant artist.

Danticat acknowledges her fascination with history, and the Haitian past in particular:

I'm not a historian but I'm fascinated by history and especially the way that it manifests itself in the present. That's always something I'm looking at and I think especially in the case of Haitian history. Often when you meet Haitians they're very mindful of one huge event, such as the Haitian Revolution that happened 200 years ago. But if you hear people talk about it, it's almost as if it happened last year. So the way in which history is not just something in the past, but the way that people carry it forward, the way they live in it, the way they claim it, is very interesting to me. (Mirabal)

While Haitian history has a very distinct presence in all of her work, more specifically she examines the silences involved in that history; in the same interview, she continues: "I'm also interested in the gaps in history.... The silences of history and even those

ordinary moments during daily life, how people lived through that, interest me very much” (Mirabal). Danticat’s books explore the silence imposed on subjugated people or individuals with confused identities, such as immigrants, by those holding power, as well as these larger silences the West has imposed on non-Eurocentric histories. Furthermore, by describing individuals who have historically been silenced and narrating her stories from the perspectives of those who do not have voices within society—women, youth, lower classes, and immigrants—she is giving them a voice; though they are fictional characters, they represent sectors of society that U.S. Americans typically would not consider at all, and so by writing their stories in English and publishing them in the U.S. at the very least they are rendered visible. Beyond just giving that voice to people such as young Haitian immigrant women, Danticat is also exploring and interrogating the silences in history, or the reasons such individuals do not have a voice in the first place. The silencing of contemporary Haitians is of course in some way connected to the “general silence that Western historiography has produced around the Haitian Revolution” (Trouillot 97) and Haitian history more broadly, and by writing about silence itself as it affects her characters, Danticat hopes to reveal the broader silences of history to her audience.

Silence occurs as the most important effect of the past in all of Danticat’s work, and as the one in danger of affecting Danticat herself that she may be said to be writing precisely to counter. As Ka recalls in the first story of *The Dew Breaker*, her father, the former torturer, used to read her the *Book of the Dead* and recite in particular the phrase, “my mouth is the keeper of both speech and silence” (32). Both may be manipulated to serve one’s purpose of either mourning or resisting. However, though Danticat presents

silence as a means of political resistance, such as by pointedly *not* venerating a political figure or act that one is expected to, her work as a whole underscores her conviction that silence, whatever its origin or intention, always works to further subjugate the voiceless, and finding a voice is the only way to free oneself from oppression as well as to finally enter the historical record because silence prevents a collective remembrance of history. Danticat speaks of the importance of “creating as a revolt against silence, creating when both the creation and the reception, the writing and the reading, are dangerous undertakings” (*Create Dangerously* 11).

Throughout her work, Danticat illustrates three different reasons for silence, all of which may be linked to aspects of Haiti’s troubled history: silence may be physical, political, or emotional. The physical occurs when a person is rendered mute for bodily reasons. Political silencing arises where one is forced into silence, either in punishment or as a way to remain safe. The third reason for silence, the emotional or psychological reason, is a result of trauma; it occurs either when one is stunned into silence because of the shock or pain brought about by a traumatic event or when one is unable to speak about an upsetting memory. Physical silencing occurs in two notable works: *Brother, I’m Dying*, and “Water Child” in *The Dew Breaker*. In the former, Danticat’s uncle is physically silenced by a laryngectomy after being diagnosed with throat cancer. Joseph’s attempts to explain his situation are met by confusion by those who have never encountered someone who *becomes* physically silenced: “People were either born mute or not. They did not become mute” (40).

“Water Child,” on the other hand, explores both physically and emotionally motivated silence. Nadine is an Ear, Nose, and Throat nurse who works specifically with

patients who have recently had laryngectomies and who cannot accept their loss of the ability to speak. Nadine herself lives in such isolation as to render herself virtually silent. Likely because of her own silence, she is sought out by an angry, newly mute patient with whom she is able to build a relationship, however fragmented, without speech. Nadine herself is haunted by memories of her aborted child; she has constructed an “altar” (56) to both the child and her former lover, whom she has cut off along with everyone else in her life since the abortion. However, it is significant that though she herself elects not to speak, while at home she leaves on the television, which is described as “her way of bringing voices into her life that required neither reaction nor response” (56). While she herself may be silent, she is unable to live in utter silence; she must fill her life with meaningless noise to distract her from her pain.

Many of the other silences in *The Dew Breaker* are also emotionally motivated, as Nadine’s is. In “Night Talkers,” the story of Dany, one of the former Macoute’s tenants, Dany’s strongest bond with his aunt is their habit of talking in their sleep. He describes them as “those who spoke their nightmares out loud to themselves” (120). Dany returns to Haiti, where his parents were murdered by the Tonton Macoute, to question his aunt about their deaths. Though they never have the conversation that Dany came to have, they converse while sleeping. It is his aunt’s “growing silent” (110) in her sleep that marks her death. After her death, Dany finds himself temporarily unable to speak: “He wanted to . . . wake up from this unusual dream where everyone was able to speak except the two of them” (112). In “Seven,” a reunited couple is unable to overcome years of separation, and by the end of their first week together they fall under a permanent silence: the wife wishes for “a temporary silence, unlike the one that had come over them now”

(52). As the husband of this couple is the father of Nadine's aborted child in "Water Child," their silence is connected through this shared trauma and perhaps perpetuated by their immediate and necessary separation after the fact.

These silences arise for similar reasons. Dany comes to Haiti to tell his aunt that he has discovered the man responsible for his parents' murders. It seems that Dany and his aunt are not able to speak of the trauma of losing these loved ones while conscious; instead, they ignore their pain while awake, and talk about it in their sleep, when painful memory becomes nightmare. In "The Funeral Singer," the narrator is exiled from Haiti because she chooses to be silent to resist the regime; when she is invited to sing at the National Palace, she refuses the offer though she knows the consequence will be leaving her country. "Water Child" mentions the "electively mute, newly arrived immigrant children" (56) who visit the doctor because their silence worried their parents. This phenomenon seems to be a silence motivated both by the trauma of exile as well as the attempt to resist. The life of the former Macoute and his wife is described as having "more silence than words between them" (241), most likely due to the presence of their unspoken but painful memories of their life in Haiti.

*The Dew Breaker* also quite effectively demonstrates forced or necessary silence. The former Macoute, around whom the novel revolves, had the ultimate power of permanently silencing others when working under the Duvalier regime, namely those who were noncompliant with the government. In fact, it was the mark of a good Macoute to leave all he crossed silent. This Macoute is described as "one of hundreds who had done their jobs so well that their victims were never able to speak of them again" (77). The final chapter describes the Macoute's last victim and his escape from Haiti; there it is

revealed that after capturing his wife's brother, the pastor, the Macoute places his fist "around the preacher's Adam's apple, putting extra pressure on the preacher's voice box to keep him from speaking" (211). Thus he silences this victim just as the extent of the regime's murders and tortures were effectively silenced to most of Haiti as well as to the outside world. It further seems that the silence that defines his relationship with his wife in the United States is a result of all the innocent civilians he silenced over the course of his career as a Macoute.

