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Trauma of a Perpetrator: Reimagining Perpetrators in Edwidge Danticat's

*The Dew Breaker*

Marinda Quist

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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## ABSTRACT

Trauma of a Perpetrator: Reimagining Perpetrators in Edwidge Danticat's  
*The Dew Breaker*

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This article studies the possibility of perpetrator trauma in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*. The article gives a brief historical background of the political violence in Haiti that occurred under the Duvalier dictatorship and focuses specifically on the role of Tonton Macoutes, the violent enforcers of much of Duvalier's oppression. Drawing on trauma theory, the article argues that perpetrators have been very little studied within trauma studies because of the possible moral implications of giving research time to individuals who have often chosen their own path of violence. Along with theorists such as Kali Tal and Dominick LaCapra, this article investigates the difficult position of perpetrators who are also victims or those who have been traumatized in the act of violence. The paper finally argues that perpetrators may benefit from the opportunity to work through their trauma in the same way that victims work through trauma as a means of healing. In making this argument, this article shows the need for trauma theorists to study perpetrators in addition to current studies on victims and also shows an in depth study of the main character and primary perpetrator in *The Dew Breaker*.

Keywords: trauma, Caribbean literature, perpetrator, *The Dew Breaker*, Edwidge Danticat

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## Trauma of a Perpetrator:

Reimagining Perpetrators in Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*

With the awareness of worldwide atrocities and traumatic events, the painful after-effects of trauma have been increasingly studied within the field of trauma studies. The interest in trauma has also led to the popularity of the genre of trauma literature, through which the stories of trauma victims are told. Trauma victims must live with the difficult memories and emotional and psychological scars left by traumatic events. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (3) and argues that “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later” (4). Although it is difficult to overcome trauma and the traumatic repetitions of the experience—what Caruth calls “haunting” and Dominick LaCapra calls “acting out”—victims of trauma can work toward a process of healing by “working through” their trauma. LaCapra explains the process of working through trauma, which involves overcoming some of the negative repercussions associated with trauma: “Working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma . . . one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one . . . back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future” (*Writing* 21-22). Thus, victims can heal and avoid being caught in the past by working through. LaCapra refers specifically to victims in this passage, but the process of working through, I argue, is important for many perpetrators as well.

While most theorists do not discuss perpetrators of trauma directly, most of the work on trauma implicitly touches on perpetrators through the discussions of victims who are inevitably connected to the perpetrators of their trauma. Trauma theorists may be resistant to giving space

to a study of perpetrators because of the ethical implications of studying people who have willingly chosen to commit violence against others. Such people seemingly warrant little sympathy, even when they are themselves traumatized, because of their own choices to hurt other people. It may seem unethical to study them alongside their victims because of their complicity in the trauma. Claude Lanzmann, the director of a famous French documentary about the Holocaust called *Shoah*, reacts antagonistically when an audience member asks during an interview whether Lanzmann is interested in studying perpetrators. Lanzmann directly and firmly explains that his interest in perpetrators is limited to discovering the facts of what they did, but does not extend beyond that. Lanzmann says, “You imagine a conversation between an SS of Treblinka, for instance, and me about their life, about how did they come to this point, how did they arrive there. This has been attempted already. They talk very much about their parents, about their childhood, about their schooltime. And there is a gap, and they know perfectly well that they cannot bridge it” (212). For Lanzmann, it is useless to learn about the past of a perpetrator because what is important is the revelation of their crimes. The “gap” that Lanzmann speaks of indicates the moment when a person chooses to commit violence instead of any other option available to them at that time. While other theorists have not stated their opinion on studying perpetrators as firmly, many would likely agree that perpetrators have forfeited the right of consideration by their actions, and so theorists focus their efforts on studying victims.

Some theorists, however, have written about perpetrators and the possibility of victimization and trauma. Kali Tal, for instance, while focusing her efforts on victims also studies victims who are also “victimizers”; namely, soldiers, and in particular for Tal’s study, soldiers of Vietnam. Tal writes, “Those exposed to combat or other life-threatening events, and those exposed to the carnage resulting from combat were traumatized. . . . The soldier in combat

is both victim and victimizer; dealing death as well as risking it” (9-10). Like Tal, LaCapra similarly studies perpetrators in his extensive works on trauma. Although Tal has discussed the problems associated with the soldier’s trauma, LaCapra’s work on perpetrators will be most applicable to my study because he focuses on a variety of elements surrounding perpetrators, including perpetrators who are not necessarily victimized, even though they may suffer from what LaCapra calls “perpetrator trauma” (*Writing* 79, 120). Even with the current work of these theorists on perpetrators, the study of trauma is incomplete without a greater study into the possible trauma of perpetrators, who have inevitably participated in much of the trauma created around the world.

Trauma literatures often seek both to offer a venue for victims to work through their trauma by witnessing to crimes committed against them and also to create empathy in a reader of the literature. In writing of trauma literature, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith explain that “stories offer readers new ways of gaining knowledge about peoples around the globe, calling into existence new cultural forms, new modes of circulation, and new forms of civic engagement” (“Conjunctions” 14). Literatures of trauma, then, may do important work in fostering awareness of and sympathy for different experiences of individuals around the globe. Tal also affirms this notion when she explains, “Literature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it ‘real’ both to the victim and to the community. Such writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author” (21). In creating a cathartic experience for a victim, and offering an opportunity for readers to develop sympathy, it will be important here to differentiate the terms sympathy and empathy. My use of the terms sympathy and empathy grow out of current understandings of how readers and listeners relate to victims of traumas. While not specifically defining her terms, Tal explains that an



expectation of trauma literature is that readers will come to identify with, or empathize with, victims of trauma: by sharing their stories, victims “believe . . . that if they can only *make us see* what they have seen, we too will be changed: We too will see *as they see*” (131). Dori Laub similarly sees identification between a listener and a victim as an expected element in the relationship: “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels” (57-58). LaCapra writes most explicitly about the terms he uses, and strictly disagrees with ideas like Laub’s that advocate identification. LaCapra explains that the ideal relationship between a listener and a victim arises out of empathic unsettlement, which he describes as putting “oneself in the victim’s position while respecting the difference between self and other and recognizing that one cannot take the victim’s place or speak in the victim’s voice” (“Trauma Studies” 125). In contrast to Laub, LaCapra advocates this form of relating because he sees empathy as a problematic emotion that risks overidentification with a person whose experiences the listener cannot truly understand. Following LaCapra’s lead, I will use the term sympathy to refer to a sense of pity or compassion that one may feel when listening to the trauma of others, an emotion that may lead to a desire to offer understanding or kindness to a person, but avoids the problems of identification. Because I agree that identification should be avoided, I will in some cases use the term empathy to refer to this type of problematic over-identification between characters in the novel or between the reader and the characters.

