

Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration

Jennifer E. Henton
Hofstra University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

Recommended Citation

Henton, Jennifer E. "Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.2 (2010): [<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1601>](http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1601)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 12 Issue 2 (June 2010) Article 11**Jennifer E. Henton,****"Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/11>>

**Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 12.2 (2010)
Thematic Issue *New Modernities and the "Third World"*****Edited by Valerian DeSousa, Jennifer E. Henton, and Geetha Ramanathan**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol12/iss2/>>

Abstract: In her article "Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration" Jennifer E. Henton analyzes Edwidge Danticat's novel with Lacanian thought. It is assumed frequently that literatures of the non-West "arrive" when they move from political and didactic traditions to the "aesthetic" and experimental models that delve into the terrain of the psyche. In *The Dew Breaker*, the Haitian family's move to the U.S., executed self consciously, indicates loss in a different sense than lack. In the case of Danticat's novel, loss or lack represent not a source of anxiety that evokes matters read in a psychoanalytical framework; instead, Henton argues, in *The Dew Breaker* loss requires a reading in order to mediate the landscape of the loss. Danticat's text maps out the arrival of the Haitian family in the U.S. where Haiti figures as a symbolic, as well as real landscape and Henton explicates with tenets of psychoanalysis Danticat's narrative.

Jennifer E. HENTON

Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration

For Jacques Lacan, Sigmund Freud's stages of development play out as a syntactical discourse pivoting on lack. The individual's integration into the symbolic, that is, her/his arrival as a speaking subject and her/his relation to language determines the relative place she/he occupies as a functional member of "normal" social order. The symbolic represents the "final" stage of development, a barring from an imaginary limitlessness based on the "mOther" (or the ego's hallucinated limitlessness established in the mirror phase). In Lacan's terms, a presence, not necessarily a biological father or father figure, blocks the individual from this position and forces her/him into a position of lack. He/she acquires a desire to find a place within society and thus become a part of the endless chain of signifiers known as symbolic order, or language. Such an exposition of the way Western subjectivity works seems like a transparency (the clear plastic sheets we all used before Power Point) that can be set atop any individual subject. Thus psychoanalysis, as "an exemplary manifestation of literary modernism" (Ian 60), or as a field of expertise, seems to arrive first, and is then applied to the other. Psychoanalysis seems eminently capable of transplanting its framework onto others, especially with its command of terms that support the parameters of its own introspective "science." Left behind is that subject position embroiled in additional burdens of racial difference, colonial heritage, or subaltern identity.

Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, a "third world" (the designation is employed reluctantly) literary text, redirects the "high-culture" discourse that seems to require an indulgent modern subject: someone who suffers from alienation and has the luxury to inquire about it. With kings, queens, and princes setting much of the psychoanalytic stage (Oedipus, Hamlet, the Queen from "The Purloined Letter"), this novel is a gaze on other end, not on the ruler, but on the subject of rule. Set in an "Other" scene, here indicating the unconscious (Bergeron 61), Danticat's Haiti engenders the psychoanalytic subject differently because Haiti castrated the colonial father early on and this castration is immutable. Still, the "third world" subject already resides at the site of psychoanalytic inquiry. For it is the gaps or silences that demarcate the psychoanalytic cause — and therein speaks the Other. Carine M. Mardorossian suggests that the migration motif presents a more fitting discussions of an alienated "underdeveloped" subject (16). Rather than draping the subject in blackface, migration reflects the subject's ability to traverse the registers of imaginary and the symbolic (on the theory of migration and literature, see, e.g., McClennen). The subject of the oppressed intimates that the symbolic and must be initiated by loss, not lack. The difference hinges on lack as a deficiency as opposed to loss stemming from losing. Losing more closely approximates the colonized experience.

