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VIOLENCE, DICTATORSHIP AND TRAUMATIC MEMORY IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *THE DEW BREAKER* AND MARIO VARGAS LLOSA'S *THE FEAST OF THE GOAT*.

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TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT – VIOLENCE, DICTATORSHIP AND TRAUMATIC MEMORY IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *THE DEW BREAKER* AND MARIO VARGAS LLOSA'S *THE FEAST OF THE GOAT*.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Edwidge Danticat and Mario Vargas Llosa's treatment of political violence, dictatorship and traumatic memory in their respective novels *The Dew Breaker* (2004) and *The Feast of the Goat* (2000). Danticat's narrative is contextualized by the infamous dictatorship of François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier. On the other hand, Vargas Llosa draws from historical documentation in his representation of the oppressive dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. Both authors demonstrate that there is an indelible relationship between history and literature as they fictionalize history in their narratives to render significant the struggles and experiences of victims of dictatorial regimes. Furthermore, they exemplify different ways of representing a dictatorship through literature. Whereas Vargas Llosa adheres to the Latin American dictator novel genre, Danticat takes an oppositional stance to traditional discursive narratives on dictatorship. The authors demonstrate that traumatic memory of political violence and the abuse of a tyrannical leader continues to plague victims. The characters are affected to such an extent that their trauma informs their present, thus shaping the way in which they carry out their lives. Therefore, Edwidge Danticat and Mario Vargas Llosa depict the realities of a dictatorial experience through their novels.

Key words: political violence, dictatorship, traumatic memory, dictator novel, Trujillo, Duvalier.

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INTRODUCTION

When interrogating the political functions of writing, the dictator novel must be considered, as it represents a space where authors mobilize their art against tyranny. Within the context of the dictator novel, history is fictionalized in such a way that "favors multiplicity, permeability, and change, since different perspectives, models and flexibility are the emphasis" (Ruiz 1). Thus, within the literary sphere of the region, writers fictionalize history to underscore the political and historical truths that are ignored in mainstream historical texts. This research concerns two such novels, namely Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* (2004) and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* (2000).

Edwidge Danticat is a critically acclaimed, Haitian-American author of novels, short stories, children's books, and journalistic publications. Born in Port-au-Prince in 1969, Danticat migrated to the United States at the age of twelve to join her parents, who had settled there during the early years of her childhood while she remained in Haiti with her paternal uncle. Danticat lived under the infamous Duvalier regime before migrating. Thus, her work is frequently situated in the dictatorship of François Duvalier (1957-1971) and his successor, Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986). She uses her artistic voice to comment on the history of political instability and violence that has plagued Haiti for centuries. Traumatic memory and exile are recurrent themes in her writing as they reflect the reality of countless Haitians who survived years of repressive dictatorships. This prolific and dynamic author also addresses the role of women in literature and identity issues in the diaspora.

Danticat's first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) portrays the strength of Haitian women amid terror and political violence. Both her fiction and nonfiction work follow the same thematic pattern of highlighting the traumatic memory that has haunted Haitians for centuries, regardless of

age or gender. Some of these publications include *Krik? Krak!* (1996), *The Farming of Bones* (1998), *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010) and *The Dew Breaker* (2004), the subject of this study. The text constitutes a cycle of short stories which painstakingly expose the trauma, exile and political violence associated with the Haitian reality following the vicious Duvalier dictatorship.

The second author to be studied is Mario Vargas Llosa, one of Latin America's major literary figures of the past five decades. Acknowledged as one of the four leading writers of the Latin American Boom, he has published a series of novels, essays, plays and critical studies, the success of which won him the 2010 Nobel Prize for Literature. Born in the Peruvian town of Arequipa in 1936, Vargas Llosa is a known political commentator and activist for social justice. His persistent engagement in the political arena culminated in his unsuccessful presidential campaign in the 1990 Peru elections. In his essays and interviews, Vargas Llosa constantly interrogates the political function of writing. His narrative style is as fluid as his political stance, making it difficult to categorize his life and work. Sabine Köllmann cleverly summarizes the response of many readers of Vargas Llosa's novels and political commentary: "Love his fiction, hate his politics" ("Self-Definition" 173).

Despite his controversial political approach, Vargas Llosa's fiction is fervently received on the global scale. His first novel, *La ciudad y los perros* (1963) won the Premio Biblioteca Breve in Spain, instantly recognizing the Latin American author as a leading literary figure. Other political works from Vargas Llosa include *Conversación en la catedral* (1969), *La guerra del fin del mundo* (1981) and more recently, *La fiesta del chivo* (*The Feast of the Goat*, 2000), the complementary subject matter of this study. Mario Vargas Llosa ventures to the Dominican

Republic in *The Feast of the Goat* to render a shocking, novelistic representation of the cruel dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo from 1930-1961.

This study intends to comparatively analyze *The Dew Breaker* (2004) and *The Feast of the Goat* (2000), with focus on the authors' treatment of political violence, dictatorship and traumatic memory. These novels were selected because they each deal with a Caribbean dictatorship that continues to have traumatic effects on Haitians and Dominicans alike. It can be argued that the plurality of narrative perspectives is a major technique that Danticat and Vargas Llosa adopt in the selected novels to illustrate the aforementioned thematic concerns. Thus, this study aims to examine how these literary works depict the socio-political sphere of the Caribbean. The appropriate literature and primary sources such as interviews were consulted in order to present a thoroughly critical analysis of the subject matter.

The current study is made up of three chapters. Chapter one will examine the relationship between history and literature, with focus on author's approach to representing history in their respective texts. Chapter two will deal with the issue of dictatorship. Using the Latin American dictator novel as a model, the chapter will analyze how Edwidge Danticat and Mario Vargas Llosa portray a dictatorial regime. Finally, Chapter three will explore the haunting of traumatic memory, with emphasis on the characters' methods of coping with a traumatic past.

CHAPTER ONE

Notions of History in Literature

History and literature are two disciplines that are undeniably interrelated. In the sphere of the Caribbean, for example, many literary works explore notions of the region's history, which contributes to an understanding of the Caribbean experience. In Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat*, the historical context must be considered. Thus, this chapter will examine the relationship between history and literature, for which Hayden White's study on narratives in history will act as a guide. Furthermore, the representation of history in *The Dew Breaker* and *The Feast of the Goat* will be presented.

White in his essay "Historical Text as Literary Artifact" (1978) weighs the conflation of fictional plot structures and historical discourse. He argues that recorded historical events offer the historian only "*elements*" of a story. The events are only then made into a story through the process of "emplotment," which White describes as the "encodation" of the facts of 'chronicles' or events as the elements of specific kinds of plot structures, particularly those of fiction (83-4). White claims that historical narratives are "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (82). Thus, in the same way that fiction writers adopt "elements" of history to imaginatively create tragic, comic or romantic stories, historians must match a plot structure to a set of historical events to effectively generate a meaning of any kind. Said events are organized or configured by way of the historian's interpretation.