In discussing the possibility of perpetrator trauma and reader sympathy, I will focus on *The Dew Breaker*, by Edwidge Danticat, which is a fictional account of trauma about Haitians

that offers a thought-provoking narrative about a perpetrator who committed many atrocities and then immigrated to the United States and began living a peaceful life. The protagonist, a former torturer in Haiti's corrupt Duvalier regime, is characterized in unusually sympathetic terms. The book's representation of the Dew Breaker offers readers an understanding of the Dew Breaker's difficult life circumstances without excusing him from his crimes against humanity. This characterization of a perpetrator creates space for a discussion of the role and expectations of trauma literature since such genres typically present stories that evoke feelings of sympathy for the victims of trauma but not for the perpetrators. As the perpetrator and the main character of the book, the Dew Breaker is first presented to readers as a quiet, peaceful barber and a good father, but is later revealed as a former brutal torturer. This conflicting representation not only creates a sense of confusion and resistance in the reader, who does not expect to feel anything but animosity for a perpetrator, but also challenges the currently established strict construct of victims and perpetrators by trauma theorists. Although some would see it as an ethical problem to study perpetrators, I would argue that we can further investigate the position of perpetrators who have also experienced trauma or have been victims within a corrupt system. To this end, I will argue that *The Dew Breaker* refuses to accept simplistic delineations of perpetrators and victims by depicting the Dew Breaker as both a perpetrator and a kind, loving father. In doing so, the book invites readers to reconsider how they respond to victims and perpetrators of any kind, and also gives insight into the way in which literatures of trauma can and do influence readers. *The Dew Breaker*, I propose, shows that individuals who have committed crimes against humanity are traumatized by the violence they commit and witness and need to be allowed to work through their trauma without being excused from their accountability for their actions.

To argue that perpetrators need to work through their trauma, I will first discuss the historical context of *The Dew Breaker*'s moment of representation to show how the Dew Breaker's crimes would have fit into the broader political violence that took place at the time. Next, I will discuss how *The Dew Breaker* sets up a problematic portrayal of the perpetrator and how the book compels both characters and readers to imagine how they may consider new possibilities of responding to perpetrators as proposed by the novel. I will then discuss current theoretical perspectives on perpetrators, especially with regards to the relationships between perpetrators and victims and the possible reader expectation of and responses to trauma literature.

Danticat's fictional account converges with history as she weaves a story of fear, violence, and perpetual haunting related to the horrific period of violence and suffering of the Duvalier regime. *The Dew Breaker* spans the time between the 1960s and the present day, during which period François, or "Papa Doc," Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude, "Baby Doc," Duvalier ruthlessly ruled the people of Haiti as "presidents-for-life" (Coupeau 94). Laurent Dubois writes of Duvalier, "A careful student of his country's history and politics, Duvalier offered a brutally successful response to the decades of political crisis that had followed the U.S. occupation, tapping into a long tradition of authoritarian rule in Haiti and carrying it to new heights of cynicism and effectiveness" (313). In short, Duvalier created an oppressive state of senseless violence that eliminated political opponents and forced the people of Haiti to follow Duvalier out of fear.<sup>1</sup> The political killings and reprisals were so arbitrary that people often had no idea what a person had done who had disappeared or been killed.<sup>2</sup> Duvalier sought to indoctrinate the

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<sup>1</sup> Dubois writes that the fear of violent reprisals led people to align themselves closely to the government: "The violence infused everyday interactions with terror and uncertainty. To protect themselves from being harmed by the state, people sought to tie themselves to it in whatever way they could" (329-30).

<sup>2</sup> Steeve Coupeau also discusses the terror created by Duvalier's oppressive government in which the Duvaliers "claimed more than 40,000 lives" (95): "Throughout the Duvalier era, the prefects instilled terror, making the emergence of grassroots organizations virtually impossible. They engaged in physical elimination of action or

country that he was the personification of Haiti, the only rightful leader of the country. He backed this up with the force of political violence and killings. Dubois writes, “The message was clear: Duvalier was the one true representative of the Haitian nation, the authentic descendent of the country’s revolutionary founders. The era of resistance was past; the present was for obedience, and the only revolution was the one led by Duvalier himself” (348). Steeve Coupeau writes that the Duvaliers “claimed more than 40,000 lives” (95) in the course of their ruthless dictatorship.<sup>3</sup> Understanding this widespread fear and oppression gives a sense of the fear felt by the characters in *The Dew Breaker* that the Dew Breaker participated in creating. Maria Bellamy writes of the Dew Breaker’s relationship to Duvalier, “Probing her father’s history, Ka would discover that distinctions between hunter and prey break down quickly in Haiti under Duvalier and that a desperate, dispossessed boy drawn to become a predator could find his position reversed without warning at the whim of Duvalier, the only true hunter” (191). Here, Bellamy makes an important distinction that, while not excusing the individual crimes of the Dew Breaker, shows that the source of all the violence in Haiti was Duvalier who acted as the mastermind behind all the groups in Haiti.

One of these groups that enacted Duvalier’s violence was his special police force, the Tonton Macoutes, of which the Dew Breaker was a member.<sup>4</sup> Dubois estimates that “By the early 1980s, perhaps as many as three hundred thousand individuals were incorporated into the Tontons Makouts [sic] hierarchy” (358). This militia group was officially called the National

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suspected opponents, summary arrests and incarcerations without trials, abduction, secret torture, and selective and random murders” (99).

<sup>3</sup> Dubois places estimates of deaths that occurred at the hands of François Duvalier ranging “from twenty thousand to as high as sixty thousand killed over the course of three decades” (326) For a further discussion of Duvalier’s rise to power and the violent oppression he used to create his dictatorship, see also Heinl and Heinl’s *Written in Blood* p. 542-45.

<sup>4</sup> Coupeau calls the Tonton Macoutes “the main instrument of repression under Duvalier” (95).