The Dew Breaker begins with "My father is gone" (3), working from a space of loss. The narrative moves Western psychoanalytical terrain by way of two major points, the secondary backdrop of the novel, Haiti, and Ka's subjectivity, which surfaces fully once she suffers her father's loss. Ka is the daughter of the unnamed prison guard, for whom the novel is named. The vignette-like chapters revolve around the story of the Haitian prison guard torturer, his family (Ka, daughter, and Anne, wife), and his victims. Each chapter takes up a different victim's struggle while three core chapters concern the Dew Breaker's family, specifically Ka's discovery of her father's past as a prison guard. The first chapter begins with Ka discovering her father's secret, a middle chapter narrates Anne's view before Ka finds out, and the final chapter takes up the Dew Breaker's shift from torturer to father as Ka breaks away from her parents. Ka, born in the U.S., must make a psychological move back to Haiti to occupy the position of the Western subject proper. The entire text testifies to the idea that loss, rather than lack, underscores the arrival of psychoanalysis to such a fluid subject position. While the novel opens the psychoanalytic question, Danticat describes her work as storytelling, not as social science or theory (Lyons 190). Likewise, for Luis Madureira, "whatever psychoanalytical tinge these [critiques of modernity] may disclose interests me far less than their historical and epistemological implications" (145). But Danticat's novel opens the discourse in irresistible ways. *The Dew Breaker* uses psychic space to make a return to Haiti. For Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "the geography of imagination inherent in [cultural domination] did not need the concreteness of *place*. Rather, it emphasized *space*" ("The Otherwise" 222). A closer look at Haiti produces an intricate and tangled scene that draws on the exacer-

bated colonial rule (François Duvalier) and cultural memory of Africa (Vodou). Both raise a curtain on what Trouillot notes as "the story that the North Atlantic tells about itself" ("The Otherwise" 222), or in this case, refuses to tell.

A study of Ka's subjectivity begins with how Haiti stages a loss that cements for Ka an all too firm imaginary. The novel takes place in contemporary Tampa, Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. All the characters reference an imaginary Haiti, except Ka. Ka has no access to Haiti's Other scene, its placeholder status for loss of the paternal order of the father: colonialism. Historic Haiti serves as that Other scene for Western discourse, a scene that provokes *jouissance* — Lacan's concept indicating insufferable pleasure. Marked by absence or silence, Haiti is often "forgotten" or cast as the result of a barbaric people, an untamable group too close to its African primitiveness for redemption or civilization. But what makes this scene different is its precise success in imbibing the barbarity of colonialism/slavery to incite a release from its bondage. Haiti's eradication of slavery contradicts the idea of Africa's barbarism because Haiti attained the "high"-minded ideal, the enlightened ideal, of liberty independent of white benevolence.

When not silenced, African descendants are stigmatized as Frantz Fanon articulates: "No one would dream of doubting that [the Negro's self-division]'s major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man" (17). Haiti then stands for the uncivilized, the rudimentary, the unrefined. The signals are many: the cultural/religious practice of Africans (Vodou in Haiti); the sexuality of black female bodies exemplified in the Venus Hottentot (Harris 235); or the physical presence of brown skin and various features. Haiti's African descended people presented resistance and obstacles to being used as resources for modern culture. Spectacle or not, they became something far too scandalous. What begins to show behind Danticat's U.S. Haitian community is the West's inability to recognize Haiti as self-emancipator, especially because Haiti's slave populace imbibed slavery's violence in order to achieve liberation. Haiti thus nonplusses because its self-accomplished modern aspirations outreach the high ideals claimed by the West. Henri Meschonnic, Gabriella Bedetti, and Alice Otis write of Western modernity that "In a society that goes backward toward its future while contemplating itself in the past, according to the same reason that makes its privilege the technoscientific venture and the short term of profitability plans rather than the long term of the projects of society, the modernity of the subject is perhaps what keeps collectivity from becoming the programming of the individual" (405). Haiti's place in the U.S. consciousness fits their thought. Such subjects reveal the West's duplicitous high ideals because those subjects reveal collective advancement as indicative of the West's high ideal of individuality. But Haiti, being the first country to overthrow slavery, and sixty years earlier than the U.S., goes further than just refuting domination. It undercuts the understood treatise of "good" white support (the work of Lincoln with the likes of John Brown and Harriet Beecher Stowe), economic factors (industrial North versus agricultural South), and politics (slavery as illogical to a freedom-loving nation). Danticat's novel moves Haiti's longstanding agency to center, counter to its supposed underdevelopment. Madureira explains that "Toussaint [L'Overture]'s 'failure' does not, in fact, mark the minor moment in a dialectic whose staging ground has shifted to the planet's 'hidden face' ... it points to the aporetic double time of 'underdevelopment'" (163). Madureira's insistence that "underdevelopment" be read as a behind-the-scenes marker of something unsaid indicates Haiti as a lost subject. For modernism's stage must include that hidden behind-the-scenes scene.