Edwidge Danticat's careful selection of specific events throughout Haiti's history and their chaotic organization in *The Dew Breaker* provides an alternative perspective of viewing and

understanding the country's past. Through the process of "emplotment" that White describes, Danticat represents the reality of Haiti's past and present in her fiction. This is reflected in the novel's structure, which is fragmented in space and time.[1] The text begins with the story "The Book of the Dead." The Dew Breaker, a former Tonton Macoute who lives peacefully with his wife and daughter in New York amongst possible victims of his brutality, reveals to his daughter Ka that he was part of the militia responsible for torturing and murdering countless Haitians: "Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey" (21). The subsequent stories are interconnected by characters who are plagued by traumatic memories resulting from a history of political violence and social instability. Through the figure of the Tonton Macoute, Danticat provides a new perspective on one of the most horrific periods of Haiti's history, the dictatorship of François Duvalier (1957-1971) and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986). Edwidge Danticat therefore uses her fiction to present another version of history, a version which highlights the daily struggles of Haitians who constantly battle trauma, exile and isolation, whose stories are lost in the silences of history.

White posits that all historical narratives contain an element of interpretation. In order to reconstruct "what happened" in any given moment in history, the historian must "fill in the gaps" of his information on "inferential or speculative grounds" ("Interpretations" 51). White goes on to quote Claude Lévi-Strauss, who maintained that "history is never simply history, but always history-for" (qtd. in White, "Interpretations" 56). Like fiction writers, historians can "interpret" historical events and present them for a specific purpose or for a specific audience. Danticat fulfills this role in her fiction by presenting the silenced histories of Haitians. Given the complicated and

[1] The individual stories take place in Florida, New York and Haiti at different points in time (the present, 1990's, 1980's, 1970's, 1960's). The author refers to specific events in history to contextualize the time period of each story.

devastating history of Haiti, there is no wonder Haitian writers like Danticat, Dany Laferrière and Jacques Romain, amongst others, chose to "interpret" history through their literary works, thus providing a new lens through which we can view Haiti's troubled past.

As Laferrière points out, "literature in Haiti is completely tied to history" (Dash 189). Danticat further testifies to this as she explains how the poetic connotation associated with the Haitian education culture of having children commit historical facts to memory influenced her writing: "for me too, history was a kind of inspiration for writing, the facts of history that you recited and learned by heart" (Dash 193-4). Thus, the inspiration fostered by history that Danticat mentions arms writers with the tools to create new stories from existing histories. They are thus able to control the narrative, blurring the line between history and fiction. Danticat further explains the impact of oral history on her writing:

> It's not a *written* influence, but storytelling is my first influence … I grew up listening to stories and that's the first I realized I wanted to tell stories in some way ... That kind of daily storytelling, as well as more structured storytelling, were big literary influences. (Danticat 00:28-01:35).

These influences are translated into the style of Danticat's writing. The author's 1995 publication of *Krik? Krak!* is a series of short stories that mimics the storytelling tradition. The collection explores the problematic Haitian identity in the context of a shared history which engendered painful individual experiences. Danticat thus fictionalizes the personal experiences of survivors of political violence in Haiti. She gives voice to the voiceless while filling in the gaps of "historical amnesia" (Beauclair 25) that seem to plague mainstream historians. The extensive

intertextuality present in Edwidge Danticat's works serves as a basis for the historicity of the images and events in the narration.

References of precise instances in Haitian history are found throughout Danticat's narratives. This prolific author's fiction and nonfiction works underscore the historical, political, and cultural realities of Haiti while exposing the injustices and trauma experienced by Haitians both within the country and the diaspora. Although *The Dew Breaker* is a work of fiction, Danticat anchors the narrative in important moments of Haitian history. The story "Monkey Tails" is contextualized around the fateful day of February 7th, 1986, which marks the end of the Duvalier dictatorship. The narrator, Michel, recalls the chaos that enveloped Haiti following Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier's exile from the country and Haiti's sudden freedom: "Overnight our country had completely changed. We had fallen asleep under a dictatorship headed by a pudgy thirty-four-year-old man and his glamorous wife. During the night they'd sneaked away" (139). The author intertwines history and fiction, effectively utilizing facts to fictionally reconstruct a significant moment in Haiti's past. She does this with other real references which locate the stories within a particular time frame. For example, the mentioning of Emmanuel Constant,[2] who fled to the United States in 1994, in "The Book of Miracles" places the story around that period (78). Similarly, in her memoir *Brother, I'm Dying*, Danticat uses her uncle Joseph's birthday as a point of reference to the event of February 7th, 1986 (134). The specific historical connection to important personal dates that Danticat constructs in her nonfiction work reinforces the historicity of the images presented in her fiction. Furthermore, her depiction of the excessive cruelty of the Tonton

[2] Emmanuel Constant was the Secretary General of the paramilitary organization FRAPH (Front Révolutionnaire pour l'Avancement et le Progrès d'Haïti) during the military regime of Raoul Cédras (1991-1994).

Macoutes and instances of political violence throughout her works can be reflected in Danticat's own personal history.

The author has publicly divulged her family's personal experience with loss, exile and political violence.[3] The exile of her uncle and father and the death of family members because of political violence reflect recurring themes in Danticat's fiction and is the life sentence of many of the protagonists in *The Dew Breaker*. As Edouard Glissant points out, "Literature is not only fragmented, it is henceforth shared. In it lie histories and the voices of the people" (77). In Danticat's stories are the voices of Haitians whose histories are lost in a sea of silence. She therefore becomes a spokesperson for the people through her literature. Danticat uses her artistic voice in this sense to combat "historical erasure" by entering "the void of silences of history" (Beauclair 52) to render significant the daily struggles of thousands of Haitian victims whose stories otherwise go unacknowledged.

As in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* is based on a specific period of history, the thirty-one-year dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina from 1930 to 1961 in the Dominican Republic. Vargas Llosa's political interests prompt him to maintain a dual role as a writer and avid political commentator. Köllmann observes that "From the beginning of his career, literature and politics were two sides of his vocation as a writer that have coexisted and influenced each other" (*Companion* 1). Although Vargas Llosa experimented with many genres throughout his career,[4] turning reality into fiction remained his

[3] See for example *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), *Create Dangerously* (2011), Jaggi (2004) or her interview with Racine-Toussaint (2005).