Security Volunteers and they acted as a personal security force to Duvalier,<sup>5</sup> undertaking much of the political violence and suppression during the reigns of both François and Jean-Claude Duvalier (Dubois 328-29). Danticat writes of these militiamen, “The legend of the Tonton Macoutes, bogeymen who come to take disobedient children away in a knapsack, comes to life in the form of denim-clad killers, henchmen and henchwomen who would assassinate their own mothers and fathers if so ordered by the dictator” (*Create Dangerously* 63). Danticat also explains in an interview that the name “the dew breaker” is her “English translation of a Creole expression ‘choukèt laroze,’ which during the twenty-nine year period (1957-1986) that Haiti was ruled by the father and son dictators . . . referred to a rural chief, a brutal regional leader and sometimes torturer” (Interview). The Tonton Macoutes enacted violence ordered by Duvalier, but also committed many crimes of their own volition in order to terrorize and intimidate people. Dubois similarly writes of the folktale origins of the group’s name and explains, “it captures the way in which the militia lurked somewhere between reality and nightmarish imagination” (312). This explanation emphasizes the complete fear that the Tonton Macoutes inspired in Haitians. As a member of this group, the Dew Breaker became very power-hungry and cruel. We read of the Dew Breaker, “He hadn’t been a famous ‘dew breaker,’ or torturer, anyway, just one of hundreds who had done their jobs so well that their victims were never able to speak of them again” (*Dew Breaker* 77). These torturers were powerful agents of violence and terror in this time period, and any attempt on my part to explain how the Dew Breaker is a traumatized character in no way excuses either the fictional character or any other perpetrator of crimes committed against others. In analyzing the role of the primary perpetrator in the novel, I seek to find a middle ground that

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<sup>5</sup> Heinl and Heinl compare the Tonton Macoutes to the Nazi party SS and SA officers, who enforced the Nazi ideologies and formed an elite group of officers who carried out Hitler’s orders (549).

does not excuse the perpetrator's crimes, but does show the power and importance of Danticat's sympathetic portrayal of a perpetrator.

Danticat makes a deliberate aesthetic choice to create sympathy for the Dew Breaker through the structure of the progression of the stories about the Dew Breaker. By introducing the Dew Breaker as an old, peaceful man and a good father in the opening story of the book, the reader will likely identify the Dew Breaker as the protagonist and feel some level of sympathy for him even as the novel unfolds and the true identity of the Dew Breaker is revealed. The subsequent stories give hints at the Dew Breaker's actions and the effects of his actions on various characters. Though the perpetrator is depicted as a horrible person and the trauma suffered by the various characters is immense, it is not always certain that the perpetrator is, in fact, the Dew Breaker. For example, in "The Bridal Seamstress," Beatrice relates the horrific experience of being arrested because she wouldn't go dancing with "the prison guard." She tells Aline, "He tied me to some type of rack in the prison and whipped the bottom of my feet until they bled. Then he made me walk home, barefoot. On tar roads. In the hot sun. At high noon. This man, wherever I rent or buy a house in this city, I find him, living on my street" (132). Beatrice was not only physically wounded, but suffers psychological trauma that haunts her, as Caruth describes the aftereffects of trauma. The description of the wanton violence of the prison guard is sickening, but Beatrice never gives any of the visual markers used to identify the Dew Breaker, such as his widow's peak. Though the prison guard is almost certainly the Dew Breaker, who is the perpetrator focused on for many of the crimes in the novel, the story leaves the identity ambiguous and leaves the reader questioning the true identity of the prison guard. This type of ambiguity delays the full realization of all the Dew Breaker's crimes until the final story of the book. It is only in the final story of the novel that the full description of the Dew Breaker's

actions is revealed, when before they have been softened in description or left ambiguously attributed to him. This progression may create the possibility of a reader responding sympathetically to the Dew Breaker because of how the reader begins the book with a sympathetic response. By moving from an ideal situation of a perpetrator who seems to have fully reformed to the cynicism of how many people were wounded by the Dew Breaker's sadistic actions, the book creates a conflicting sense of sympathy and abhorrence that prevents readers from reaching easy conclusions about the Dew Breaker. Rather than simply relying on prescribed notions of a perpetrator, this situation in the book requires readers to thoughtfully question their own reactions to and beliefs about the Dew Breaker as a perpetrator, which is a positive investigation into personal stereotypes and opinions about how to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes. Whatever conclusion readers ultimately arrive at about the Dew Breaker's character, the story involves readers in a process of scrutiny that may lead them to recognize the possibility that the Dew Breaker and other perpetrators like him may suffer from trauma that they need to work through.

In creating this sense of sympathy for the Dew Breaker, the novel uses Ka's (the Dew Breaker's daughter) representation of her own father to construct the audience's initial understanding of his character because her father's elusive character and past have forced Ka to imagine her father's past. Even though the Dew Breaker's elusive history and strange behaviors may provoke suspicion, Ka's trust in the Dew Breaker as her loving and kind father, as well as her surprise and worry at his unexpected disappearance, dissipates any suspicion in his actions and creates a sense of familial confidence in the Dew Breaker that fosters trust in the reader. To further construct the audience's understanding of who the Dew Breaker is, the story shows how Ka herself sought to construct her father based on the few elements of his past that she does

know. Ka focuses on the characteristics of her father that she witnesses and she idolizes her father for the suffering she believes he endured while a prisoner in Haiti, explaining that she repeatedly sculpted her father in an attempt to portray his suffering and his elusive character as a “quiet, distant man” (13): “I’m more of an obsessive wood-carver with a single subject thus far—my father” (4). She obsessively seeks to define the character of an important person in her life whose past she has little access to. Of her completed sculpture of him she describes that “it was the way I had imagined him in prison” (6). These elements emphasize how little Ka actually knows about her own father. He is “quiet” and “distant” and she must “imagine” him in a part of his life that she knows nothing about beyond his scar and the nightmares she knows he has (4). Ka’s “obsessive” carving of him suggests a desire to understand her father’s suffering. Even though she knows he has hidden his past from her, the love and trust she places in him indicate that he has been a loving father. In addition, a description of the sculpture from an outside perspective adds credence to Ka’s own imagination of her father. Gabrielle Fonteneau, the actress and client that had planned to buy Ka’s sculpture, describes the sculpture as “regal and humble at the same time” (11). Since the sculpture and Ka’s account of her father are the first glimpse the audience has of the Dew Breaker, the audience accepts the characteristics that Ka and Gabrielle endow him with and perceive him as a protagonist in the book. Descriptive words like “quiet,” “regal,” and “humble” emphasize his positive character traits that are captured in the sculpture as Ka has crafted it. Because of his elusiveness, Ka specifically describes minor, every day details about her father that give a sense of familiarity to him. For instance she describes his “velvet-brown eyes” (4) and how she “heard him humming loudly, as he always did, in the shower” (6). Such details humanize the Dew Breaker, showing him as a person who has a family, works at a job, and would never commit crimes against humanity. This early depiction of the



Dew Breaker based on Ka's own imagination of him predisposes readers to feel sympathy for the Dew Breaker even as his past is revealed, especially since the readers' imagination of who the Dew Breaker is as a changed man becomes a referent for reflecting on him in later stories in the book.