Many West Indies authors address such gaps where the West cannot bear to mention the subaltern subject's agency. George Lamming theorized this space in *The Pleasures of Exile* as dormant (35). Paule Marshall, in *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*, created Cuffee Ned, who, based on Toussaint L'Overture, was always omitted from history books. For that text and others, the omission of Caribbean resistance silences the need to remember their presence. Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* muses on Aldrick's silencing via jail sentencing. Jamaica Kincaid's memoir, *A Small Place*, ponders Antigua's ability to blind. All emphasize the symptom of omission surfacing from effective aversion from the other. The scene Haiti presents of the unconscious working behind the subject arises in the first chapter when Ka's father abandons her and destroys a statue she has carved of him. Ka planned to sell it to Gabrielle Fonteneau, a famous U.S. actress who returns often to Haiti. Fonteneau boasts of the wonderful feeling of "sinking your hand into the sand" (30). Key here is that she is an

actress, performing a privileged, "adjusted" subjectivity in the U.S. Hearing Fonteneau's privileged delight, Ka ponders her father's dream. Broken of her imaginary connection to her father—she believed him the victim of torture and now knows he is the victimizer — she imagines his dream that when he dips his hands into Haiti's sand, blood comes up (30). Significantly, her mind returns to her father's scene, and produces an "imaginary" dream of her father's. The imaginary marks the register wherein a child perceives its link to its parents as its own self. Children move out of this phase when the father/father figure bars the child from its mother. Ka's act of dreaming for her father suggests a simultaneous break and connection. Her act of dreaming for him echoes an imaginary, but also a dream (which marks the subject's entry into the symbolic). Within the symbolism of migration (the shore) and the savaged body (blood), Ka, knowing nothing of Haiti save what she could find out through newspapers and books, gleans too much information. Her father has just told her that he was a prison guard, not a prisoner. Thus her scene involves loss: her victim father is missing, her statue of him is missing, her heritage is missing. This complex traversal of dream, image, symbol, hallucination, all return Ka to Haiti.

Understanding the historic Haiti as backdrop to Danticat's text is crucial. The Haiti of Danticat's text is rarely more than a hint throughout the novel; characters are more likely to recall the militia, the dew breakers, or the private guard. Duvalier upheld the colonial standard of modern civilization or progress (Mintz 282) and layered African traditions atop a corrupt colonial autocracy, embodying both revolution and corruption and creating a complex scene that shapes Ka's father. Duvalier himself worked like a dream, sustaining contraries as Freud notes of dreams and jokes (*The Interpretation* 353; *Jokes* 8-9). We understand that Duvalier's role in Haiti informs the Dew Breaker's role in the colonialist version of the name-of-the-father; the name-of-the-father functions here as a delusion, not desire. Desire works on the personal level as the child seeks to wrestle free of parents and gain access to social pleasure. The delusion emerges from demand rather than the desire/fantasy. Demand, always answerable, remains fixed, but desire, the supposed trajectory leading to the symbolic, remains insatiable — it moves just when it is about to be attained. Missing fathers, their loss or remnant, actually echoes the colonial past, a period bent on destroying any semblance of familial life in order to harvest human capital for modernity's demand. Duvalier, imitating colonial rule, provided a too answerable, thus delusional, symbolic law. The symbiosis of the personal and public father breaks down in *The Dew Breaker* because of Duvalier's colonial/Haitian demands. Whereas the public and private father (or some restricting figure) usually work in unison to uphold the law, here, the public father largely cancels out the private father. The private father initiates the symbolic order by barring the child from the mother — the familial, roughly speaking. Here, the options are eradication or enjoyment of Duvalier. Duvalier insisted that the private father go missing or function as a metonymical substitute for himself, hence the Dew Breaker. Duvalier replicates this colonial move, but with a twist: Vodou.

Duvalier adapts rather than shuns a connection to an African heritage by way of his invocation of Vodou. He rules by conflating his power with Otherness in a way that subverts the private father's role in subject formation. One late scene in *The Dew Breaker* illuminates the traversal of imaginary and symbolic that marks Vodou's role in the Other scene. In a kind of late-stage entry into the symbolic of the speaking subject, the young Dew Breaker attends one of Duvalier's flag-day speeches and hallucinates that a flock of winged women, sibyls of various skin tones, from honey to jet-black (193), circles the palace. Having just lost his biological parents to Duvalier's corruption, the Dew Breaker's hallucination — flying women who prophesy in every skin tone — indicates the hyper-power that will make him a metonymical part of Duvalier's totalitarian reign. The magical and feminine expression recalls Vodou. Duvalier used hours-long speeches to wear down his audience to the point of hallucination, a ritual utilized in Vodou. He donned attire, sunglasses, a Derby, and powdered skin (192), to signal himself as the guardian of the cemetery. This moment in the novel brings up a deeper connection with Vodou. With Vodou imagery in tow, Duvalier overloaded the paternal (colonial) order, or the promise of controlled *jouissance*, the pleasure/pain that threatens to erupt, cannot be abated, and created an environment that drew on the imaginary and symbolic. *jouissance*, which must be contained or drained for purposes of social order (ensuring people will not live by pleasure/pain threshold and thus annihilation), became one instrument by which Duvalier installed himself in the paternal order. His