[4] Mario Vargas Llosa writes prolifically across literary genres and has published erotic fiction, thrillers, comedies, memoirs and historical fiction, amongst others.

central focus. Köllmann points out that "[a]n important point in Vargas Llosa's approach to literature is his ambition to encompass the complexity of reality in a work of fiction" (*Companion* viii). As such, many of this Peruvian author's works are contextualized by historical or biographical information. Political and social criticism are also cleverly combined with his manipulation of form to create acclaimed works across the genres. This is evidenced in his first published novel, *The Time of the Hero* (1962), which reflects Vargas Llosa's own experience at the Leoncio Prado Military Academy and sharply criticises Peru's military system. Furthermore, his novel *Conversation in the Cathedral* (1969) systematically attacks the eight-year regime of Manuel Odría in his home country of Peru from 1948 to 1956. *The Feast of the Goat* reflects the pattern set in Vargas Llosa's previous works of transforming reality into fiction.

Mario Vargas Llosa became fascinated with the Trujillo dictatorship during an eight month visit in 1975 to the Dominican Republic. The dictator's shadow continued to loom over the country, and Vargas Llosa began to meticulously gather information about the *trujillato* and the dictator's death from interviewing witnesses and reading books, historical accounts and newspaper archives (Köllmann, *Demons* 249). The careful documentation of this momentous period in Dominican history resulted in *The Feast of the Goat*. The major players surrounding the fall of the Trujillo regime appear as characters in the novel with their real names, but they are treated with "great liberty" (Köllmann, *Demons* 249). He does this through the creation of multiple narrative threads. The first of these recounts the story of Urania Cabral, a fictitious character that Vargas Llosa includes to represent victims of Trujillo's sexual abuse. The second thread narrates the final day in the life of Trujillo from the perspective of the dictator himself. The third thread deals with the main conspirators involved in the assassination of the tyrannical leader. The "great liberty" that Köllmann mentions refers to the fictitious inner perspectives Vargas Llosa creates for these

historical figures. The author thus employs this narrative strategy as a mechanism of interrogating the relation between reality and fiction. He is able to effectively blur the lines between the two concepts, creating a fictional view of historical events.

White considers that a historical work is "a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of *explaining what they were by representing* them" (White, Metahistory 2). Thus, White's claim supports the assertion that Vargas Llosa presents his version of history through the three different perspectives in the novel. Through dialogues, flashbacks and memories, key moments of the *trujillato* are recreated. Historical facts from verifiable sources are blended with 'imagined facts,' characters and anecdotes "to create the fusion of truth and the symbolic effect of fiction" (Weldt-Basson 116). For instance, Urania links her anecdotes to real and reputable sources, such as Robert D. Crassweller, "the best-known biographer of Trujillo" (54), and reports from *The New York Times* (105). She states that Crassweller mentioned Trujillo's sexual indiscretion with one of his right-hand men, Don Friolán Arala's wife (54). However, though Crassweller describes Trujillo's "extraordinary sexual drive" (5) and his "use of [sex] as a lever" and "an instrument of power" (80) to control and humiliate his people, there is no mention of Vargas Llosa's anecdote. Nevertheless, the biographer's acknowledgement of Trujillo's abuse of power in this sense makes it possible to imagine that Vargas Llosa's fictional anecdotes could have possibly transpired, even though there is no factual documentation.

The thorough investigation into Dominican history that Urania occupies herself with is reminiscent of the meticulous documentation that Vargas Llosa carried out in order to complete the novel. Her memories of life under Trujillo exposes aspects of the dictatorship from the perspective of a child directly abused by the dictator. Köllmann suggests that "This direct insight

into past situations can confirm, contradict or relativize information gained from present dialogues" (*Demons* 255). This narrative strategy is employed throughout the novel, as each of the conspirators reflect on the events that led to their decision to join the revolution and assassinate Trujillo, and the dictator in his thread reminisces on his past in the U.S. Marines and his rise to power. The author mentions key elements of the Trujillo Era: the 1959 Cuban invasion, the struggle with the Church and the gruesome murder of the Mirabal sisters, among others.[5] These reflective recollections provide context on the imminent fall of the regime and are acknowledged by historiographers. Nevertheless, Trujillo's reaction to said events are fictitious, effectively blending reality and fiction.

Evidently, it is through multiple narrative threads that the author achieves his goal of turning reality into fiction. Like Danticat, Vargas Llosa refers to events which place his narrative within a specific moment of history. *The Feast of the Goat* revolves around the Trujillo Era and the dictator, focusing on the country's history of a dictatorial regime. The author incorporates 'imagined facts' within the narrative to expose his interpretation of history. That is, the subjugation of the Dominican people and the effect of the dictatorship on their psyche. On the other hand, Danticat fictitiously creates individual stories and perspectives to demonstrate how characters face the traumatic effects of a violent history despite limitations of age, class and gender. Both authors effectively intertwine history and fiction as they employ multiple narrative voices to explore different ways of experiencing a shared history of violence and dictatorship.

[5] Robert D. Crassweller documents each of these events in detail in his biography, *Trujillo: The Life and Times of a Caribbean Dictator* (1966).

CHAPTER TWO

Literary Representations of Dictatorship

It would be amiss to discuss history without mentioning the harsh reality of political violence within Latin America and the Caribbean. Power and oppression in Latin American politics gave birth to a new "subgenre" of historical fiction, that is, the dictator novel (Weldt-Basson 113). This genre is influential to such an extent that Roberto González Echevarría refers to it as "the most clearly indigenous thematic tradition in Latin American literature" (65). However, authors like Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz and Julia Álvarez have confronted the dictatorial past of the Caribbean in their work, particularly of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Despite the thematic concerns addressing the legacy of authoritarianism in the region, Daynalí Flores-Rodríguez considers that the Caribbean novel of dictatorship "rarely conforms to the conventions of the Latin American dictator novel" (70). In contrast, it "challenge[s] the Latin American discursive tradition ... that normalizes hierarchical notions of power" (70). Nevertheless, although *The Feast of the Goat* is set in the Dominican Republic, it is still categorized as a Latin American dictator novel. Thus, considering Florez-Rodríguez's estimations, this chapter will evaluate Edwidge Danticat and Mario Vargas Llosa's approach to the representation of the dictator figure and dictatorial regimes in their respective novels.

In her article "Familial Longings: Trans-Caribbean Narratives of Dictatorship and the Latin American Imaginary," Daynalí Flores-Rodríguez argues that the Latin American dictator novel provides a narrative that reveals power dynamics like those found in colonial and neocolonial systems. She maintains that these narratives depict a powerful but isolated dictator figure who is "an exception from his people because of his ties to foreign interests, his egocentrism, his egotism,

and his messianic traits" (71). Flores-Rodríguez goes on to argue that the dictator wields absolute power over his family, peers and subjects through his use of sheer violence, terror and coercion. This absolute power for the writer in question is "reminiscent of European monarchies of the colonial past" (71). On the other hand, Flores-Rodríguez demonstrates how the dictator novel genre is a "straitjacket" for Caribbean authors (73). She contends:

> Caribbean dictatorial experiences are only recognized as such when they conform to particular ideological templates, namely, those established in the Latin American dictator novel genre. Dictatorial experiences, for example, are conventionalized through their most brutal instances. It becomes necessary to describe the atrocities and the violence committed by the regime against the people, but we rarely see ordinary individuals affected by it unless they are actively opposing the system or benefiting from it (73).