Since the reader's conception of the Dew Breaker has been constructed by Ka's own interpretation of who her father is, the audience feels the same sense of loss and betrayal that Ka feels in having her expectations of her father crumble. Ka sums up her feelings when she reflects, "I have lost my subject, the prisoner father I loved as well as pitied" (31). This statement reflects how her previous imagination of her father manifested itself in her artistic representation of him, though her sympathy for him and the audience's sympathy for him exist outside the sculpture itself. The comparison to her work as an artist reveals how deeply she feels the weight of her father's confession. Her artistic representation reflects her deep love, admiration, and pity for her father that has been created by her beliefs about his past. This representation comes from within Ka, meaning that in a sense her imagination of her father is really an extension of herself or a manifestation of Ka's own inner world and manner of seeing the world. Therefore, the revelation of his crimes does not only damage Ka's understanding of her father and her ability to imagine his past, but it also damages her sense of self because her imagination of her father is as much a representation of her inner world as it is a representation of who she thinks he is. Throughout the rest of the story, Ka reimagines events from her childhood in a way that reflects her new knowledge. For instance, we read, "I imagine my father's nightmares. Maybe he dreams of dipping his hands in the sand on a beach in his own country and finding that what he comes up with is a fistful of blood" (30). The reimagining of her memories is an example of how Ka must reconstruct both her father's identity as she had understood it and her own identity that was

based on her childhood experiences. Ka is no longer the daughter of a victim; rather, she is the daughter of a perpetrator. She feels a sense of betrayal in finding out her imagination of her father's identity and past was wrong. By telling this story in Ka's first person point of view, and especially from her constructed perspective based on what she wanted to believe of her father, the readers similarly have their expectations of the Dew Breaker's character crushed and they too must reimagine how to feel toward a character for whom they once may have felt trust and pity. By creating this sense of betrayal in the reader, *The Dew Breaker* asks readers to consider along with Ka how they will respond to the Dew Breaker as a perpetrator and offers perpetrators up to readers as figures worth more thorough and thoughtful consideration when prescribing how justice might best hold them accountable for their crimes and serve the community and when considering how studies of trauma may ethically consider perpetrators alongside victims.

This readerly sense of conflict increases as the question arises of how the Dew Breaker could be a good father in one part of his life and yet be a cruel torturer and murderer in another. The audience must reconcile their knowledge of his past with how he has changed in his later years. Though Ka never becomes fully aware of her father's cruelty, later stories in the book reveal to the reader how deeply evil he was while working as a Tonton Macoute and provide details that would seem to displace any feelings of trust and compassion the audience initially may have felt for the Dew Breaker as Ka's father. In addition to "The Bridal Seamstress," the Dew Breaker's violence is also described by Anne in "The Book of Miracles," Dany in "Night Talkers," and the three women in "The Funeral Singer." The final story of the book, "The Dew Breaker," describes the Dew Breaker's ruthlessness: "The way he acted at the inquisitions in his own private cell eventually earned him a lofty reputation among his fellow torturers. He was the one who came up with the most physically and psychologically taxing trials for the prisoners in

his block” (198). In addition to gaining a reputation among his peers, he left unforgettable wounds on his victims. This description makes it impossible for readers to silently excuse the Dew Breaker for his past crimes as Ka does because the reader witnesses the Dew Breaker’s horrible actions through stories and perspectives in the book to which Ka does not have access. By contrasting the Dew Breaker’s sinister brutality with his character as an older man living in New York, the story creates a portrayal that may be difficult for readers to accept as they, unlike Ka, see the Dew Breaker simultaneously in both roles of torturer and father.

Rather than forcing the reader to choose between accepting either one portrayal of the Dew Breaker or the other—a good father or a brutal torturer—the book makes it impossible to easily judge the Dew Breaker by showing the duality of his character. The book increases the audience’s discomfort by challenging traditional portrayals of a perpetrator as it shows that the Dew Breaker is neither all bad even at his very worst, nor all good even at his very best. In this way, the book avoids the tendency of reducing the Dew Breaker to a caricature of a perpetrator and instead portrays the Dew Breaker as a multi-faceted person. In contrast, Collins points out, “While Danticat may be showing us that anyone, in the right conditions, may be capable of inflicting and becoming oblivious to another’s sufferings, she does not offer up the Dew Breaker character for full understanding” (12). I would argue, however, that showing that anyone could go down the same path as the Dew Breaker does indeed give greater understanding of the Dew Breaker. We see that there is both good and bad in the Dew Breaker like most individuals, but this portrayal opposes the typical understanding of a perpetrator since a reader may expect a perpetrator to be depicted as a simply evil character. When we simplify the designation of a perpetrator as a completely bad and static person, it is much easier to condemn him or her. Reminding readers of the duality of all people, including criminals, creates the uncomfortable

position of giving greater consideration to individuals that readers would likely rather condemn without question and it leads to more a more thoughtful enactment of justice. Armendariz points out that literature about trauma has “traditionally tended to draw a clear line between victims, perpetrators, and witnesses, thus conveying the idea that while the first group is in need of mourning, re-membering, reconnecting and building some sort of commonality . . . , the second should be approached from the perspective of their accountability and responsibility for the crimes” (45-46). While victims are typically seen with compassion, perpetrators are seen only in terms of their accountability for their crimes. This expectation may often manifest itself in the expectation for perpetrators to be seen as one-sided, evil characters. However, *The Dew Breaker* reminds readers that some perpetrators may also be victims and they may be multi-faceted individuals.

*The Dew Breaker* shows that a flat representation of a perpetrator is not necessarily accurate. For example, even when the book describes the Dew Breaker as a kind and loving father, we read that before his confession to Ka, he grabs her wrist, in a move that foreshadows the revelation of his violent past: Ka describes, “I tend to wave my hands about wildly when I laugh, but I don’t notice I’m doing that now until he reaches over to grab them. . . . He ends up grabbing my right wrist. . . . My father holds on to it so tightly now that I feel his fingers crushing the bone, almost splitting it apart” (20). Ka calls this a “sudden, uncharacteristic flash of anger from [her] father” (20). Though this action is uncharacteristic, her father’s strength and ability to inflict such acute pain—to the point that Ka feels that her wrist could break—shows he cannot erase his past actions even if he has become a different person. Bellamy writes of this situation, “The hands of Ka’s loving father are also the hands of the Tonton Macoute of an earlier era. Her understanding of her father’s true duality will enable her to read the text of his

body, his hands, and the fragmented signs of her upbringing and construct a meaningful, multi-faceted representation of her father that renders his full complexity” (185-86). The Dew Breaker’s hands as a father are the same hands that tortured and killed many people in his former life. He seems aware of this when we read, “He looks down at his own fingers, then lowers his hand to his lap” (20). Though some, like Marion Rohrleitner, might argue that it is unjust for a torturer to have the ability to move on with his life after committing so many crimes,<sup>6</sup> this moment shows that the Dew Breaker may be able to work through some of his past actions and become an entirely different person, but he too lives with the burden of the past. Showing that the Dew Breaker feels remorse and is burdened by his actions gives the reader a sense of compassion for someone who clearly has changed. However, confessing to his daughter and working toward the future indicate that he has begun working through his past actions. The Dew Breaker’s ability to reflect on his past actions with regret shows that he has changed and turned away from his past crimes, which allows the readers in this moment to imagine him as a person who continues to suffer under guilt, a sense of responsibility that his former self would not have felt. By revealing his past crimes slowly throughout the novel, *The Dew Breaker* reminds reader that under moral codes of justice the Dew Breaker must be punished for his crimes. However, his confession and burden of his guilt also indicates that he has trauma that may be necessary to work through.