In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle is unable to speak after being injured by Dominican soldiers and is forced to escape across the border to Haiti. Although at first she is physically unable to speak due to having parsley violently stuffed into her mouth and resulting in injuries, she continues not to speak while she is recovering, out of shock at her experiences and sadness for the loss of her lover, Sebastian. She remains silent for days, or maybe even weeks—time is confused in her traumatized state. Even when she finally surfaces from her stupor, it is physically difficult for her to speak; she declares: "my throat felt like it was tearing from the effort of trying to speak" (216). Eventually, Amabelle regains the ability to speak without physical pain. However, even then, as she grows old living with Sebastien's friend Yves and his mother in Haiti, she rarely communicates and never about the Massacre, even to Yves, with whom she shared the experience. Though Yves was not physically silenced as Amabelle was during the slaughter, the memory of it continues to silence him many years after: "the sound of Spanish being spoken—even by Haitians—made his eyes widen, his breath quicken, his face cloud with terror, his lips unable to part one from the other and speak" (273). Instead of attempting to commemorate their loved ones' deaths and move past their own trauma

by speaking of the Massacre, Yves and Amabelle live together in relative silence and attempt to distract themselves from their memories rather than acknowledge them: “He and I both had chosen a life of work to console us after the slaughter. We had too many phantoms to crowd those quiet moments when every ghost could appear in its true form and refuse to go away” (274).

Amabelle’s silence seems a fitting reaction to surviving the Massacre of 1937; Trujillo’s troops determined if an individual was a Haitian—and therefore was to be killed—based on whether they were able to “trill their “r” and utter a throaty “j” to ask for parsley” (114). Thus many Haitians sentenced themselves to death by speaking, a fact that most likely made silence seem the safest option to many survivors. Moreover, Amabelle’s continuing inability to speak about the Massacre parallels the overwhelming silence that followed it; Trujillo quite successfully concealed the mass murders his troops had committed, and—though there were rumors of violence—other nations including the United States were unaware of what exactly had transpired along the border in Hispaniola until years after the fact. In the words of Myriam J. A. Chancy, those who read about the 1937 Massacre in *The Farming of Bones*, “are made to enter the space of history in which the genocidal attack on Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic is all but denied” (138). Thus this particular historical incident is silenced by the historiography of the outside world, and is not even properly remembered in Haiti due to the silence with which its victims have treated their memories of it. Danticat herself says: “The 1937 massacre is very much part of both Haitian and Dominican consciousness, but in Haiti it’s not taught in school as history” (Lyons).

If silence opposes commemoration, then why is it that those who remember a critical event in the history of their nation, such as the Haitian Massacre of 1937, do not speak of it, if for no other reason than to ensure it is remembered? Peterson, discussing these themes in African-American literature, hypothesizes: “Some things are unspoken because reigning ideologies do not consider them worthy of notice. Other things are unspeakable because they are too traumatic to be remembered” (52). In the first case, Peterson describes the reason behind history’s silencing of the Massacre (as well as the Haitian Revolution and other significant parts of Haitian history). In the second, she explains why those directly affected by an incident, such as Danticat’s characters in many of her works, may remain silent about it. Shoshana Feldman and Dori Laub elaborate: “speakers about trauma on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to—and of listening to themselves” (58). The inability to speak about a situation or memory may be a symptom of trauma, or, in other words, what is often termed post-traumatic stress; victims avoid articulating their pain for fear of reliving it and thus intensifying their suffering. The lasting effects of the past that affect Danticat’s characters in all of her books may be described quite aptly in these terms of trauma.

LaCapra describes another symptom exhibited by individuals suffering from the ongoing effects of trauma: “Those traumatized by extreme events, as well as those empathizing with them, may resist working through because of what might almost be termed a fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it” (22). Danticat describes such a symptom in *Brother, I’m Dying*, in telling the story of a daughter grieving for her recently deceased father who refuses to attend the wake at



which his friends will celebrate his life. She asks, “Why should I ever rejoice again?” (266). However, her father finds a way to tell his daughter that he is content in death, and the daughter is able to find peace and allow the wake to continue by coming to a central realization: “most importantly, we will speak of my father. For it is not our way to let our grief silence us” (267). Danticat thus views this fidelity to grief that she demonstrates in many of her characters as a silencing force. LaCapra elaborates: “Part of this feeling may be the melancholic sentiment that, in working through the past in a manner that enables survival or a reengagement in life, one is betraying those who were overwhelmed and consumed by that traumatic past” (22). This idea describes the fate of *The Farming of Bones*’ Amabelle quite well. She feels a deep sense of guilt at surviving while others did not and is led to believe she somehow owes the dead something for being alive.

Amabelle, after losing her loved ones, isolates herself and lives in mourning and the memory of those who died in the 1937 Massacre. Though the story is told from a first-person perspective, she still manages to remove herself from most of the action and merely reports on the lives of others. It is only in the short vignettes between chapters that she acknowledges her own emotions, and it is these that reveal to the audience how haunted by her past she is. Though she lives and grows old with Yves and his mother, she distances herself from them. Both she and Yves remain alone for (presumably) the remainder of their lives, unable even to seek comfort in each other.

However, the trauma that Danticat explores extends beyond a simple explanation of post-traumatic stress. Especially in Danticat’s earliest works, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and *Krik? Krak!*, her characters are not only affected by the traumas they directly experience themselves but by those that others before them have suffered—namely,

either their direct ancestors or their nation of Haiti as a whole. When Dominick LaCapra says, “the aftereffects—the hauntingly possessive ghosts—of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone and, in various ways, affect everyone,” he describes what occurs throughout Danticat’s fiction (xi). Because of the pattern of children inheriting the ghosts of their parents, and entire populations inheriting the ghosts of national ancestors, the ghosts of the past take on a larger cultural significance; as Kathleen Brogan suggests, “they signal an attempt to recover and make social use of a poorly documented partially erased cultural history” (Brogan 2). Brogan terms the literary presence of these symbolic ghosts “cultural haunting” (4), and uses it to explain the presence of ghosts in recent literature (particularly ethnic American literature) that represent the repressed histories of a minority group. Cultural haunting occurs when distressing events traumatize those who never directly experienced the event; the figurative “ghosts” of these events become problematic for subsequent generations or for others belonging to the culture or nation of the original victims. Brogan also explains such silences as those previously discussed in terms of this cultural haunting when she describes a peculiar “invisibility and voicelessness” (10) present in the haunted works of ethnic female writers, such as Danticat, that arise because of the past’s “possession” of these women. This silence occurs as the most apparent, all-consuming effect of the burden of a traumatic collective memory on every member of the affected group.