However, contemporary Caribbean authors approach dictatorships "not as experiences from the past anchored in specific countries but as events that are still consequential" (74). This is certain in the works of Edwidge Danticat, as she exposes the traumatic memory that continues to haunt Haitians after years of political violence and authoritative regimes. She does not limit her narratives to Haiti but crosses the border into the diaspora as well. Political violence has plagued the Caribbean nation since the era of colonialism. Few territories in the hemisphere have suffered such an extensive course of repressive regimes as Haiti. Diederich and Burt acknowledge this fact as they highlight how "the country suffered almost constant tyranny and disorder. Repeated revolutions shook Haiti as twenty-two dictators came and went. The masses, as always, bore the brunt of their misrule" (27).

The almost thirty-year infamous rule of François "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, was one of the worst dictatorships the country has been subjected to. During Duvalier's regime, Haiti became the "horror of the hemisphere" (Diederich and Burt 21) and effectively "began to feel the suffocating iron grip of its ruthless and implacable new master. The curtain had gone up on one of Haiti's bloodiest epochs, and occupying centre stage was Papa Doc" (Diederich and Burt 122). After François Duvalier died of natural causes in 1971, his son Jean-Claude took control of the regime until he was overthrown in 1986 by the national armed forces. The father-son "family dictatorship" that François Duvalier imposed on Haiti is indeed "a trademark of dictatorial regimes in the Caribbean [which] function as absolute monarchies" (Flores-Rodríguez 75).

François Duvalier created the Tonton Macoutes, a militia which he utilized to subjugate the people of Haiti. The dictator himself declared that the Tonton Macoutes "n'a qu'une seule âme : Duvalier, ne connaît qu'un seul chef : Duvalier, ne lutte que pour un seul destin : Duvalier au pouvoir" (qtd. in Hurbon 13). Consequently, operating under the sole command of Duvalier, the Tonton Macoutes were given free rein to utilize extreme violence and brutality to maintain the administration's vicious control over the population and eliminate its enemies, real or invented. They effectively led a reign of terror throughout Haiti. The brutality of the Tonton Macoutes is in fact a leitmotif in the works of Edwidge Danticat. The Haitian-American author does not explore the dictator as a character as is common in the dictator novel. Alternatively, she depicts the issues of identity, exile and traumatic memory that plague the direct and indirect victims of macoute violence. Duvalier's legacy of terror is frequently referenced in the works of contemporary Haitian authors who continue to remind their readers of the trauma caused by one man's authority. Critically acclaimed authors such as Dany Laferrière, Évelyne Trouillot and Marie Vieux-Chauvet

occupy the global literary scene alongside Edwidge Danticat, thus remembering the suffering and oppression of Haitians during that era.

The members of this paramilitary force were recruited mainly from the popular classes. Families were disrupted and relationships destroyed, since one's brother, uncle, father, cousin or friend could be indoctrinated into Duvalier's band of macoutes. Through her narratives, Edwidge Danticat utilizes the dysfunctional family relations engendered by dictatorship to "challenge internal dynamics of oppression presumed natural" (Flores-Rodríguez 75). In *The Dew Breaker*, the stories "The Book of the Dead," "The Book of Miracles" and "The Dew Breaker" revolve around a former macoute, his wife Anne and his daughter Ka. Each story is told from a different perspective (the daughter's, the mother's, the Tonton Macoute's), a different time (the present, the 1990's, 1967) and a different place (Florida, New York, Haiti). Nevertheless, they each inform each other, providing an alternative way of representing a dictatorial past. In lieu of giving readers a fictional insight into the oppressive heart of a dictatorship, Danticat carefully traces how it disrupts familial relations through the Bienaimé family.

In "The Book of the Dead," Ka must navigate a way to deal with the trauma that comes along with the revelation that her father was once a torturer and a murderer. The pair are on their way to deliver a sculpture that Ka has created to captivate "the way [she] had imagined him in prison" (6). However, after her father's confession, Ka must reevaluate her life and her relationship with her parents considering this new information: "Is he going to explain why he and my mother have no close friends, why they've never had anyone over to the house, why they never speak of any relatives in Haiti or anywhere else, or have never returned there?" (21). She now understands the distance her parents have placed between themselves and the diasporic community, between themselves and her. Ka's sculpture is a metaphor for the mask that her father used to hide his true

identity. She created an image of him oppressed and powerless like so many other Haitians. However, as the wood splits into several chunks and sinks to the bottom of the lake, her father's betrayal is simultaneously unmasked. Danticat shows the duality that exists within representations of figures of power in a dictatorship. The dew breaker reminds his daughter: "Ka, no matter what, I'm still your father, still your mother's husband. I would never do these things now" (24). A cruel Tonton Macoute is thus able to double as a picture-perfect family man. Nevertheless, his role as a devoted father and husband sharply contrasts with the way in which he exercised his power over his wider Haitian "family."

The three stories appear in reverse chronological order, but they are separated by other narrative strings which center on Haitians living in the diaspora. The readers fleetingly get a glimpse of the dew breaker in these stories, the only character close to a dictatorial regime. However, his connection to other characters is revealed through the glimpses the author provides of their traumatic past and its effect on their present lives in the diaspora. Danticat therefore "finds it more appropriate and illuminating to explore the later life of the torturer's victims than to simply present this man's brutal violations" (Armendariz 35). Armendariz also maintains that this does not render irrelevant the crimes that radically changed the lives of the victims and are the origins of their trauma. Conversely, it commands attention and forces readers to react when the impact of the trauma emerges through the physical and mental reactions of a group of people "whose individual and collective identity has been deeply disarrayed" (36). Therefore, Danticat does not represent dictatorship in the same way as discursive literary traditions, which depict oppression and violence blamed on autocratic regimes. Alternatively, she focuses on family dynamics and how Caribbean people take agency over their own lives and experiences. The unnamed Tonton Macoute chose to exert his power over his fellow Haitian brethren, a betrayal that Danticat

denounces in her work. Like many other Haitians, the Tonton Macoute faced personal loss because of the dictatorship when his family's land was seized, after which "his father had gone mad and his mother had simply disappeared" (191). However, he decided to take agency over the experience by joining the militia that brutalized and subjugated those citizens who continued to struggle for their freedom. He therefore chose to be with those with power rather than those without. This extended to family members, as is slowly revealed in the text.