The Dew Breaker’s multi-faceted character is similarly evident in the kindness he seems capable of as a Tonton Macoute, but showing the type of concern he exhibits for a young boy challenges the audience’s ability to feel animosity toward the Dew Breaker solely as a torturer. The concern he feels for the boy in the following situation recreates the feelings of compassion

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<sup>6</sup> Rohrleitner writes, “The novel thus critiques all-pervasive systems of bureaucracy, which allow individuals to detach themselves from individual responsibility . . . and addresses the dangers inherent in allowing a dew breaker, but not his victims, to remake himself in exile” (75).

readers felt for the Dew Breaker as Ka's father. As the Dew Breaker waits in his car for the preacher to arrive at the church so that he can arrest the preacher, the Dew Breaker asks a boy to buy him cigarettes and then gives some extra money to the boy "in honor of a past he couldn't deny" (191), which refers to the poverty of his family as a child. In the course of his talking with the boy, we read, "There was a part of him that wished he could buy that child a future, buy all children like that a future" (194). In thinking this, the Dew Breaker shows himself to have a sense of charity for poor children whose circumstances mirrored his own childhood experiences. Even after the boy leaves, he continues to think about the boy's future and what difficulties he may be experiencing. This concern for a small boy is juxtaposed in the following pages with the violence he commits against the preacher, again creating a conflicted understanding of the Dew Breaker as a character who is capable of at once being kind and cruel.

Additionally, the last story in the book describes how the Dew Breaker became a Tonton Macoute, which is another situation filled with traumatic loss that offers a sense of understanding or pity for his situation because it allows the reader to see that extreme circumstances in Haiti led him to his violence. Readers can offer pity and greater understanding to the Dew Breaker without excusing his crimes, which the series of stories seems to encourage by showing the many facets of his character. The Dew Breaker, for instance, was first a victim of Duvalier's rise to power, with his family losing their farm and as a result his father losing his mind and his mother abandoning their family to live with another man. After being victimized, the Dew Breaker is forced to go to a rally for Duvalier and finds himself "mesmerized" by the city and the power demonstrated by Duvalier (192). Collins disagrees that these elements generate pity for the Dew Breaker: "Certainly we see that humanity runs alongside indiscriminate violence (187), particularly when the Dew Breaker worries about a young boy's fate (194). We also see how the

Dew Breaker's family is destroyed by Duvalier's ascendancy (191). Yet this alone does not constitute empathy" (12). While Collins may be correct that those experiences do not guarantee the audience will feel empathy for the Dew Breaker, the various conflicting representations of the Dew Breaker's character do create a sense of confusion for the audience about how to interpret the duality of the Dew Breaker's character, one that could lead to sympathy even for a torturer. By creating the possibility of seeing the Dew Breaker in a sympathetic light, these examples prohibit the audience from fully demonizing the Dew Breaker. The confusion the audience feels may arise from the sense that perpetrators are not easily delineated, a realization that may create discomfort for the audience especially as it compels readers to reconsider their response to the Dew Breaker as a torturer and whether or not this response is ethical. When a reader of trauma is truly interested in seeking justice for victims and perpetrators, the life and situation of the perpetrator will be worth considering. True justice will punish perpetrators for their crimes without re-victimizing them when they have suffered in the past. For readers to fully feel the power of the Dew Breaker's difficult situation allows them to see how justice can both punish and help the Dew Breaker by holding him accountable for his crimes and allowing him to work through the traumatizing parts of his life.

In addition to the trauma the Dew Breaker experiences in his youth, his own actions as a torturer have likely traumatized him. LaCapra explains specifically of perpetrators that "not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is the possibility of perpetrator trauma which must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices. Such trauma does not, however, entail the equation or identification of the perpetrator and the victim" (79). Although LaCapra argues that we must not conflate victims and perpetrators, he does recognize a type of

trauma that he calls “perpetrator trauma” (*Writing* 79, 120), indicating that perpetrators can indeed suffer trauma, but that this trauma is fundamentally different from the trauma suffered by victims. Like Tal’s discussion of soldiers as victims and victimizers, some perpetrators are traumatized by their own actions or the violence they witness, even if they are not victims. The Dew Breaker’s situation does not warrant victim status. LaCapra reminds us that “everyone is subject to structural trauma. But, with respect to historical trauma and its representation, the distinction between victims, perpetrators, and bystanders is crucial. ‘Victim’ is not a psychological category” (*Writing* 79). This means that an individual may experience psychological trauma without being considered a victim since a victim experiences a particular kind of trauma that has been purposively inflicted by another person. When comparing the Dew Breaker’s experiences as a youth to the trauma he inflicted on other victims, his hardships seem small in comparison. However, he is clearly traumatized by his past. From Ka’s perspective we learn that the Dew Breaker suffers nightmares of his past, which are a key sign of trauma. Ka recalls, “My father has had partial frontal dentures since he fell off his and my mother’s bed and landed on his face ten years ago when he was having one of his prison nightmares” (4). She notes that the “only visible” sign of his past is the scar on his face, indicating that he suffers emotionally or psychologically below the surface (5). Even at the end of his time in Haiti, it is apparent that his role as a Tonton Macoute was not necessarily secure, meaning that he also lived in fear within the Duvalier system, and that he may be traumatized by his experience. The Dew Breaker fled the country to escape the consequences of his actions and the perception of his disobedience to orders. Like soldiers, the Dew Breaker was part of a larger system of violence in which he acted independently. Bellamy explains that *The Dew Breaker* “humanizes without excusing the former Macoute by revealing the line between hunter and prey in Duvalier-era Haiti



to be highly situational” (190). Though it is impossible to compare the trauma of a perpetrator with that of a victim, it is clear that the Dew Breaker has been traumatized by his own violence in a way that he would benefit from working through.