Though Brogan is generally concerned with the ghosts of African-American history surfacing in contemporary literature, she also describes how this phenomenon might manifest in immigrant literature. In particular, when Brogan speaks of writers living in exile, for whom their home country actually becomes the ghost haunting their

lives in the United States (3), she seems to explain what manifests in Danticat's fiction. *The Dew Breaker* illustrates this particular aspect of cultural haunting particularly well, as it is comprised of a collection of stories about Haitians living in the United States for whom Haiti itself is the ghost that troubles them. Furthermore, as demonstrated above, the novel very clearly illustrates the "voicelessness" that arises from such traumas of one's home country. The book opens and closes with the family of the unnamed former Tonton Macoute. He escaped to New York with the unknowing sister of his final victim, who is now his wife. Though Ka, his daughter, has never been to Haiti and until adulthood is unaware of her parents' past lives, she is unconsciously affected by the pasts of her parents. She possesses a nervous twitch that is an inherited remnant of her mother's seizures; both Ka's twitch and her mother's seizures are triggered by stressful situations, often involving the father. Her mother's seizures are described most clearly when she has them as a reaction to her brother's capture, undertaken by the man who is now her husband. Ka's twitches are first seen after her father leaves her and she cannot find him; they intensify when her father finally relates his past to her. Neither of Ka's parents has returned to Haiti since their exile to the United States, and so Ka has never been to her country of heritage. Because they escaped Haiti, then, it is the absence of Haiti in their present lives as well as the overwhelming presence of Haiti—its history, culture, and politics—in their pasts that haunts them. Anne, Ka's mother, considers her aversion to cemeteries as one among a number of "unexplained aspects [of her] life [that] was connected to 'some event that happened in Haiti'" (72). The absence of Haiti in Ka's life causes Ka to feel a distinct and troubling distance from her parents; she tells people she's from the country she's never visited because "it is one more thing I've always

longed to have in common with my parents” (4). Ka’s father represents Haiti to her, which becomes complicated because of his past as a Macoute. Ka relieves the tension related to the haunting absence of Haiti in her life through her art: she says, “I’m really not an artist, not in the way I’d like to be. I’m more of an obsessive wood-carver with a single subject thus far—my father” (4). Because her father, to many a symbol of the darkest aspect of recent Haitian history, is to Ka Haiti as a whole, she alleviates the oppressive presence of the ghost of Haiti as well as the ghost of her father’s past by repeatedly carving her father. Both Haiti and her father’s past are equally unknown to her and their absence in her life haunts her, rendering her obsessed with one image that epitomizes these absences to her.

Other than the three chapters devoted to this family, the remainder of the book tells the stories of other Haitians, all of whom live in the United States at the time of the narratives. Three of the stories concern young men, all Haitian immigrants, who rent an apartment from the Macoute and his wife, and two of the chapters, “The Bridal Seamstress” and “The Funeral Singer,” describe women who fell victim to the terror of Macoutes in Haiti; because the identities of their torturers are unspecified, some or all of the Macoutes in these women’s pasts may be said to be the former Macoute of the first and last chapters. Thus all of the characters in this seemingly loosely connected collection of stories have at least indirect ties to one of the darkest aspects of Haitian history, the Duvalier Tonton Macoutes, and the novel demonstrates the effects that interaction has on the lives of the individuals far removed from the original traumatic situation. More specifically, their interaction with the Macoute has either forced them, haunted, out of

Haiti or has followed their escape—motivated for other reasons—into the United States where the Macoute becomes present in their lives there.

In “Seven,” the story of the long-awaited reunion of husband and wife, they have grown into people who no longer know each other because one’s past is in Haiti and the other’s is in the United States. In “Night Talkers,” Dany is returning to his home country to tell his aunt that he has recognized the man who killed his parents many years before. The story demonstrates the lasting effects his father’s death has had on Dany, and the seemingly odd result of Dany’s finding his parents’ murderer; rather than confront the man he rents a room from him. Because of his proximity to the man who orphaned him, Dany “couldn’t sleep for months” (106). He seeks further contact with the Macoute: “He visited the barbershop regularly for haircuts, arriving early in the morning soon after he opened. He would sit and watch the barber, now a much thinner man. . . . His heart would race as the barber draped a black cape over his chest” (106). As for Ka, this man has come to represent Haiti for Dany, and so when Dany finds him, he attempts to use the Macoute to fill that absence that leaving Haiti has created. It is startling and significant that, though Dany presumably spent many years in Haiti, in his memory Haiti is mostly his parents’ deaths, and thus their killer comes to represent his past.

“The Bridal Seamstress” tells of a woman who was once tortured by a Tonton Macoute and emigrates to the United States to escape that memory. However, rather than escape the memory of her torturer, she feels followed by him, seeing him everywhere she goes. This story is similar to Martine’s in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, as that early character is consumed by the memory of her rape, seeing her rapist even in her daughter. Both Martine and Beatrice of “The Bridal Seamstress” leave Haiti in an attempt to flee these

haunting memories, but for neither is this escape successful. In a line reminiscent of Martine's case, Beatrice's situation is described as one in which "tremendous agonies filled every blank space of [her life]" (137). In a fashion similar to the other characters who are haunted by the absence of Haiti, the void of which has been filled by haunting memories, the memory of the Macoute is constantly with her. She imagines that he physically follows her every time she moves, and every time she moves it is in an attempt to elude him. She does not realize that the Macoute following her is a part of her memory and imagination, though the places she imagines him to be are in actuality empty. Beatrice describes her delusion: "I let all my girls know when I move, in case they want to bring other girls to me. That's how he always finds me. It must be. But now I'm not going to send those notes out anymore. I'm not going to make any more dresses. The next time I move, he won't find out where I am" (137).