The dew breaker's last victim was the stepbrother of his wife, Anne. The scar he sustained in the scuffle is a permanent reminder of his betrayal. Anne continues to struggle with his past identity and the fact that she must acknowledge the "kinship of shame and guilt that she's inherited by marrying her husband" (81). Danticat challenges the traditional representation of the family as the core of cultural identity. She instead makes it "a site of violence and betrayal ... and the Bienaimé family is a microcosm for the larger Haitian community seeking to work through its traumatic legacy" (Bellamy 180). While the dew breaker must live with a permanent reminder of his role in the violent Duvalier dictatorship, the larger Haitian community must live with the scars it left in its wake. Edwidge Danticat establishes in her text that there are other ways of representing a dictatorial regime than the traditions of the Latin American dictator novel. She exposes the intricacies of family and empowers characters, despite their socio-historical conditions, by giving them agency over their own experiences.

Unlike Edwidge Danticat, Mario Vargas Llosa focuses on dictator figure as a character. As Flores-Rodríguez points out, the Latin American dictator novel presents characters close to the regime and describes the atrocities committed against the people. However, it is rare that "ordinary" characters are developed, unless they are "actively opposing the system or benefitting from it" (73). This narrative trend is adopted by Vargas Llosa in *The Feast of the Goat*. Mario

Vargas Llosa was among the Latin American Boom authors of the 1960's and 1970's who further popularized the dictator novel. The socio-political atmosphere of the Caribbean and Latin America during and following the Cuban Revolution prompted these authors to write about their opposing political views (Flores-Rodríguez 73). *The Feast of the Goat* is Vargas Llosa's second venture into the genre. His 1969 publication of *Conversation in the Cathedral* portrays Peru under the dictatorial regime of Manuel A. Odría in the 1950's. Vargas Llosa's dictator novels can be located among influential publications such as Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el Supremo* (1974), Alejo Carpentier's *El recurso del método* (1974) and Gabriel García Márquez's *El otoño del patriarca* (1975).

Wiarda considers that the Trujillo regime was "probably the strongest and most absolute dictatorship ever established in Latin America" (qtd. in Wolff 2). Indeed, the *trujillato* was a defining moment in Dominican history. There is therefore no argument that the era occupies a significant role in Dominican literary traditions post-Trujillo, as remembering the exiled, tortured and murdered Dominicans became an important trope for many authors. Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* is only one of many literary works that represent or refer to Trujillo's regime. Julia Álvarez's *The Time of the Butterflies* (1994) and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) are some works that contribute to the narrative on Trujillo. Nevertheless, whereas many of these works are considered to fall within the category of novels of dictatorship, *The Feast of the Goat* incorporates elements of the dictator novel. Castellanos and Martinez highlight the difference between the two categories, the former being "de orientación sociológica y política, más que psicológica" (79), where the dictator is a peripheral character or mentioned incidentally. However, the latter concentrates on the dictator as a character and "la compleja personalidad tiránica" (79) that characterizes him.

All narrators that appear in the novel are connected to the regime either directly or indirectly, thus following the model of the Latin American dictator novel. The text's structure reflects the total dominion that Trujillo held over the country. Although there are three different narrative threads, Trujillo is the common element that links each story to the next. Urania's trauma originated from her violent sexual encounter with the dictator. She encounters Trujillo because of her father's role in the regime and henceforth becomes a victim of his machismo. Through the dictator's narrative thread, the readers get an idea of how he views his family and collaborators. The power games and strategies of manipulation that he enforces to control the population are also revealed. On the other hand, the third thread revolves around the assassination of Trujillo, therefore making the dictator figure central to each point of narration.

The dictator's death occurs exactly in the middle of the novel in chapter XII, after which the narrative strings lose the order that was set in the first half of the book. The focus shifts from Urania at her father's house to her aunt's, and her perspective interchanges with that of her father as she slowly reveals to her aunt and cousins why she suddenly left the country. The conspirators move from the intense moments in their car to the confusion that ensues after Trujillo's death and the unraveling of the attempted coup. Finally, Trujillo's perspective shifts more and more to other members of the regime, focusing on Joaquín Balaguer in the final chapters of the novel. The unpredictability that characterizes the narrative threads after this pivotal chapter in the novel reflects the chaos that ensued after the death of the 'Benefactor.'

Castellanos and Martinez maintain that the dictator figure is characterized by the following: his almost 'mummified' old age, his memory, magnetism, machismo, countless lovers, gloved hand, spurs, hammock, cold cruelty, love for his mother, tenderness towards his father, his isolation, his impenetrability and his loneliness (81). Excluding the gloved hand and hammock,

Vargas Llosa's Trujillo embodies the characteristics of the dictator figure. Through the dictator's inner perspective, the "psychology of dictatorial power and the mechanisms of state control" are exposed (Vargas 12). Robert D. Crassweller declares that Trujillo was "a genius of power ... [who] could dominate his countrymen to an incredible degree. Power was the great river of his being, flowing through every extremity of his life" (4). Mario Vargas Llosa captures this controlled power that Trujillo possessed through his portrayal of the effect of the regime on the Dominican psyche. The author states:

> Creo que esta novela la escribí a partir del misterio de que Trujillo llegara a acumular un poder semejante. [...] lo que más me impresionó fue la conducta de personajes como el general Román, conspiradores importantísimos que hicieron fracasar la conspiración. ¿Por qué fracasó? Porque los principales conspiradores quedaron *paralizados* por lo que habían hecho [...] Trujillo seguía dentro de ellos, vivo aunque el cadáver estaba allí; seguía dominándolos, avasallándolos, empequeñeciéndolos desde el interior de su propia personalidad. (Krauze 22, my italics).

As Trujillo interacts with his collaborators, military and family, the effect of his magnetic presence and cold power become clear, as general Román describes in the novel: "like so many officers, so many Dominicans, before Trujillo his valor and sense of honor disappeared, and he was overcome by a paralysis of his reason and his muscles, by servile obedience and reverence" (309). Even the dictator's gaze was unbearable to endure. Trujillo's charisma, intelligence, physical strength and virility despite his age give him a mythicized image among Dominicans. Ángel Rama affirms that the dictator figure is more than a historical character; it is a myth that persists within the Latin American imaginary (44). Gabriel García Márquez supports this idea with his claim that "el dictador es el único ser mitológico que ha producido América Latina, y su ciclo histórico está lejos

de ser concluido" (García 137). It is through this mythification of the dictator that the author depicts the effect of the dictatorship on the Dominican psyche.