Along with showing how the Dew Breaker is a layered character in the way he has changed from a selfish and violent torturer to a kind and loving father, the book also shows how the reactions of the characters toward those who have committed violence to others change according to the circumstances and how each individual has interacted with the Dew Breaker. The comparison of various ways that other characters respond to the Dew Breaker demonstrates the range of possibilities of how readers may also react to the torturer. In offering these possibilities, the book does not force a particular reaction onto the audience, but rather suggests that there are a variety of possible responses in a case like the Dew Breaker’s. The book shows readers that like all characters and people, perpetrators also cannot be classified in easy categories because of both the duality and the dynamic quality of their characters, which are qualities shared by most people. The example of Anne and Ka’s reaction to Emmanuel Constant show the immediate reaction the characters have to a person who is a complete stranger and has not harmed them personally, the position that readers of *The Dew Breaker* will be in. As protagonists, Anne and Ka are characters who the audience may relate to and may base their own reactions to the Dew Breaker on. Though neither Ka nor Anne have any personal pain associated with Constant, they react strongly to him because they know that he is wanted for crimes against the Haitian people that were likely similar to the types of crimes the Dew Breaker committed. Like the Dew Breaker, Constant had immigrated to the United States after committing many heinous crimes and would probably never be held accountable for those crimes (79). Anne, Ka, and the Dew Breaker encounter a man at Christmas Mass that they think may be Constant. We

read of their reactions that Ka “was fuming, shifting in her seat and mumbling under her breath, all the while keeping her eyes fixed on the man’s profile” and “Anne was proud of her daughter, proud of her righteous displeasure. But what if she ever found out about her own father? About the things he had done?” (80). Though Ka and Anne both revile Constant, Anne must remind herself that “she didn’t have the same freedom to condemn as her daughter did” (81). Anne tempers her reactions because she knows that she married a man who had committed similar crimes against Haitians, but it seems apparent that if she were not burdened by her husband’s guilt, she would have a similar reaction as Ka.

Ka, on the other hand, does not yet know of her father’s guilt as indicated by her mother’s question. However, when Ka does discover her father’s guilt, she does not denounce him as she would Constant. Instead she offers him compassion and forgiveness, suggesting that it may be easier for a person to forgive earlier crimes committed by someone they love and trust who has clearly changed. Although the Dew Breaker enacts cruelty and violence to other characters, the book depicts him as a different kind of criminal than Constant because the Dew Breaker was first victimized and then regrets his violence and seeks to live a completely different life than his life as a torturer. The book shows this difference in character by contrasting reactions of Ka and Anne to the Dew Breaker and to Constant. An important key to the difference between the Dew Breaker and Constant is that the readers see the Dew Breaker in his later life as a changed person who has lived a peaceful, quiet life since his immigration. The power of first knowing the Dew Breaker as a completely different person relieves some of the intense feelings of disgust that readers may later feel. The Dew Breaker seems to have taken action to change by becoming a barber in his community and by living humbly without flaunting his freedom. He also willingly confesses his crimes to his wife and daughter when it seems to be

an appropriate time. In *History and Its Limits*, LaCapra argues that perpetrators, like victims, do need a forum to speak about their own experiences and that “it is important for perpetrators to be able to bear witness or give testimony other than in trials or in situations leading to adjudication and punishment” (77). The Dew Breaker willingly confesses to his daughter, and it is clear that he is “self-critical,” which, as LaCapra points out, is an important feature of a perpetrator speaking of their past. LaCapra continues, “The opportunity to represent losses is necessary, and it is possible to do so in a way that, to some extent, indicates that a genuine attempt is being made to work through the past and arrive at different forms of self-understanding and activity” (*History* 77). In recognizing that perpetrators also need to work through their past actions and experiences, LaCapra shows a willingness to imagine that perpetrators can change and renounce their past. The Dew Breaker exhibits the change that LaCapra describes as he has sought to be a good husband and father in his new life in New York and to overcome his own trauma and guilt. In contrast, Constant is given no developmental time in the book to show whether or not he has changed or feels remorse for his wrong-doing, but the text does indicate that Constant perhaps flaunts his freedom and shows no disposition to change like the Dew Breaker has (81). The text differentiates between these two characters to show that even though criminals should always be held accountable for past crimes, some may also be traumatized and may need to work through their pasts to recover and to prevent acting out. If perpetrators do not work through their own trauma, LaCapra suggests that “the repressed or disavowed will recur once the occasion arises” (*History* 77). Thus, it is a societal imperative to not only punish perpetrators for their crimes, but to also see that they work through their pasts to prevent future wrong-doing. The example of the Dew Breaker indicates that a perpetrator who sincerely seeks to work through his crimes and to live a peaceful life may be able to do so.

Like Anne and Ka's reactions to Constant, Dany's experience offers a different perspective of how a character approaches a Tonton Macoute who personally harmed his family. When Dany discovers that the Dew Breaker is a barber living in New York who Dany rents a room from, Dany sneaks up to the barber's bedroom one night to kill him in revenge of the Dew Breaker's murder of Dany's parents. Of this experience we read,

Looking down at the barber's face, which had shrunk so much over the years, he lost the desire to kill. It wasn't that he was afraid, for he was momentarily feeling bold, fearless. It wasn't pity either. He was too angry to feel pity. It was something else, something less measurable. It was the dread of being wrong, of harming the wrong man, of making the wrong woman a widow and the wrong child an orphan. It was the realization that he would never know why—why one single person had been given the power to destroy his entire life. (107)

Dany's experience of staring down at his parents' murderer with the power to take out revenge for his parents' deaths and, yet, choosing not to shows that Dany understands that perpetuating the violence will not change the suffering that he has gone through, even if the Dew Breaker deserves any punishment that he receives. For Dany, killing the barber would never give him the answer to the question that weighs on him, a question from the past that continues to haunt his presence. Dany's obsession with finding his parents' murderer and hearing their stories from his aunt may be a sign that he is experiencing what trauma theorists refer to as acting out. LaCapra writes that victims may experience "post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop" (*Writing* 21). Dany's experience of being unable to see the barber as

the Dew Breaker he remembers allows Dany to break out of the cycle of acting out and begin working through his trauma when he returns to Haiti to see his aunt and to ask her questions that have weighed on him. Though the book does not suggest that the Dew Breaker should go free for his crimes, as indicated by the anger Dany feels and the extreme situations revealed in the final story of the book, Dany's experience does emphasize that seeking revenge may not be the solution, at least not the solution to Dany's ability to work through his traumatic memories and to heal. Although Dany is likely quite certain that the barber is the Dew Breaker who killed his parents, he sees the Dew Breaker as a completely different person. He is not the same man that killed his parents. In this sense, Dany's worry about "harming the wrong man" takes on a different significance of showing the change that can occur in a perpetrator when he works through his own past.