government hyper-extended his law by granting its executioners, Tonton Macoute, militia, and volunteer guards, the right to molest the noncompliant in unimaginable ways. With his Vodou dressed Tonton Macoutes and militia reaching out metonymically on his behalf, with instituting himself president for life, even rewriting the Lord's Prayer in terms of his leadership, Duvalier's rule substitutes a concrete *jouissance* for a foreclosed father, otherwise known as the private father. Vodou unveils the complex scene working over psychoanalytical terrain because of its rich complexities. In one sense, Vodou seems but a psychological and scientific performance as explored in Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*. Historically, it served as surrogate family for a disenfranchised slave populace (McCarthy Brown 47). In the U.S. imagination, Vodou often takes the fall for Haiti's reputation as puzzlingly poor and backward, if not perverse. Duvalier's public use of Vodou, drawing from all of its roots as science, performance, bond, and threat, creates a return to Haiti's ancestral past, intensified by the already conflicted relation between the *anciens libres* and *nouveaux libres* (Fischer 270), or the "mulattos" and blacks in Haiti. It is important to note that the elite class of Haiti, the classically-educated and usually European mixed ancestry Haitians, identified with the colonial standard to distance itself from Vodou. Duvalier legitimized Vodou and in the process transgressed "the colonizer's attempt to eliminate every culture as useless unless it emanated from the white West" (Christian 246). Vodou, Catholicism hollowed out by African spiritual worship, persisted in revolts against colonial domination and slavery beginning with L'Overture (Heuman 70). Duvalier continued this unconventional move when having the Lord's Prayer recast in terms of his presidency and having his portrait cast as the Son of God. More than just invoking Vodou, Duvalier's rule mirrors Vodou's translation of Catholic traditions into placeholders for African traditions. In doing so, his gesture moves between the imaginary and symbolic. For example, Duvalier outfitted his private military in Vodou garb, thus symbolizing his presence in remote rural regions of Haiti (Trouillot, *Haiti* 190). Additionally, the Volunteers for National Security, nicknamed Tonton Macoutes, drew on the Christmas tale told to frighten unruly children. The nickname "dew breakers," as Rhonda Cobham notes, "the silent, magical way in which the dew 'falls,' or 'breaks'" (3), indicates a kind of fantasy as well. They come before the morning to snatch away victims from their homes, reinforcing and breaching the dream/wake state. Before or as the dew forms in the morning, the Tonton disrupt the order of the day. They thus rupture dew, the formation of water due to heavy moisture in the air, and symbolically speaking, birth. The ambiguity follows and characterizes most of the victim's chapter-length accounts of their torture.

Duvalier installed himself as a satisfaction that supplanted and usurped the familial. Duvalier's nickname, Papa Doc, deepens the displaced personal father — for he is a "papa," the child's personal nickname for father, and he is a doctor, the official/technical figure who ushers life into the world. Responsible for "giving" children to the world in a public and scientific way, Duvalier serves as both public official and usurps the private father with his army that offers limitless (imaginary) power on behalf of his law. Duvalier works in both realms, making members of his nation-state children, supplanting private fathers with himself as the ultimate law, the ultimate father. Dew Breaker serves as metonymical extension of Duvalier and Danticat hides Dew Breaker's proper name in the face of his job, a job serving the bloated name Duvalier. Danticat withholds his name while simultaneously naming the text after his metonymic role, thus displacing mystery onto the father. The "protagonist" must therefore be perpetually referred to as the Dew Breaker or as Ka's father. He remains that "thing," meaningful only in the context of the demand he fulfills: enforcing Duvalier's lawful lawlessness, otherwise called *jouissance*.