The powerful effects cultural ghosts such as the ones in *The Dew Breaker* have on the characters in Danticat's literature are usefully described in terms of trauma. Cathy Caruth describes the lasting effects of trauma—commonly referred to as post-traumatic stress—as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucination, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (4). This is a definition that clearly influenced Brogan's description of cultural trauma. This "repeated, intrusive hallucination"—such as Beatrice seeing her torturer everywhere she goes—is what Brogan calls the "ghost." Thus the lingering effects of a traumatic experience are the ghost that haunts the literature Brogan discusses, reflected

strongly in Danticat's characters. Caruth continues: "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (5). She is using the language one might apply to the all-consuming haunting of a ghost. When Martine is pregnant in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, she feels embodied, or possessed, by the ghost of her rapist to such an extent that she feels she must physically kill that ghost to rid herself of it; because this metaphor of possession means that the ghost is somehow a part of the one who is haunted, though, Martine also kills herself in murdering her ghost. Such extreme and often violent effects of haunting and trauma demonstrated in Danticat's first novel are often intimately tied to Haiti's past and as such render them issues of cultural trauma.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* both personal and historical aspects of the past are closely interwoven, especially in the ways that the past becomes a central part of the first-person narrator's life. For example, Haitian history and folklore play a significant role in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, though the majority of the novel takes place in the United States. One of Haiti's traditional origin myths describes Sister Rose, a slave woman, who gave birth to the entire nation as a result of her rape (Dayan 48-49). This legend demonstrates the place that sexual violence holds from the very beginning of Haitian history, and the Cacos' experience then is framed as a continuation of a longstanding cycle of violence toward women; the subjugation of women that led to Martine's rape has been an issue that has pervaded Haitian history for centuries. And it is because her problem is essentially a problem of national history that the Cacos seem unable to recover from their own sexual traumas. The Caco women even enact such sexual violence on themselves through the tradition of *testing*; throughout the novel all three generations of women reveal the trauma that the testing they endured produced, yet they maintain the tradition

by testing their daughters. When Sophie questions her mother about the motivation for continuing a tradition that she herself had once despised, Martine explains, “because my mother had done it to me. I have no greater excuse” (170). Not only then do these women reenact the sexual dominance of men over women on their own daughters, but the suggestion that such a reenactment has actually become a tradition for (some) Haitian women intensifies the implication that they are in certain ways trapped and traumatized by the past, whether it be their own or their country’s. In Sophie’s words, she is from “a place where nightmares are passed on through generations like heirlooms” (234).

Thus, while the Caco women are primarily haunted by their personal memories, those memories are the products of a larger cultural history. Martine cannot escape the personal memory of her rape, yet her rape is part of a longer tradition of sexual violence. Moreover, she is raped by a Tonton Macoute, an icon of the institutional violence of not only the Duvalier government but the entire tradition of oppressive dictatorial regimes that spans the twentieth century in Haiti. This fact directly links Martine’s suffering to that of her country as a whole. Sophie too is plagued by an inseparable combination of personal and cultural history. Since her birth, she has been haunted by her absent mother’s rape and flight from Haiti. Upon arriving in New York, her mother’s pain more directly affects her and prevents them from forming a close, trusting relationship. Martine sees her rapist in Sophie, and so becomes even more haunted upon her daughter’s arrival in New York. This distance between them ultimately leads to her mother’s testing, as Martine cannot trust Sophie to remain pure—most likely because she herself was unable to. It is the testing, then, that haunts Sophie into her adult life and prevents her from becoming intimate, both physically and emotionally, with her husband. Cultural memory



causes the testing that becomes a painful personal memory for Sophie. In this way *Breath, Eyes, Memory* demonstrates the oppressive effects of the traumas of Haitian history on Danticat's characters.

*Breath, Eyes, Memory* recalls the Haitian past and the effects of that dynamic history on the modern Haitian individual. The ideological importance of remembering family and tradition conflicts with the reality of the characters' desperate attempts to forget. This inability to separate deference to the past from progress into the future has created a deadlock from which the Caco family is unable to advance. This line of women is haunted by the decisions of their mothers, yet they continue in the same tradition, ensuring the same sexual trauma for their daughters as they suffer.

The stories in *Krik? Krak!* contain the same theme of the entrapment of women by the traumas of a Haitian past that *Breath, Eyes, Memory* does. The opening story, "Children of the Sea," is told through imaginary letters written between young lovers, one of whom is on a boat fleeing to the United States to escape the political violence resulting from the ousting of Aristide in 1991. The other is a young woman trapped in her house by her father, who is terrified because "the soldiers can come and do with us what they want" (13). The consequences of this powerful police force are shown on the boat with the young man; among the passengers is a fifteen-year-old girl escaping because she is pregnant, the result of a group of soldiers who broke into her house and who "took turns raping Célianne" (23). Before reaching the mainland, Célianne jumps overboard with her dead infant. Like Martine, the painful memories of her violent rape cause her suicide. Later in *Krik? Krak!* it is implied that the entire boat sank. Although these things are all tied to the politics of recent Haitian history, the story is further correlated with a

more distant past, when the young man compares his experience to that “on those slaves ships years ago” (15). As the ship is sinking, he looks forward to joining “the children of the deep blue sea, those who have escaped the chains of slavery” (27).

The next story, “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” describes a mother and daughter both unable to move past the effects of the Haitian Massacre; the mother was arrested soon after narrowly escaping Trujillo’s troops, who killed *her* mother. Her daughter, who was born “on the night that El Generalissimo, Dios Trujillo, the honorable chief of state, had ordered the massacre of all Haitians living [in the Dominican Republic]” (33), serves as a constant reminder of the trauma the mother suffered on the day of the massacre, which culminated in her imprisonment and eventual execution. The women in this family have been closely linked to the traumas of Haitian history since the Revolution: the narrator’s “great-great-great-grandmother Défilé” (*Krik?* 34) is a historical figure who was born into slavery and eventually “became sutler to Dessalines’s troops” during the Revolution (Dayan 40). Significantly, this woman “became the embodiment of the Haitian nation: crazed and lost, but then redeemed through the body of their savior” after Dessalines’s death (Dayan 40). Thus the narrator of this story is the descendant of Haiti itself, and so is prevented from moving past the traumas and silences of that past: they are her own and her family’s traumas.

*Brother, I’m Dying* combines Danticat’s own memory with Haitian history in a nonfiction work, a merger of personal and collective history demonstrating that this connection is not merely imagined, and more importantly that the past, both personal and distant, does have direct effects on living people just as it does on her characters. The memoir interweaves aspects of her own childhood in Haiti with the story of the life of her

uncle, a Baptist pastor and her foster father in Haiti, and the account of her father's diagnosis of and death from pulmonary fibrosis. Danticat attempts to explore her family's history even further back than her father and uncle by discussing their roots as peasant farmers. In doing so, she demonstrates how directly her parents' and uncle's lives were influenced by their ancestors; the tradition of poverty that has oppressed her family for generations—which created the large Haitian peasant class—is what forces her parents to leave Haiti and their children, forever altering the lives of the entire family.

Danticat further illustrates how her father Mira and her Uncle Joseph's own pasts have had profound impacts on their own lives, as well as their families' lives, much as she does for the characters in her fiction. Her father's modest Haitian youth, during which food was never taken for granted and luxuries were nonexistent, produced in him an uncompromising work ethic and a complete disregard for his own health, which led to its rapid deterioration and his eventual death. Further, Mira and Joseph grew up under dictatorships, including that which was in place during the United States' occupation of Haiti, the memories of which continued to haunt them throughout their lives. Like Danticat's fictional characters, the men in *Brother, I'm Dying* depict the insecurity and intimidation caused by living in fear under a tyrannical government long after the family's escape from that regime. Joseph is especially haunted by memories of the United States' presence in Haiti and the cruelty of the marines during that time, which he experienced both personally and through stories of others. Though he was only eleven when the United States officially left Haiti, this impression, created by his own memories and the memories of his family and community, instigated a deeply rooted distrust of U.S. Americans that remained with him and, arguably, partially led to his

emotional collapse and subsequent death at a U.S. immigrant detention center many years later.