Trujillo takes advantage of his enigmatic personality to perpetuate his image as the 'Father of the New Nation' among the people. Through his perspective, the reader witnesses the *compadrazgo* relation he forges between himself and the people: "To establish that relationship, to be compadres with a campesino, a laborer, a craftsman, a merchant, was to guarantee the loyalty of the poor man and poor woman" (125). The people therefore become indebted to him, their 'Benefactor'. Trujillo's mythological status keeps the people in a state of paralysis, unable to escape his domination. One of the conspirators, Antonio De la Maza, torments himself for not being able to avenge his brother's death even though he stood a few steps away from the tyrant himself:

> Why didn't he attack when he had [Trujillo] so close? ... It was something more subtle and indefinable than fear: it was the paralysis, the numbing of determination, reason, and free will, which this man ... with his thin high-pitched voice and hypnotist's eyes, imposed on Dominicans, poor or rich, educated or ignorant, friends or enemies. (88).

Nevertheless, Trujillo slowly loses his power over the people. A gaze that once "intimidated and annihilated" (31) is no longer mythicized: "But he wasn't God. His gaze could only be the gaze of a mortal man" (31). Mario Vargas Llosa uses his novel as a "critical and oppositional stance toward [his] subject of representation" (Vargas 11). The author purports: "Uno no puede inventar a un personaje creíble sin mostrar de alguna manera su humanidad" (Krauze 26). He therefore demythifies the dictator by humanizing him and demonstrating his susceptibility to illness. The power that the 'Father of the New Nation' has amassed over the three decades that

he ruled the country is slowly slipping away. The readers see Trujillo simultaneously losing control of the political affairs of the country, his family and his body. As the regime slowly continues to deteriorate, so does his body. Vargas Llosa humanizes the character by showing his physical weakness, effectively weakening his status as a mythological figure. Trujillo's inability to control his bladder or sustain an erection overshadows his narration. Used to being in control, not even allowing himself to sweat in the presence of others, the character obsesses over his condition. Unlike the political situation, "this wasn't an enemy he could defeat like the hundreds, the thousands he had confronted and conquered over the years [...]. This lived inside him" (16). Defined by his machismo and extraordinary sexual drive, impotence eliminates an important factor of Trujillo's character. His frustration turns into desperation as he frantically attempts to reestablish his manhood: "Dear God, do this for me. Tonight I need to fuck Yolanda Esterel right. So I can know I'm not dead. Not an old man" (288).

The reader therefore becomes a witness to the downfall of the mythical dictator in the final moments of his reign. The myths associated with the Goat's sexuality and sexual appetite crumble each time he loses control of his bladder or is unable to fulfill his sexual functions. Despite his inner turmoil, Trujillo does not allow himself to get distracted from his duties as the 'Benefactor' of the nation. He starts his day as usual, and his inner perspective reveals how he plots to control the increased resistance against his regime. Readers also get an insight into the logic behind the manipulative power games that Trujillo uses to control his collaborators. For example, sending members of the regime into disgrace "in order to keep them always on the alert [...] A trial he had forced all his collaborators, close or distant, to endure" (177). The cruel, inhumane punishments and brutal murder of those who oppose the regime create an atmosphere of "fear, censorship and violent repression" in the novel (Vargas 10).

There is a clear distinction in the way in which Mario Vargas Llosa and Edwidge Danticat explore the issue of dictatorship in their respective novels. Evidently, *The Dew Breaker* falls within the category of the novel of dictatorship. The author is not concerned with dealing with the dictator as a character as is the case in *The Feast of the Goat*. Rather, she focuses on how the recruitment of militants disrupt small social structures like the family. The atrocities committed by these militants on behalf of the state or for personal gain remain etched in the memories of the victims, as with the dew breaker and his victims. Through individual stories, Danticat portrays the inescapable traumatic memory that haunts the characters regardless of geographical location. She therefore does not focus on the experience of living under a dictatorship, but the complications of survival after the period. Conversely, Vargas Llosa commits to the Latin American dictator novel model, presenting three different perspectives of experiencing the Trujillo dictatorship. The author invents fictional circumstances and manipulates historical facts to present his interpretation of the dictatorship. He portrays Dominicans to be "so frightened, browbeaten and manipulated by the Trujillo government, as to have internalized a code of subservience and humiliation which rendered them paralytic and doomed to inaction until the conspirators of May 30th finally assassinated Trujillo" (Weldt-Basson 116-17). There is an almost historic account of the final days of the dictator's life, a close attention to the dictator figure that Danticat does not adhere to.

CHAPTER THREE

THE HAUNTING OF TRAUMATIC MEMORY

In the previous chapters, the notion of history as it was developed in each novel was explored. It was also established that political violence represents an indelible part of Haitian and Dominican history as a result of harsh dictatorial regimes. In this chapter, an analysis of Edwidge Danticat and Mario Vargas Llosa's treatment of the traumatic implications of such a violent history of dictatorship will be presented. More specifically, the chapter will demonstrate how the characters in each novel respond to and cope with their trauma.

Through the short story cycle, Edwidge Danticat shows how trauma cuts across space and time, gender and age. Each of the nine stories in *The Dew Breaker* has its own plot, but they are nevertheless connected. All the protagonists in the text suffered traumatic experiences, some of which were at the hands of the dew breaker. Each at different stages of life, the characters are portrayed "in the aftermath of the trauma as they go through the process of healing and remembering, trying to live a life free from the trauma of the past" (Quist 148). These traumatic experiences engender psychological damage associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Cathy Caruth posits that the condition is a delayed response to the origin of the trauma, which "takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors" (qtd. in Carreño 21). These delayed psychological responses continuously disrupt the lives of the characters affected. Nightmares, seizures and hallucinations plague Dany, Anne and Beatrice respectively, which are constant reminders of the trauma they suffered. The characters continuously recreate past events which left traumatic marks that shape the way in which they understand their lives. As Albright et al. explain, "Trauma produces a rupture in the life story line of its victims and, as a result, survivors

find it difficult, if not impossible, to untangle the now snarled or clipped threads of stories so as to create a new overarching story that makes sense to them" (400). Thus, the "disturbed sense of self" (Quist 148) that characterizes victims of trauma makes it increasingly difficult for them to overcome their traumatic past.

Kathleen Brogan explores the idea of cultural haunting, a concept that makes a connection between historical erasure and ghosts in literature in her reconsideration of the familiar ghost story. For Brogan, stories of cultural haunting explore "the hidden passages not only of the individual psyche, but also of people's historical consciousness" (152). Indeed, Danticat's approach to the idea of the haunting of traumatic memory is reflective of Brogan's notion of cultural haunting. While she explores the individual trauma of the characters and their response to such trauma, the disparate chapters are "obliquely linked by the theme of Duvalier's terror as perpetrated by the Dew Breaker" (Collins 10). There is therefore a sense of collective haunting, suggesting that the author "[makes] an attempt to recover and make social use of a poorly documented, partially erased cultural history" (Brogan 150). However, Danticat establishes the difficulty of overcoming the memory of a traumatic and "denied past" (Brogan 152).