According to the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, the personal father gives the name in order to solve the riddle of the mother (the riddle of procreation, which remains overt in men, but hidden in women). Importantly, the Dew Breaker's lack of proper name displaces a mystery that should reside in the space of the mother, but instead occupies the name-of-the-father. Indeed it is the mother who must be abated to push the child into the symbolic; it is the father who is named because of the anxiety about the mother's power of procreation. He relays the name, which, as Willy Apollon clarifies, is a design meant to solve the anxiety of the unknown called forth by the mother: How did she conceive? Whose child is it? What does she want? Hence fathers provide a logical syntax that answers or attempts to answer the question of the m(O)ther (52-54). The child, barred from the mother must look to social outlets for satisfaction — which feeds the individual into social networks. The Dew Breaker

chains all the victims as signifiers, articulating Duvalier's name. All the private fathers, including the Dew Breaker's father, and he himself in his own role as a father, remain remnants. It is their loss, like his missing name, that marks them: they are distant, resistant, insane, absent, dead, or imprisoned. Dany dreams/imagines that he found the guard who shot his father. Nadine silently builds a temple to her miscarried child and keeps tapes of the father's phone messages. Beatrice keeps moving to avoid her torturer while sewing bridal gowns for young girls. Michel voice-records the discovery of his own father. Freda, Mariselle, and Rezia describe their lost fathers, husbands, or over fathering — Freda's father is beaten by guards, Mariselle's husband is shot after painting an unflattering picture of the president, and Rezia is assaulted by a national guard in her home.

The Dew Breaker's own father provides a salient example. The Dew Breaker's father is "lost" when Duvalier's officers take peasant farming land for vacation homes. In light of Haiti as primarily agricultural (McCarthy Brown 43), the confiscation of their land for summer homes replicates a strategy of lawlessness implemented by Western colonies. Upon this return to colonial trauma, the Dew Breaker's father makes weekly trips into town, naked, and clutching a rock in each hand. His son, the Dew Breaker, upon becoming a part of Duvalier's force and excelling at cruel enforcement, eventually regains his father's "house" — an empty structure that housed his father and his father's father (notably not the land). The Dew Breaker's namelessness functions, then, as a physical return to the father's house, not the father's power. It becomes necessary, then, for the psychoanalytic terrain to redress the loss of the father. If the father in psychoanalysis answers the question presented by woman, curtailing the mystery of conception by naming, then "even when it is represented by a single person, the paternal function concentrates in itself both imaginary and real relations that always more or less fail to correspond to the symbolic relation that essentially constitutes it" (Lacan 230). But in the novel fathers articulate too fully the symbolic. Personal fathers are but a metonym for Duvalier, they are traces.

Significant among lost fathers is the preacher, who disappears at the very end of the novel. His "traceless" (242) death at the end of the novel gives Ka her own trace of a father. The preacher's trace has been present from the beginning of the novel by way of the Dew Breaker's scar. The preacher, also nameless, creates and becomes a remainder, a secret or mystery that the Dew Breaker must manage his entire life, an absence written on the face. Anne's stepbrother is this private father, this personal, civilian link to God. As such he becomes a metaphor for the symbolic, distinct from Duvalier's public claim to be God. The preacher's act to scar the Dew Breaker marks his disappearance from his sister's life, his flock, and the narrative while at the same time moving the Dew Breaker from metonym to metaphor. The preacher surprises the Dew Breaker out of his observer position, the mental space wherein the Dew Breaker regards with curiosity how far he can tease and torture prisoners. Unlike other officers who take assignments to exact revenge, this dew breaker takes assignments to torture people whom he does not know (187). He excels because of his ability to maintain cool cruelty, devising the most "physically and psychologically taxing trials for the prisoners" (197). When the preacher surprises the Dew Breaker by stabbing his face, the Dew Breaker's reaction to shoot and kill him becomes a moment of rupture. The Dew Breaker usually acts seamlessly on behalf of Duvalier, but here he is shocked into an emotional reaction, and he is disappointed in himself. He makes a mistake. He becomes fallible. The scar initiates the Dew Breaker as a victim, as a subject, as someone who can be hurt: "What did they do to you?" (237), asks his future wife Anne, who raises doubt in the Dew Breaker's impenetrable armor, shifting him from metonym to metaphor. Doubt, says Bruce Fink, drains the symbolic of literalness that marks the psychotic (84), thus staving off psychosis. In this context, the Dew Breaker becomes a normal neurotic in his subject relation to the symbolic. Instead of standing in for a larger whole, with limitless power, the Dew Breaker now has a wound that symbolizes his loss. His power drained, he is subject to domination and oppression. He returns to the metaphor, installed as a way to proportion the symbolic, control its access, and curtail *jouissance*. This moment moves the Dew Breaker and Anne to the mainland and into "normal" lives.