*Brother, I'm Dying* is the only one of Danticat's works that explicitly discusses the United States' occupation of Haiti. Joseph was born during the U.S. occupation and thus has vague memories of the occupation, and particularly of the U.S. Marines who were present in Haiti throughout the occupation, which continue to plague his memory throughout his life. Joseph was born in 1923, and so his memories of the occupation and the Marines are from early childhood. In fact, most of his memories of occupied Haiti are shaped by the anxieties concerning the U.S. presence that he heard reflected in his older relatives' conversations. What Joseph remembers particularly well of these anxieties are the threats into which they developed; quickly spreading rumors of the atrocities committed by the U.S. Marines gave these mysterious U.S. Americans frightening associations in the eyes of many Haitians, some of whom had never actually encountered the troops. Joseph recalls that he and the other children were threatened with the punishments the U.S. Marines would inflict on disobedient children. He describes "an image from his boyhood of the fears that a lot of parents, including his, had for their children during the American occupation" when he asks, "What if they bayonet the children right in front of us? Would you want to see that? Your children torn limb from limb right before your eyes?" (180). Though this image of the violence of which Haitians believed the U.S. Marines capable makes only a brief appearance in *Brother, I'm Dying*, it very aptly illustrates Haitian opinions of the occupation and its consequences for the general population.

Joseph himself has only one personal memory of the occupation and the Marines who came to embody it. He recalls being carefully kept from the U.S. troops inhabiting the island, due to his parents' fear that, if seen, he might have been "captured by the Americans to work in the labor camps" (245). This fear resulted in Joseph's and his young peers' confinement to their parents' houses and property; they were warned not to wander away from their small community and were even forbidden from accompanying the adults to the outer world so that "he may never lay eyes on occupying marines or they on him" (245). The only time he was exposed to U.S. Marines it was the first he had seen of white people, and first and foremost their "pink, pale skins" (246) shocked him.

Danticat then describes his experience upon reaching the scene:

As my uncle approached the small circle of men and the larger crowd of vendors and shoppers watching with hands cradling their heads in shock, the white men seemed to him to be quite agitated. Were they laughing? Screaming in another language? They kept kicking the thing on the ground as though it were a soccer ball, bouncing it to one another with the rounded tops of their boots. Taking small careful steps to remain the same distance away as the other bystanders, my uncle finally saw what it was: a man's head. (247)

This experience forms Joseph's "most haunting childhood memory" (245) as well as the only memory from his youth that he passes on to his niece.

Danticat's own grandfather, Joseph and Mira's father, fought the U.S. marines during the occupation; however, he had to keep that role secret and did not speak of his experiences on the occasions he returned home; Danticat explains: "Instead they were to act as though he'd never left, like he'd been with them all along. This is why they knew

so little of Granpè Nozial's activities during the U.S. occupation. This is why I know so little now" (*Brother* 246). Though there is no evidence as to the specifics about the type of resistance in which Danticat's grandfather was involved, it is likely that he was part of the peasant rebellion based out of the mountains; these insurgents, whom the U.S. marines "waged war against" (Renda 10), were called Cacos.

Danticat's concern with the U.S. occupation with Haiti, then, is intensely personal, as it is a marginalized event in the Haitian past for which she can see the direct results on her family. For this reason, after-effects of the occupation—violence, domineering authority figures, and a subtle antipathy toward the United States—faintly resonate throughout all her work. For instance, she names the family of women about whom she writes her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the Cacos, after the vigilante insurgents who fought the U.S. troops. Glimpses of the lasting effects of the occupation are elsewhere visible in brief mentions of the violence and tools of oppression that U.S. soldiers bequeathed to Haitians during their time there. Danticat says of the occupation:

It had a very potent legacy that we're still living with today. For example, the whole military structure in Haiti that existed until the early 1990s was put in place by the American occupation.... The threat from the U.S. is something that is always hanging over people's heads: If we don't behave, we'll have the occupation again. (Barsamian)

The story "1937" tells the story of a survivor of the Haitian Massacre who has since been incarcerated. Though the young narrator, the daughter of the imprisoned woman, seems relatively naïve, often knowing only what her mother has shared of history, she nonetheless attributes distinct blame in describing the jail that imprisons her

mother: “The yellow prison building was like a fort, as large and strong as in the days when it was used by the American marines who had built it. The Americans taught us how to build prisons. By the end of the 1915 occupation, the police in the city really knew how to hold human beings trapped in cages” (35). Similar images occur in *The Farming of Bones*, when Haitian soldiers attempt to restrain a crowd waiting for a magistrate to record their stories of the Massacre: “The people at the front of the crowd charged at the entrance. Trained by Yanki troops who were used to rebellious uprisings, the soldiers shot several rounds of bullets in the air” (234).

In fact, *The Farming of Bones*, though set in the Dominican Republic, focuses nearly as much attention on the United States occupation as does *Brother, I'm Dying*, most likely because the former is set only three years after the occupation officially ended in 1934. In this novel U.S. Americans are referred to as “Yankis,” and the occupation is called the “Yanki invasion.” At the beginning of the novel, Amabelle has been told that Yves, a cane worker in the Dominican Republic, lost his father because he was killed “organizing brigades to fight the Yanki occupation” (56). Her lover Sebastien recounts: “The father was put in a bread-and-water prison by Yankis and let go after thirty days. First thing done by the mother was to cook him all the rich food he dreamt about in prison. The father eats until he falls over with his face in the plate and he’s dead” (129). By the end of the novel, however, when Amabelle is living with Yves and his mother in Haiti, she hears the true account from his mother: “The Yankis had poisoned Yves’ father’s mind when he was in their prisons here; he was going to spy on others for Yanki money after he left their jail. Many people who were against the Yankis being here were going to die because of his betrayal. And so I cooked his favorite foods for him and

filled them with flour-fine glass and rat poison. I poisoned him” (277). She explains her motivation by declaring: “[G]reater than my love for this man was love for my country. I could not let him trade us all, sell us to the Yankis” (277).