The author links the cultural process of mourning to recovery from trauma. As Michael J. Dash explains, "The perpetual threat of the dead person's return preoccupies family members during the period of mourning" (70). This is certainly the case with Anne, who lost her brother at sea. Her family therefore could not complete the burial, a crucial stage in the mourning process. As a result, "she'd convinced herself that her brother was walking the earth looking for his grave … trying to find his name" (71). Anne will therefore never be able to fully mourn the death of her brother or find closure. His ghost will continue to haunt her, as will the traumatic memory of his drowning. She is forced to relive the experience of her brother's death whenever she passes a

cemetery or has a seizure. As Dominick LaCapra observes, “One is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes” (21). During one of her epileptic episodes, Anne describes:

> Her body stiffened and the inside of her mouth felt crowded, her tongue swelling and spreading out over her teeth, filling them with the briny taste of dirty seawater. Fragmented moments from her life were filing past her, event after event streaming by at high speed on the giant puppet screen she now imagined her mind to be: her younger brother’s drowning [...]. (215).

What Anne deems possession of spirits is really possession of the past. Similarly, Dany is plagued with nightmares of the dew breaker the night he murdered his parents and burned down his house. There is a sort of possession of the past in this case as Dany voices his terrors in his sleep. Brogan explains: “In most cases possession is established by traumatic experience, such as the loss of land or homes, deaths of family members” (153). Both characters are hence locked in a prism of the past, unable to escape. In both cases, mourning has exacerbated the trauma.

Anne’s incomplete mourning ritual is directly contrasted with Estina’s funeral in “Night Talkers.” Dany returns to Haiti to inform his aunt that he has found the person who killed his parents: “I found him. I found him in New York, the man who killed Papa and Manman and took your sight” (97). However, after several interruptions, Dany is unable to complete his story. He then dreams about the conversation he wishes to have with his aunt. The protagonist begins “by recalling with his aunt the day his parents died” (104). Through this account, the reader becomes aware of the dew breaker’s role in the traumatic past of the protagonist: “Shut up now or I’ll shoot you too!” someone was shouting from the street. It was a large man with a face like a soccer ball

and a widow's peak dipping into the middle of his forehead" (105).[6] Nevertheless, when Dany finds the opportunity to avenge his parents, he realizes he is unable to for fear of killing the wrong person (107). When he awakens, Estina reveals that he has been calling for his parents in his sleep. She finally continues their interrupted conversation, allowing him to inquire about the reason behind his parents' death. Nevertheless, her answer is as ambiguous as Dany's understanding of his parents' past: "I don't know, Da. Maybe they were mistaken for all of us. There's a belief that if you kill people, you can take their knowledge, become everything they were. Maybe they wanted to take all that knowledge for themselves" (109). Estina then falls into a sleep that she never wakes up from. Contrary to Anne's situation, Dany completes the burial process, which would supposedly allow him to mourn his loved one and eventually overcome the loss. However, Estina's death leaves Dany in a state of unresolved trauma as she was unable to confirm or reject notions about his parents' political involvement or the identity of their killer.

Unlike Dany, who is only able to voice his trauma while asleep, the character Beatrice from the story "The Bridal Seamstress" recounts her torturous experience with her "Haitian prison guard" (128) neighbour to a young journalist, Aline. Supposedly the dew breaker, the torturer whipped the bottom of her feet and made her walk home without shoes because she refused to dance with him. Beatrice claims: "This man, wherever I rent or buy a house in this city, I find him, living on my street" (132). However, when Aline investigates, she realizes that the house in question is unoccupied. Although Aline describes Beatrice as "a bit nutty" (132), she considers the truth of her story as evidenced by her feet, which were "thin and sheer like an albino baby's skin" (131). Beatrice is haunted by a traumatic and violent moment from her past which continues to

[6] The link between the macoute in Dany's story and the dew breaker is made through the description of the unnamed Macoute in "The Dew Breaker" (211).

inform the present. She sees her torturer everywhere she goes, which makes her frequently move. As Pierre Janet observes, traumatic memory "fails to adapt the past to the present, dooming the traumatized subject to mechanical, nonverbal reenactments" (qtd. in Brogan 154). Therefore, Beatrice's neurosis is evidence of how she is trapped in a cycle of reliving her violent experiences and how this memory shapes her present life. She claims that she is retiring from her business because of her physical state, but the reader soon realizes that her actions are related to the haunting of the prison guard. Beatrice insists that he always finds her because she sends notes to her clients whenever she moves. Consequently, she "[is] not going to make any more dresses" so that "the next time [she] move[s], he won't find out where [she is]" (137).

In Beatrice's story, there is also a sense of unresolved trauma. The reader is left wondering if by changing her life narrative, Beatrice can escape from the unwarranted haunting of the guard. Aline is skeptical about the existence of the omnipresent torturer, but she explores the possibility of other individuals who experience similar suffering:

> Aline had never imagined that people like Beatrice existed, men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every blank space in their lives. Maybe there were hundreds, even thousands, of people like this, men and women chasing fragments of themselves long lost to others. […] These were the people Aline wanted to try to write about now. (137).

Through Aline, Danticat reinforces the idea that there are countless individuals who suffer silently. She suggests here that it is the job of authors like herself, who maintain a wide audience, to combat the silences of history through their documentation of the cases of Haitians dealing with shocking experiences of violence and loss. Steve Beauclair considers that this is perhaps "Danticat's way of

painting herself into the picture, of commenting on her particular mission as a writer to merge the factual and the fantastic in her narratives" (102).

The voicing of trauma as exemplified in "The Bridal Seamstress" is also portrayed as a coping mechanism in "The Funeral Singer." Freda, the narrator, explains that there are three types of death: "the one when our breath leaves our bodies to rejoin the air, the one when we are put back in the earth, and the one that will erase us completely and no one will remember us at all" (177). This corresponds with the process of recovering from a traumatic experience. The first stage is reminiscent of voicing the trauma; the second reflects taking action to begin the healing process, whereas the third is overcoming the memory. The three Haitian women in the story, Freda, Mariselle and Rézia, share a common history of violence and oppression which forced them to exile themselves from Haiti. Freda refused an invitation to sing at the national palace and was subsequently asked to leave by her mother. Her father was also tortured by macoutes after which he went out to sea and never returned. Mariselle's husband was shot because of an unflattering portrait he painted of the president, and Rézia was raped by a macoute. The three try to find solace in each other, as Freda confirms: "I thought exposing a few details of my life would inspire them to do the same and slowly we'd parcel out our sorrows, each walking out with fewer than we'd carried in" (170). By sharing their trauma with those who have lived through similar experiences, the women build a support system that can help them through their recovery.