Most significantly, to discover the mysterious man's name, Ka believes, is to discover his true identity — to discover whether or not he is Constant. His name will tell whether or not he is the criminal: her "name is the thing" illustrates her inability to understand the discrepancy between the name and the thing, which, reading the novel with Lacan, suggests the psychological dimension of displace-

ment. For Ka, the bar separating word and thing is like an equal sign. She has far too literal an understanding of language. Although Anne announces decisively that this man is not Constant, the chapter, like the victims' account of their torture, does not settle the issue definitively. The chapter remains consistent with all of the victims' experience of doubt and this can be explained, again, with Lacan: doubt induces metaphor, an indirect relation to language, as opposed to the direct ratio of metonymy. It would seem obvious that Ka, in her distance from Haiti and the inaccessibility of that scene, should exhibit psychosis. A parallel example from the same chapter is the flyer on Constant posted throughout their neighborhood. The sign remains posted on telephone poles, symbolic of the communication that will be cut between Anne and her daughter. The sign falls prey to the sun's bleaching; Constant's named crimes fade, turning all of his crimes into a kind of wordplay or joke. "Rape," becomes "ape," a pun in poor taste perhaps, but one that might articulate the barbaric nature of the act. The disintegrated word trivializes the damage by "monkeying" around with meaning. Then the zeros at the end of the thousands of people harmed by Constant evaporate as well leaving little recognition of the many victims. Their multitudes become empty.

Ka's rage against the man she knows little about proves as hollow as the sign's fading information. As she points her finger, whispers, and comes very close to making a scene, the truly guilty man, the Dew Breaker, sits beside her in church. In reality, he has done the things that outrage her. Her behavior is backed by ignorance of her father's scene. Ka does not know how deeply indebted she is to this atrocious past. Likeable or not, Ka's life springs from the soil of past inhumanities. Her life attests to the sustenance of opposites. Ka's incessant sculpting of her father reflects this point. For Ka, the imaginary object is not lost to her, she has not been barred from it. The imaginary is in fact too firm for her. Ka's father, his mystery and secrets, prove most provocative for her as he repeats his often told story of Ka's name: Ka is his good angel. She represents her name's meaning and why they named her. Ka, then, is his savior. But children cannot save parents. Readers can theorize that in his eyes she might have regarded a sliver of desire for he holds her as his currency from his prison guard past. She becomes wedded to him in this way figuratively, following through with and fulfilling the demand that she redeem him. And he repeats this story, a story that she notes softens her anger and a story that she notes she falls for every time he uses it. Here, Freud's notion is relevant whereby just the suggestion of this father's desire is far too incestuous symbolically to continue. There is little doubt that Ka seeks to please her father's desire. For "his way of looking at things was why I ultimately began sculpting in the first place" (19). In her attempts to "awe" her father, Ka hopes to stop his looking at these mysterious, ritual filled objects of ancient society and instead be satiated by her, by her statue. She hoped to silence the demand put to her. For to awe someone is to make that person speechless with wonder, to overwhelm that person to satiate the senses or emotions, a *jouissance* to be sure. She mentions early that he is her "one" subject: "I'm not really 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). Artists are always driven by their subject matter. They capture it, enslave it, and drain it of its power repeatedly. In Ka's case, she remains incapable of transferring her drive — her desire — outside of the private realm. As such, she is not an artist, stylizing and recreating the agony of the lost "object a," which is the subject's own ego (Fink 38). She is too connected with her father to be restricted by him and still too close to him to approximate it via artistic expression. Her father might be her "one" subject, but she must be able to drain *jouissance* into different forms only to have it fill up in her again. Her single subject, her father, is her one object of fixation, but also one that she is not subject to. He has not barred her, forcing her out into the world.

Ka's many attempts at a statue of her father remain unfinished. The reader does not know what leads Ka to finish the statue that initiates the novel, but since it facilitates the beginning and end of the narrative, she encounters loss. The artist must continue to strike out against the impossible articulation of her/his *jouissance*. While those attempts often produce a finished product, the finished product is never satisfactory. She usually does not complete these attempts, so she has not fulfilled her father's demand and has not silenced him. The statues of her father are not symbolic; they work too much like a hieroglyph, not enough like language. Ka's father notices that Ka gestures towards only what is missing when they go to the museum: "But all you noticed was how there were pieces missing from them, eyes, noses, legs, sometimes even heads. You always noticed more what was not there