These images of the oppression and tyranny facilitated by the U.S. occupation echo a startling legacy of the U.S. presence in Haiti; Mary Renda explains: “Far from laying the groundwork for the hoped-for advent of democracy, material improvements in transportation and communication served to increase the efficiency of the occupation as a police state, with marines and gendarmes in command of every district of the country” (11). Indeed, the authority given to the Haitian presidents serving under—and in the interests of—the U.S., Renda adds, very probably paved the way for the decades of dictators who have come after the occupation years:

By crushing Haitian peasant rebellion and by creating the mechanisms for strongly centralized government control in Port-au-Prince, the occupation eliminated the very safeguards against entrenched despotism that Haiti, for all its problems, had always successfully maintained. In doing so, US Americans helped to lay the groundwork for two Duvalier dictatorships and a series of post-Duvalier military regimes. ( 36)

In pointing directly to these tools of oppression the U.S. left Haiti after their occupation, Danticat is quite aware of this connection. She mentions it once, and only briefly, when discussing the “so-called peacekeepers” the United Nations frequently sends in response to political unrest in Haiti. Danticat describes the ubiquity of these forces in her older relatives’ lives: “Like my uncle, Léone had spent her entire life watching the strong arm of authority in action, be it the American marines who’d been



occupying the country when she was born or the brutal local army they'd trained and left behind to prop up, then topple, the puppet governments of their choice" (*Brother* 171). She mentions such associations explicitly in her stories set soon after the occupation; however, in her depictions of the United States and U.S. Americans and their effects on the lives of contemporary Haitians—especially when it comes to the confused identity of Haitian immigrants to the U.S., like herself—she seems to be subtly and indirectly expressing the lasting effects of the occupation that continue into the present day.

Memories of the occupation, personal or passed down through generations, often provide the basis for opinion on the United States and its citizens as a whole, particularly for those who have never left Haiti. While Joseph's memory is central to the portrayal of U.S. Americans in *Brother, I'm Dying*, it is not revealed until near the end of the book. Prior to this passage, the references to the United States are similarly, if more subtly, haunting. It is the country that separates Danticat from her parents in childhood. Its citizens are those who render Joseph mute: silence is described as "a curse that...only American doctors could cross an ocean to put on you" (40). When Danticat visits the American consulate before joining her parents in New York, she feels traitorous as she "bow[s] to the flag that our grandfather had once fought against" (105).

The theme of the oppressive presence of the United States in Haiti throughout Danticat's work is unsurprising in light of her own background. As she is an immigrant to the United States, her fiction expresses her own confusion concerning her national identity. She says of herself: "My country...is one of uncertainty. When I say 'my country' to some Haitians, they think I mean the United States. When I say 'my country' to some Americans, they think of Haiti" (*Create* 49). Her divided identity even sparks

resentment in Haitians, which can only reinforce her sense of isolation. She explains that immigrants are often referred to as “Diaspora” in Haiti, and speaks of her “own personal experiences of being called ‘*Diaspora*’ when expressing an opposing political point of view in discussions with friends and family members living in Haiti, who knew that they could easily silence me by saying, ‘What do you know? You’re a *Diaspora*’ (*Butterfly* xiv).

The combination of having roots in Haiti and a home in the United States unsurprisingly has led Danticat to return repeatedly to the relationships between her native country and country of residence. The ambivalence associated with the United States in her work seems then to be an expression of the discontent she feels toward her status as an immigrant and the resulting distance she feels from her “home” country. Throughout her work Danticat portrays immigrants as outsiders wherever they are: Sophie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* never finds solace in American friends; the mother in “Caroline’s Wedding” is unable to accept a U.S. American lifestyle and clings tightly to Haitian tradition instead; Ka’s parents in *The Dew Breaker* do not interact with anyone except themselves; the Haitian migrant workers in *The Farming of Bones* clearly are not accepted by any level of the Dominican population. Even when certain groups are not immigrants but have multiple cultural influences in their lives, they seem to possess this split identity as well: when Danticat discusses the CIMO officers in Haiti—members of the Company for Intervention and Maintaining Order, a military-like group comprised of Haitian citizens trained by U.S. special forces teams that has been accused of human rights abuses—she recounts in *Brother, I’m Dying* the belief that because of their U.S. American military training, they are no longer Haitian, nor are they U.S. American; they

are not “even human at all” (199). According to this logic, Danticat’s contact with the United States causes her to cease to be Haitian. But because of her roots in Haiti, she is unable to become fully U.S. American. In *Create Dangerously* she describes this confusing duality of the immigrant experience by asserting that “two very different countries are forced to merge within you” (112). Because she lies outside general acceptance in both of these countries, she feels isolated and consequently marginalized. It is in part because of this fear of insignificance, and the consequent fear of being silenced, that Danticat insists her voice be heard through her writing. She does so primarily by giving voice to others who are marginalized in similar ways, particularly female Haitians who are often immigrants. In her essay, “We Are Ugly, But We Are Here,” Danticat discusses the silencing of Haitian women that her work is clearly attempting to amend: “Watching the news reports, it is often hard to tell whether there are real living and breathing women in conflict-stricken places like Haiti. The evening news broadcasts only allow us a brief glimpse of presidential coups, rejected boat people, and sabotaged elections. The women's stories never manage to make the front page. However, they do exist.”

The silences that affect Danticat’s characters in all of her works are microcosms for the larger silences surrounding Haiti’s history, citizens, and exiles, and her focus on revealing these silences to her readers intends to shed light on the absence of Haiti—as well as the Caribbean as a whole, Caribbean women, and immigrants to the United States—from many perspectives. Not only is Danticat writing to spread awareness of these issues, but her writing also aims to give voice to those silenced, and in doing so, to help those traumatized to recover from their entrapment by the past.

If trauma and cultural haunting cause symptoms of voicelessness or silence in their victims, breaking that silence represents overcoming a traumatic past, or exorcising one's persistent ghosts. In the case of Danticat's characters and Haitian history, communication is a way to escape the oppressive past. The articulation of the most painful aspects of the past that so many of Danticat's characters avoid in fear of reliving their trauma is in fact a necessary step in ending the uncontrollable reliving of their painful pasts. Kathleen Brogan explains how a previously haunted individual triumphs over the entrapment of ghosts of the past, which have caused her to continually reenact the past: "The saving movement from reenactment to enabling memory is represented as a movement from traumatic silence into language" (10). Recovery from deeply rooted cultural trauma involves more than just the articulation of a single, personal trauma, however. To escape the stasis that many of Danticat's characters suffer due to their entrapment in the traumas of their ancestors or nation, they must conquer the silences of a cultural history as well as those present in their own past. Nancy Peterson claims that "knowing one's history and communicating it with others significantly involves a movement away from individual isolation and painful silence and towards collective memory and resistance" (182). When there are significant gaps in the knowledge and recording of a history—such as the silencing of the Haitian Massacre by Trujillo or the global reluctance to recognize Haiti as a nation—recovery from the suffering these incidents have caused first requires awareness of the events and then conversation about them. By writing about aspects of the Haitian past that are outside most people's general knowledge, Danticat addresses the first step in this recovery process. She also attempts to enable the second step; in her fiction she attempts to free her characters from the

traumatic silences of their pasts by giving them voices. Her earliest pieces, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and the stories in *Krik? Krak!*, exemplify this effort especially.