In contrast to the examples of Dany and of Anne and Ka's reactions to Constant, the book also demonstrates how characters who are close to the Dew Breaker react to his crimes, which gives readers a sense of perspective on the possibility of someone feeling sympathy for a torturer. Two of those characters, Anne and Ka, are members of the Dew Breaker's family in the U.S. and both discovered the truth of his past long after the fact. As already discussed, Ka loves and pities her father, so she may already be inclined to offer him forgiveness or at least understanding upon discovering that he committed violent crimes even though her initial reaction was one of shock and betrayal. Having a personal connection to someone like the Dew Breaker may make it possible to feel pity for him in his later life. At the end of Ka's conversation with her father, the Dew Breaker tells Ka, "No matter what, I'm still your father, still your mother's husband. I would never do those things now" (24). In response to this, Ka thinks, "And this to me is as meaningful a declaration as his other confession. It was my first inkling that maybe my father

was wrong in his own representation of his former life, that maybe his past offered more choices than being either hunter or prey” (24). Though Ka is hurt by her father’s confession, her knowledge of her father in her lifetime seems to outweigh her imagination of a person who committed crimes. Her acceptance of his changed life arises from her inability to picture her father as a different, violent man. His subsequent affirmation of the change that has occurred in his life allows Ka to ignore the crimes she cannot accept and to accept the image of her father as she has grown up with him. Because Ka is so distant from her parents’ experiences in Haiti, she focuses on the person her father has been as her father and does not imagine how he could be different, especially since his violent crimes would, in any case, be difficult to imagine.

Similarly, Anne approaches her husband sympathetically even though, as Ka describes it, Anne “was nurturing a great pain that she could never speak about” (22). Anne finds out about her husband’s crimes only after they have been married and Anne has given birth to their daughter. Like Ka, Anne’s first interaction with the Dew Breaker is one which evokes pity from her, which again indicates that feeling a personal connection from the outset may facilitate offering forgiveness to a torturer. Anne’s pity arises from her belief that the Dew Breaker was a prisoner at Casernes because she meets him as he runs away from the prison. The explanation he gives her is “I’m free . . . I finally escaped” (237), and we learn that the Dew Breaker “wanted sympathy, compassion from her” (231). Anne similarly begins her relationship with the Dew Breaker on grounds in which she trusts him and feels pity for his suffering, leading her later reaction of the revelation of his crimes to be tempered by her prior sense of pity.

In contrast to Ka’s relationship with her father, Anne must navigate her feelings of pity for her husband while coping with the personal crime he committed against her family, which is the murder of her brother, the preacher. While Ka relies on her knowledge of her father as she

knows him to find peace with his confession, Anne seems to rely on her belief in God and miracles to find peace with her husband's crimes. Anne, a devout Catholic, regularly shares miracles that she hears about with her family. The miracle she wishes she could share, but never can is what she sees as "the simple miracle of her husband's transformation" (73). Anne wishes she could tell Ka in "The Book of Miracles," "*A long time ago, more than thirty years ago, in Haiti, your father worked in a prison where he hurt many people. Now look at him. Look how calm he is. Look how patient he is*" (72, italics in original). Anne believes in her husband's ability to change based on her belief in the power of miracles. She sees him as a completely different person because of the miracle that occurred in his life. In her conversation with Ka right after Ka discovers her father's past, Anne tells her, "You and me, we save him. . . . He a seed thrown in rock. You, me, we make him take root" (25). Anne imagines the Dew Breaker through her religious beliefs and her attitudes about her husband are grounded in her religious devotion that is evident in this statement that contains a religious allusion as well as the implicit assumption that her religious comment will be understood by her daughter. In this allusion, Anne becomes a Christ figure because of how she asserts that she and her daughter will save the Dew Breaker from his crimes and because of how she shares a parable from the Bible that Christ himself shared. This relation to Christ portrays Anne in a space of forgiveness and of love for her husband that is undeserved because of his past crimes. In the allusion to the Bible, Anne compares her husband's upbringing to a familiar parable in which seeds are placed in different soil (*The Holy Bible*, Matt. 13). Some seeds are placed in good soil and flourish, while others are placed in bad soil or in rock and are unable to grow. The parable indicates that individuals' actions will be judged in part on their opportunities. This suggests that in spite of the Dew Breaker's terrible choices and behaviors, Anne believes that he is not bad at his core, or in other

words he is not a bad seed, but instead he did not have the appropriate nutrition to his character to give him the foundation he needed to “take root” in becoming a moral person. This merciful imagination of her husband as a seed allows Anne and the readers to see the Dew Breaker as a dynamic character who has become a different person over the years.

But even as she feels hope that her husband can change and take root, Anne still has an inner struggle with the events of her past and her husband’s close connection to them: “It was always like this, her life a pendulum between forgiveness and regret, but when the anger dissipated she considered it a small miracle” (86). Anne’s perspective suggests that some feelings may always recur and may never go away permanently, but she does offer hope that peace can be found. Anne represents the possible diversity of reactions to the Dew Breaker because she has personally suffered because of him and at times abhors him like Dany does, but she also cares for him and wants to offer him forgiveness like Ka does. In this way, she is like a “pendulum” swinging back and forth “between forgiveness” and loathing. Like Anne, while the audience can imagine the Dew Breaker in both his present and past and feel hope in the situation that the Dew Breaker can change and may be worthy of sympathy, the book does not ask readers to offer forgiveness to the Dew Breaker. Instead the book offers as a possibility that perpetrators like the Dew Breaker may contribute to their society and family when given the opportunity to work through their past by moving forward, being a good spouse and parent, and earning a living through respectable work. Working through for a perpetrator may, in fact, require that he be held accountable for his crimes so that he may thereby be released from some of the burden of his guilt by paying for his crimes in a judicial sense.

The book’s thoughtful depiction of the Dew Breaker and of the other characters’ reactions to him poses broader questions of how readers can respond to perpetrators, especially



in contrast to how readers typically respond to victims. Armendariz writes, “Unlike most trauma theorists, Danticat is a bit more reluctant to mark a clear division between victimizer and victimized, since all of them seem to be burdened by a history in which they have been pawns of forces they could not really control” (54). This notion that even the Dew Breaker, a cruel torturer, was a victim of the system of Duvalier and was traumatized by his own actions challenges the firm lines that are typically drawn between the definitions of victims and perpetrators and indicates that the Dew Breaker must also work through his traumatic past. This difficult position of a perpetrator who is also a victim is depicted powerfully in Giorgio Agamben’s account of the *Sonderkommando* (“special team”) in the Jewish concentration camps during WWII. Agamben writes that “the SS used the euphemism ‘special team’ to refer to this group of deportees responsible for managing the gas chambers and crematoria” (24). In addition, along with Primo Levi, Agamben calls this position a “gray zone in which victims become executioners and executioners become victims” (17). This gray zone indicates that, at times, judgment between who is a perpetrator and who is a victim becomes impossible to make. Agamben also quotes an account from a Holocaust survivor who writes that “conceiving and organizing the squads was National Socialism’s most demonic crime” (qtd. in Agamben 25). This crime is so contemptible, in part, because it forbids some victims of Nazi atrocities from fully claiming their status as victims because of the burden of guilt they carry from something they were forced to do. For the victims who were also forced into a position in which they had to participate in the massacre of their fellow prisoners, they may not be able to find within themselves any relief from the crimes they participated in. This situation highlights the “gray zone” between victims and perpetrators, since at some level many perpetrators of crimes are the “pawns,” as Armendariz puts it, of higher powers. The situation of the Dew Breaker is clearly different from that of the victims of the