than what was" (19). Ka, in other words, is too connected to her father, for she sees castration rather than suffers castration. Ka lacks that other scene, the unconscious by way of Haiti, and along those lines, a traumatic break from her father. She has no claims on a subjectivity of her own because she has not experienced a break from her father. In part, she cannot become a "real" artist because she has no access to loss. Her carving directly reflects her frustration at not knowing her father: about her father's homeland, his family, his earlier life. She therefore holds an unbroken narrative of him, of his prison nightmares, his humility, his strength. The final statue brings on the very horror of completion, invoking the Freudian death drive (*Beyond* 46). As the title of the first chapter would suggest, "The Book of the Dead," she finishes the statue, her *jouissance* is met. She finishes it and her father, before she can sell it, takes the completed statue and throws it in a lake. He claims that "I don't deserve a statue ... not a whole one at least" (20). He acknowledges that she has seen him too fully. Ka mentions that her father has avoided her questions about his life in Haiti: "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 or, even after I learned Creole from them, have never taught me anything else about the country" (21). Thus, the father's loss is symptomized in another language, a hieroglyphic of sorts, namely the statues that Ka carves repeatedly. The novel's initiation, in fact, takes place because of her one completed statue and its unraveling of the father's secret. Unlike other characters, her loss of her father is not the result of physical torture. Yet, like the other characters, Ka articulates the disintegrating line between memory and fantasy of her father before any other character: "My father is gone" (3). The declaration announces him ("my father") and his loss ("is gone") nearly simultaneously but for the linear nature of syntax. He is "gone" before readers encounter him. In this first moment of the text he leaves early in the morning — before she wakes, like his many victims — to destroy her completed carving of him and then reveals that he is the hunter, not the hunted.

In the final chapter, Ka prohibits her mother from explaining herself, a mother who "might be there and not there at the same time" (Shea 382). Here Haiti returns to the story of the "Other scene" by way of a mother whose mystery has surfaced. Ka gains restricted access to the mother, ending a few pages after the final question remains put to Anne from Ka: "Manman, how do you love him" (24, 239). Ka hangs up the phone on her mother, unable to continue talking (or listening). Whereas the novel began with the loss of the father, here, Anne loses her daughter, "accidentally or purposely, in the hum of the dial tone," but "her daughter was already gone" (242). Ka does not hear Anne's explanation, which might possibly be only a thought — the narrative does not make clear that she actually explains "how" she loves the father. The answer, however, is provided in part in the first chapter and expanded in the final chapter. Anne finds that she cannot answer the question without an imaginary construct. Anne's confluence of dreams and reality would have made for a confusing answer: the Dew Breaker looked like Anne's drowned half brother, grown up and bloated from the sea; the Dew Breaker might have been her brother risen from the grave, enlarged by bones and souls; or he might have been one of many self-sacrificing martyrs who lick floors clean, blister their faces with peppers, and carry their heads after decapitation. Her answer, as illogical as it seems, is some mix of mysticism and Catholicism that makes possible the miracle that her husband has "crossed a sea" and managed patiently to raise a daughter without killing anyone else, ever (238). The events after the phone call remain placed in the first chapter as Ka and her father drive home from their statue selling trip to Florida. But it is the reoccurrence of the mother's mystery, "how can she love the father," that frees Ka from her position bound to her parents. The presence of the mother initiates a move from delusion about the father to dream of the father. Although there is no strict linear movement from point to point in the novel — for the first chapter is indeed the final chapter — the firmer appearance of the mother provides a shift from delusion to dreams, a movement from psychosis to neuroticism, a return to Haiti.

In conclusion, in Danticat's novel Haiti does not lack anything as it embraces loss willfully: "'Moun fèt pou mouri" ("People are born to die") (McCarthy Brown 43). Haiti's reputation as the first country in the Western hemisphere to overturn slavery and become an additional destination of migration for free Blacks in the 1820s makes it unique within the discourse of modernity (see Dixon). Often cast by its current condition as a victim of hurricanes, corruption, and poverty, Haiti is described as a small

agent never cut off from its source. It does not have an imaginary "motherland" as do so many Caribbean islands and thus it remains its own source of imagination. Thus Danticat notes Haiti is its own cultural reference point (Shea 383), for colonialism "ended so much earlier [here] than in other countries" (Lyons 197). Fanon wrote that the "colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle" (18) and thus rationality and modernity manufactured such pseudo-progressive standards for many. Yet Haiti counters that fabricated predicament without resistance because it has already been there. It is the waiting site of oppression to which Ka must return to experience lack. On the Black ego David Marriott writes, "the memory of a loss is its only possible communication" (427). In his discussion of the black subject, Marriott confirms the racial subject constellates a different trajectory from that projected by psychoanalysis proper. Here, Marriott's loss intervenes to show how "exclusively psychoanalytic or culturalist readings must be abandoned" (429). To me, his comment indicates the transformation of psychoanalysis from lack to loss, from the subject who must talk to cure to the one who must be silent to return to the inherent subaltern subject in language.