All of the characters in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* are attempting to escape from the past, but they are doing so by flight and denial. The clearest example is Martine, who emigrates and abandons her daughter in an effort to forget the intrusive memories of her rape. She clearly does not escape the past, though, as she repeats many aspects of it, both consciously and involuntarily; she relives her rape almost every night, and she enacts traumatic aspects of her past on Sophie, such as testing her daughter's virginity. The repetition of destructive tradition seems to parallel this evasion of traumatic memory, primarily as both prevent progress. The end of the novel suggests that the Caco women have been unable to overcome their histories at least in part because of this pattern of diversion and avoidance. Sophie sees two therapists, both of whom encourage confrontation rather than distraction. She puts this theory into practice when she visits the site of her mother's rape, which one therapist stresses is necessary, so she can "see that [she] can walk away from it" (211). Her remaining female relatives then ask, "Ou libéré?" (Are you free?) (233). It is a question suggesting that only now may she be liberated from the ghosts of her own past as well as the past of her "mother line," which, until now, "was always with [her]" (207).

Mireille Rosello explains Martine's inability to escape the past in terms of her lack of voice: "The novel frames her as a powerless vessel possessed by the endless repetition of the rape *rather than as a speaking subject* capable of mediating the real and the traumatic through fiction, any kind of fiction" (121, my emphasis). This observation is particularly interesting, in that Rosello sets powerlessness and possession in opposition

to speech; the implication is that if Martine were a “speaking subject” then she would not be powerless against the past—by talking about her pain she would have been able to work through her trauma and thus avoid possession by the past. Rosello expands on this idea by stating: “Her failure to organize her self and therefore her tale is framed by the novel as evidence of what would have remained a silence had the daughter not been able to find a new poetics of representation. For the novel to even exist, Martine must be written into existence from a perspective that is not hers” (122). It is significant that Rosello points out Sophie as the one who is telling the story; indeed, the entire novel may be viewed as Sophie’s attempt to find a voice. Though the unanswered question of “Ou libéré?” that closes the story leaves the reader unsure that Sophie has been completely successful in freeing herself from the traumas her family’s history has inflicted upon her, the fact that the novel is *her* story, told from her perspective, at least suggests that she has made a crucial step toward doing so. She has broken the silence about her past, unlike the women in her family who have let their silence imprison them.

*Krik? Krak!* considers the same themes of silencing and marginalization Danticat interrogated in her first novel, and, as in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat attempts to remedy those silences by giving her characters voice in these stories. The epilogue to the collection, titled “Women Like Us,” articulates these concerns most clearly. “Women Like Us” is told in the second person and speaks to a young girl who wishes to be a writer. It takes place while her mother is braiding her hair, a tradition that unites Haitian women and forces the young girl to remember the tradition she was expected to maintain. After her mother finishes braiding her hair, “she would ask you to name each braid after those nine hundred and ninety-nine women who were boiling in your blood, and since

you had written them down and memorized them, the names would come rolling off your tongue” (224). The young girl wants to commemorate these Haitian women of the past by writing about them, but, according to her mother, “Writers don’t leave any mark in the world. Not the world where we are from. In our world, writers are tortured and killed if they are men. Called lying whores, then raped and killed, if they are women” (221). However, the young writer realizes that however difficult it may be she must defy this tradition of silence because “[s]ilence terrifies [her] more than the pounding of a million pieces of steel chopping away at your flesh” (223). She feels that these generations of silenced women are begging her finally to give them the voice they have never had; the woman tell her, “You have never been able to escape the pounding of a thousand other hearts that have outlived yours by thousands of years. And over the years when you have needed us, you have always cried “Krik?” and we have answered “Kraak!” and it has shown us that you have not forgotten us” (224). Considering the title of the book, this passage reveals that Danticat views these stories as the stories of other women who are unable to tell them themselves. Danticat is the young writer asking “Krik?,” the traditional Haitian beginning of a tale, and the women answer “Kraak!”—that they want to hear these—*their*—stories.

What the epilogue to *Krik? Kraak!* reveals elucidates Danticat’s motivations for telling the stories of all the female characters present in her fiction. For instance, *The Farming of Bones* is giving voice to Amabelle, or more broadly, the women who survived the Haitian Massacre of 1937 and never were able to relate their stories. Though Amabelle seems to remain relatively silent after the Massacre, the novel is her first-person account of the tragedy, and reminiscent of Sophie’s story *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

and all the female protagonists in *Krik? Krak!*, *The Farming of Bones* seems to be Amabelle's telling of the event. Chancy argues that the novel has a broader purpose: "In focusing primarily on the exchanges between women, both Haitian and Dominican, in her novel, Danticat gives voice to the impact of these shifts upon 'real' women while at the same time attempting to lift the veil of amnesia that obscures this painful period in both Haitian and Dominican history" (131). In this story Danticat not only gives voice to fictional Amabelle but to all women affected by the 1937 Massacre. She underscores the fact that traumatic historical events have profound and lasting effects on everyday people and highlights how such a tragic event might affect women involved. And when the incident is as silenced as the Haitian Massacre, the experiences of women during that time are almost certainly ignored. Amabelle says of the minimal efforts to record testimonies of victims of the Massacre: "You tell the story, and then it's retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, and not yours" (246). To take ownership of her story, Amabelle must create her own testimony, which is told through her voice alone, and that testimony takes the form of the novel.

In her most recent book Danticat asserts that "to create dangerously is to create fearlessly, boldly embracing the public and private terrors that would silence us, then bravely moving forward even when it feels as though we are chasing or being chased by ghosts" (*Create Dangerously* 148). In simply articulating the stories of Haitians, Danticat is defying the accepted norms of recorded history and taking the first step in giving voice to those who are otherwise invisible. She speaks of being haunted herself, going so far as to claim that "all artists, writers among them, have several stories...that haunt and obsess them" (*Create* 5). However, unlike her characters, who allow their ghosts to silence them,



Danticat writes to exorcise her own ghosts as well as those who are similarly haunted. If indeed these ghosts arise from the repression of the past, by shedding light onto that part of history she is also fighting future ghosts. Kathleen Brogan speaks of writers like Danticat when she says: “through acts of narrative revision—which are very often presented as acts of translation, linguistic or cultural—the cycle of doom is broken and the past digested” (10-11). In writing about Haiti from the United States and in English, Danticat is acting as a cultural translator—she is bringing marginalized aspects of Haitian culture and history into the perspective of the United States by personalizing, narrating, and then publishing them in the very country she makes clear is attempting to forget and silence these people.