The process of voicing trauma is also seen in Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat*. Urania Cabral returns to the Dominican Republic after thirty-five years of absence and is finally able to reveal the traumatic event that has haunted her since her departure. In a desperate attempt to regain favor from Trujillo after being disgraced, Agustín Cabral offers his fourteen-year-old virgin daughter as a peace offering. Urania, because of her innocence and naiveté, agrees to go to

a supposed party at the dictator's residence to assist her father with his political troubles. However, she realizes too late that her father deceived her: "It was from [the housekeeper] that I learned I was going to spend the night there, that I would sleep with His Excellency" (390). Although Agustín and Urania are fictitious characters, Vargas Llosa uses their relationship to depict a historically documented trend throughout the *trujillato* "that shows better than any other, the level of demoralization and servitude of the Dominican nation" (Weld-Basson 119). Crassweller expounds: "[Trujillo's] friends, and those who sought to advance in his favor by this means, were always proposing females for his many beds" (79). Vargas Llosa writes Urania in the image of those women who unwillingly became victims of Trujillo's insatiable sexual appetite.

Urania's violent sexual experience at the hands of the dictator left an irreparable mark on her psyche. Furthermore, her father was an accomplice in her trauma, which makes it even more difficult for her to overcome the memory of the experience. In this case, the author demonstrates how trauma disrupts familial bonds. After escaping Trujillo, Urania flees the country. She refuses to see or speak to her father and cuts off contact with the rest of her family, effectively isolating herself from all familial bonds. Judith Herman explains that "the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. … Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (qtd. in Quist 151). Thus, as a result of her self-imposed exile and isolation, Urania cannot begin the recovery process. Like the characters in Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Urania's past informs and influences the present. Because of the violent sexual encounter that she was subjected to as a child, she is unable to withstand the touch of a man: "No man has ever laid a hand on me again since that time. My only man was Trujillo. It's true. Whenever one gets close and looks at me as a woman, I feel sick. Horrified … I'm empty and still full of fear" (400). Her trauma therefore shapes the way in which

she can interact with those around her. Despite her successful career as a lawyer in the United States, she is unable to overcome the traumatic memory that haunts her: “I’ve been trembling for thirty-five years, ever since that moment” (398). It is only as she returns home that she can face the memory.

According to Herman, “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for healing of individual victims. [...] When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery” (qtd. in Quist 151). Once Urania begins to unload her disturbing experience on her aunt and cousins, she is unable to stop despite her aunt’s repeated requests. She states: “Forgive me for telling you these things. … But it’s been burning in me for so many years” (402). Urania is finally able to give voice to her personal truth. However, she questions the effectiveness of voicing her trauma: “Why did you do it? Are you going to feel different, free of all the incubi that have sucked out your soul?” (403). Nevertheless, there is no immediate answer to Urania’s question. As in the stories discussed from *The Dew Breaker*, there remains a sense of unresolved trauma in Urania’s case. Although she has taken the first steps to recovery by speaking her truth, she still recoils from the male attention she receives upon returning to the hotel. There is no indication of whether she will be able to recover from this effect of the trauma. Vargas Llosa leaves the reader with an ambiguous ending, but one with hope for the future. Urania decides to keep in contact with her family, giving the reader the impression that she may be able to overcome her traumatic memory through the strength and support of familial bonds.

CONCLUSION

Edwidge Danticat and Mario Vargas Llosa both explore the issues of violence, dictatorship and traumatic memory in their respective novels. Throughout this study, each author's approach to the representation of each were closely analyzed and compared.

History plays a major role in *The Dew Breaker* and *The Feast of the Goat*. Both novels depict momentous periods in Haitian and Dominican history. Danticat's short story cycle reflects the communal effects of the violent and cruel Duvalier dictatorship. The author invents fictional stories of trauma and exile; however, she refers to historical facts throughout the text. These references help to locate her fiction within the reality of history, allowing her to give voice to the voiceless and combat the silences of history that bury the stories of thousands of Haitian victims. In this sense, Danticat demonstrates how political violence and oppression are unavoidable elements of Haitian history that must be discussed. Through the different protagonists, Danticat exposes the harsh reality of a history that has intergenerational effects and respects no boundaries of class or gender. She makes herself a griot for the people, exposing the suffering of her own family in her nonfiction works to reinforce the fact that within her stories is a fictional truth that should be documented.

Whereas Danticat's stories are largely fictional and only refer to precise moments in Haitian history, Mario Vargas Llosa's novel can be categorized within the historical fiction genre. The author draws on historical documentation of the Trujillo regime to create a shocking representation of that period in Dominican history. The multiple narrative threads provide different ways of experiencing the dictatorship. Vargas Llosa treats history with great liberty in his novel, creating inner perspectives for major historical figures. His rigorous documentation of events and

reference to historians such as Robert D. Crassweller gives fictional truth to the anecdotes in the novel. It is important to note that through their representation of history, both authors depict the paralyzing and traumatizing effects of dictatorship on both the individual and collective levels.

Conversely, their representation of dictatorship is considerably different. In the case of *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat does not focus on the dictator figure. Rather, she exposes the effect of the violence and oppression synonymous with dictatorships on the individual and communal levels. The author utilizes a main figure of terror during the Duvalier era, the Tonton Macoute, to show the devastating effects his cruelty had on his victims. On the contrary, the dictator figure is central to Vargas Llosa's narrative. The author presents Trujillo as a figure whose power is inescapable, even after his death. Through his representation of the assassinators and Urania, one can gauge the effect the dictatorship had on these characters and their families. Nevertheless, there is not the same diverse representation that Danticat offers. All narrators in *The Feast of the Goat* are in some way connected to the regime. Danticat shows how the common individual, without any political connections, is left victimized by the cruelty rampant in a dictatorship.

Contrarily, both authors similarly approach the issue of trauma. In the case of *The Feast of the Goat*, Urania exemplifies all the females betrayed by their fathers and protectors, offered to be sexually abused by the 'Father of the Nation' for personal gain. Urania lives in isolation for more than three decades, and it is only the voicing of her trauma that sets her on the road to possible recovery. At the end of the novel, however, the reader is left unsure of whether Urania can attain closure. This is reflective of the stories in *The Dew Breaker*. The characters are left with a sense of unresolved trauma. Danticat gives only glimpses into the traumatic past of each character, making it difficult for the reader to fully access and empathize with the experience of the

characters. Through this narrative strategy, the author is able to show that many victims are still silently suffering from the trauma they experienced.

Indeed, Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* are two novels that should be considered when examining the political functions of writing as both authors use their novels to depict the harsh realities of a Caribbean dictatorship. Though their approach to representing history and dictatorship differs, as highlighted in the previous paragraphs, they each offer valuable perspectives which help the reader to better understand the politics of trauma engendered by political violence and despotism.

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