Works Cited

- Apollon, Willy. "The Jouissance of the Other and the Sexual Division in Psychoanalysis." *After Lacan: Clinical Practice and the Subject of the Unconscious*. Ed. Robert Hughes and Karen Ror Malone. New York: State U of New York P, 2002. 49-58.
- Bergeron, Danielle. "The Work of the Dream and the Jouissance in the Treatment of the Psychotic." *After Lacan: Clinical Practice and the Subject of the Unconscious*. Ed. Robert Hughes and Karen Ror Malone. New York: State U of New York P, 2002. 71-85.
- Christian, Barbara. "A Rough Terrain: The Case of Shaping an Anthology of Caribbean Women Writers." *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions*. Ed. David Palumbo-Liu. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995. 241-59.
- Cobham, Rhonda. "The Penance of Speech." *The Women's Review of Books* 21.8 (2004): 1-3.
- Danticat, Edwidge. *The Dew Breaker*. New York: Vintage, 2004.
- Dixon, Chris. *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century*. Westport: Greenwood P, 2000.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Lam Markmann. New York: Grove P, 1967.
- Fink, Bruce. *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 1899. Trans. Joyce Crick. New York: Avon, 1965.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. 1905. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1960.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. 1919. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Norton, 1961.
- Fischer, Sibylle. *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Harris, Trudier. "Greeting the New Century with a Different Kind of Magic: An Introduction to Emerging Women Writers." *Callaloo* 19.2 (1996): 232-38.
- Heuman, Gad. *The Caribbean*. New York: Hodder Arnold, 2006.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. New York: Harper, 1938.
- Kincaid, Jamaica. *A Small Place*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.
- Ian, Marcia. *Remembering the Phallic Mother: Psychoanalysis, Modernism, and the Fetish*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2006.
- Lamming, George. *The Pleasures of Exile*. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1960.
- Lovelace, Earl. *The Dragon Can't Dance*. New York: Persia Books, 1979.
- Lyons, Bonnie. "An Interview with Edwidge Danticat." *Contemporary Literature* 44.2 (2003): 183-98.
- Madureira, Luis. *Cannibal Modernities: Postcoloniality and the Avant-garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature*. Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 2005.
- Mardorossian, Carine M. "From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature." *Modern Language Studies* 32.2 (2002): 15-33.
- Marriott, David. "Bonding Over Phobia." *The Psychoanalysis of Race*. Ed. Christopher Lane. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. 417-30.
- Marshall, Paule. *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People*. New York: Vintage, 1979.

McCarthy Brown, Karen. "Afro-Caribbean Healing: A Haitian Case Study." *Healing Cultures: Art and Religion as Curative Practices in the Caribbean and Its Diaspora*. Ed. Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 43-68.

McClennen, Sophia A. *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2004.

Meschonnic, Henri, Gabriella Bedetti, and Alice Otis. "Modernity Modernity." *New Literary History* 23.2 (1992): 401-30.

Mintz, Sidney W. *Caribbean Transformations*. New York: Columbia UP, 1974.

Shea, Renee H. "The Dangerous Job of Edwidge Danticat: An Interview." *Callaloo* 19.2 (1996): 382-89.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Haiti State Against Nation: Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*. New York: Monthly Review P, 1990.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot." *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies*. Ed. Bruce M. Knauff. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002. 220-37.

Author's profile: Jennifer E. Henton teaches English literature at Hofstra University. Her interests in research include African and African American literature, Caribbean literature, women's studies, film, literary theory, and psychoanalysis. Henton's recent publications include "Sula's Joke on Psychoanalysis," *African American Review* (2010) and "Close Encounters between Traditional and Non-traditional Science Fiction: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Gayl Jones' *Corregidora Sing the Time Traveling Blues*," *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New Wave Trajectory* (Ed. Marleen S. Barr, 2008). She is currently working on a manuscript about Black literature and Lacanian psychoanalysis. E-mail: <jennifer.henton@hofstra.edu>