What Danticat does for her characters in her fiction she also does for herself throughout her writing. The trajectory of her career demonstrates a distinct pattern: Danticat first seeks a voice for herself; then, as she continues to write, she delves continually deeper into the phenomenon of the silencing of both people and history, as if searching for the reasons behind voicelessness. As previously demonstrated, her first two works, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and *Krik? Krak!* concentrate overwhelmingly on giving voice to those Danticat feels that history and contemporary society have silenced: both the novel and all of the short stories consider the binding expectations imposed upon Haitian women and how the traditional expectation of propriety and chastity take away women’s voices. These stories actually give Haitian women a voice, and although they are fictional characters, they represent some of the trials facing the lower classes of Haitians and immigrants, difficulties that generally never get articulated or brought into the perspective of the general U.S. American public. While the stories in *Krik? Krak!*

mostly exemplify the trials of women of all ages, both in Haiti and the United States, trials that have been firmly implanted in Haitian culture due to a tumultuous history of subjugation, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* explores the attempt of one woman to find a voice despite the obstacles she inherits. The several generations of her family as well as the settings both in Haiti and the U.S. demonstrate the many levels of obstacles facing all of the women involved. This novel also demonstrates the repetitions of Haitian history that prevent progress, especially for the women who have been oppressed since the founding days of Saint-Domingue. As Sophie watches the other women in her family repeat these oppressive traditions and, in the case of Martine, be fatally consumed by the traumas of the Haitian past, Sophie realizes she must break the cycle of silence to prevent herself from falling victim to the same entrapment many generations of women before her have done. In this way *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is the story of Sophie's struggle against the past to find a voice within the Haitian story.

The epilogue to *Krik? Krak!*, most likely written around the same time as *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, more explicitly discusses finding a voice to break traditional silence that every Haitian woman must overcome or fall victim to. Though the epilogue is written in the second person, it is presumably considering Danticat's own literary beginnings, especially in regard to motivations affecting a young female Haitian immigrant writer. The short epilogue describes the pressures affecting a Haitian woman writer for whom writing "was an act of indolence, something to be done in a corner when you could have been learning to cook" (219). In this conclusion to her volume of short stories, Danticat explains that, despite the contempt with which the Haitian working class regards writers,

and especially female writers, she continued to defy her parents' wishes in pursuing writing because of the muted voices whispering from the depths of Haitian history:

It was their whispers that pushed you, their murmurs over pots sizzling in your head. A thousand women urging you to speak through the blunt tip of your pencil. Kitchen poets, you call them. Ghosts like burnished branches on a flame tree. These women, they asked for your voice so that they could tell your mother in your place that yes, women like you do speak, even if they speak in a tongue that is hard to understand (222).

Thus Danticat acknowledges that her purpose is to write for women who could not write—or speak—for themselves. She is also writing to avoid a silence that threatens her personally and to give voice to others who have been consumed by those silences of personal and cultural history.

After these two first books of the early 1990s, Danticat enters a second period of her career that begins with the publication of *The Farming of Bones*. This piece moves past a more general consideration of the Haitian past into the examination of one specific historical event that marks one of the many traumatic moments in Haitian history. In examining the Haitian Massacre of 1937 Danticat turns to one event that negatively affected many Haitians and Haitian collective memory and was itself quite silenced in terms of global awareness and repercussions. The writing of *The Farming of Bones* marks a move from the examination of silenced and traumatized *people* to an exploration and questioning of silenced *history*. Further, by exploring that history, Danticat is investigating one of the reasons behind the trauma that causes the silencing of Haitian people. The first-person narration of Amabelle also creates an unexpected and

nontraditional narrator of history. Thus Danticat both explores—and places into the U.S. American perspective—a formerly marginalized historical event as well as hypothesizes on how that sort of traumatic event may have affected and further silenced young women.

Danticat's next piece of fiction continues and extends the phase that *The Farming of Bones* begins. In *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat delves even deeper into the specifics of silencing. Not only does she examine a crucial aspect of recent Haitian history—the Haitian government's use of the notorious Tonton Macoutes—and the ways that tumultuous time created lasting traumatic effects—often manifesting in silence—on all Haitians (those in Haiti and the U.S., and both the tortured, torturers, and even those who did not come into direct contact with the Macoutes), but for the first time she also interrogates silence itself. In this novel she explores why silence arises, whom it affects, and how it works. She explores different types of silence—physical, emotional, and political—and reveals the similarities between them. Through this piece of fiction, Danticat excavates the silences of her own past too, though indirectly. In exploring the reasons and manifestations of silence in the Haitian past, she is examining the silences in her own cultural history. It is in *The Dew Breaker* that Danticat probes most deeply into the issue of silencing, and it seems that in doing so she breaks any remaining silences that affect her.

Since the publication of *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat has published only works of nonfiction. If she at first needed fiction as a medium through which to discuss a past too traumatic for historiography, through exploring voicelessness in her fictional works, she actually found a voice for herself. Because she broke the silences surrounding her cultural past that prevent the writing of “true” history, she no longer needs fiction to express what

was “too traumatic to be remembered” (Peterson 52) by official history. Just as her novels demonstrate, breaking silence and finding a voice is a necessary means to work through trauma. And since she has overcome the traumas of the past that prevent the writing of history, she is now able to write those histories. She begins by writing the history of her family in *Brother, I’m Dying*, which explores both her personal history and cultural history. In this she most investigates the period in Haitian history that arguably holds the most importance to her as an immigrant to the United States—the U.S. occupation of Haiti. She describes how that event affected her family’s history, and more broadly how relations between the United States and Haiti continue to affect her and her family to this day. When she recounts the Haitian folktale that asserts that “It is not our way to let our grief silence us” (266), she speaks for the purpose of this memoir.

Finally, most recently Danticat explores a broad range of topics concerning both Haitian history and her own history in *Create Dangerously*. The range of this last book demonstrates the freedom Danticat has finally achieved in her writing—she now has found a voice with which to discuss realities that she had to mask through fiction at the beginning of her career. She acknowledges her preoccupation with the past—“But another thing that has always haunted and obsessed me is trying to write the things that have always haunted and obsessed those who came before me” (*Create* 13)—and speaks of literature’s purpose of “revolt[ing] against silence” (11). She even writes contemporary histories in her essays about the 2010 earthquake and the recent assassination of popular Haitian radio personality Jean Dominique and thus ensures that these historical moments will not be completely silenced, even when they may at first seem too painful to be articulated. By breaking the silences of fictional characters, then, Danticat has been able

to break her own silences, and the voice she has discovered enables her to fight the silences of history. As she says in her introduction to *The Butterfly's Way*, a collection of works by Haitian immigrants: "our voices will not be silenced, our stories will be told" (xvii).

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