Holocaust; however, there are interesting parallels in terms of the blurry zone between victim and perpetrator that Agamben describes. One key difference between the two is that the fictional Dew Breaker chose to become a torturer, while in the reality of history, *Sonderkommando* were forced into their positions. Though this difference makes it impossible to fully compare the two groups, it does not make the comparison incompatible because both groups contain perpetrators who are not easily categorized. The “gray zone” of the *Sonderkommando* illuminates the difficulty of categorizing perpetrators and victims in simple terms. In *The Dew Breaker*, for example, the Dew Breaker was victimized and lost everything, including his parents, before he became a Tonton Macoute. This background complicates his role as a perpetrator since he was a victim to the very system for which he became an enforcer. Marion Rohrleitner writes of this situation, “By granting a voice not only to the survivors but also the perpetrators of torture, Danticat offers complex and disturbing insights into the workings of state-sponsored violence” (75). Recognizing “state-sponsored violence” does not in any way excuse the individuals of the violence they commit, though it does illuminate their situation as a perpetrator as well as a victim. However, LaCapra explains that “the gray zone serves to raise the question of the existence and extent of problematic—at times more or less dubiously hybridized—cases, but does not imply the rashly generalized blurring or simple collapse of all distinction, including that between perpetrator and victim” (*Writing* 79). LaCapra admits that there are times when distinction is difficult, but still emphasizes that the gray zone ought to be employed only in cases such as the *Sonderkommando* because we risk distorting useful definitions and distinctions when we allow dissimilar individuals to be placed within a group to which they don’t really belong. More importantly, falsely placing individuals in the gray zone may wrongly excuse perpetrators who have not suffered as victims in the way that the *Sonderkommando* suffered.

Even if perpetrators can and should be allowed to work through their pasts, it is important that literature does not obscure the crimes they have committed so that they are still held fully accountable for their actions. In writing about the controversy over Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, a historical work on the Nazis, one of the main issues LaCapra finds with Goldhagen's works is that he writes about perpetrators without precision: "Goldhagen touches confusingly on the problem of perpetrator trauma without explicitly formulating the problem and addressing it in sufficiently cogent and differentiated terms" (*Writing* 120). Thus, LaCapra does not necessarily see a problem with writing about perpetrators and possible trauma that they have experienced, but he does rightfully expect that discussions about perpetrators will be clearly formulated and differentiated. "Differentiated terms" also implies that a perpetrator's trauma will not be conflated with a victim's trauma. LaCapra sees it as a serious problem in any writing that "would seem to undercut or undo systematically not only the binary opposition but any distinction, however problematic in certain cases, between victim and perpetrator, as it would seem to undercut the problems of agency and responsibility in general" (*Writing* 26). For LaCapra, using narrative tools like free indirect discourse for a perpetrator, which would seem to overly sympathize with the inner thoughts and reasons for a perpetrator's actions and justifications, is inappropriate because this narrative style is often used to let the readers experience the inner mindset of the perpetrator in a way that justifies and excuses his or her thoughts or actions (*Writing* 202-03). In his formulation of victims and perpetrators, LaCapra seems to imply that any investigation into a perpetrator who may also be a victim risks sacrificing the status of true victims and excusing perpetrators from accountability for their actions. However, I assert that we can talk about the difficult positions of some perpetrators—who are still completely guilty, unlike the *Sonderkommando*—and offer

them pity without sacrificing their responsibilities to their actions because, as I have shown in the case of the Dew Breaker, some perpetrators are also victims of the system for which they are enacting violence and they are not simply static people who never change or feel remorse for their actions. For that reason, we can see perpetrators in an intricate system rather than with a simple definition of perpetrator or victim.

In portraying the Dew Breaker as a perpetrator who has also suffered trauma, the book makes use of the “gray zone” while avoiding the pitfalls that LaCapra points out. The Dew Breaker is clearly represented as an individual who committed many horrible acts, and the sympathy the audience feels for him derives from the changes he has made in his life and the difficult circumstances that led him to make the choices he made. Because the text creates a dualistic portrayal which evokes both sympathy and horror at the crimes committed by the Dew Breaker, it does not allow for an easy solution to the tension created by the conflicting representations of the Dew Breaker. This element meets an important expectation of LaCapra because it maintains the opportunity for critical judgment of the perpetrator rather than excusing any of his crimes or making his inner thoughts while committing the crimes acceptable in any way (*Writing* 202). For example, his point of view is disgustingly described with vivid imagery of his gluttony whenever he informed shop owners that they would help him because of his position as a Tonton Macoute: “With these words, restaurants fed him an enormous amount of food, which he ate eagerly several times a day because he enjoyed watching his body grow wider and meatier just as his sense of power did” (196). This view into his thoughts creates a sense of disgust rather than providing any sense of justification for his actions. In addition, *The Dew Breaker* carefully depicts the Dew Breaker from the perspective of his victims, which also avoids the problems of reading about a perpetrator’s crimes from only his or her perspective. For

instance, one of his victims recounts, “He’d wound you, then try to soothe you with words, then he’d wound you again. He thought he was God” (199). Descriptions like this show that the Dew Breaker enjoyed the game of torture that he played with his victims who were desperate for their lives and freedom, and he embraced the god-like power of giving life or death to a person. Throughout the book, we see victims’ memories or experiences with the Dew Breaker. By showing the Dew Breaker from the perspective of his victims, the book avoids oversimplifying or offering problematic portrayals of the Dew Breaker’s own perspective. This narrative tool of describing the Dew Breaker from many perspectives exposes the reader to the many facets of the Dew Breaker’s life and enables the reader to feel sympathy for the Dew Breaker’s difficult circumstances, but also suggests that the novel does not propose that we simply excuse the Dew Breaker from his crimes.

By fully implicating the Dew Breaker in his crimes, while simultaneously creating a sense of sympathy for him, the book creates a confusing dynamic for readers to navigate in responding to the Dew Breaker. As a work of trauma fiction, *The Dew Breaker* does engage the emotions of the audience toward a purpose, but that purpose may become obscure since the audience may feel a sense of concern for the outcome of the Dew Breaker, who committed much of the violence that traumatized other characters in the book. The audience must reconcile these conflicting emotions and not let their imagined perspective of how a perpetrator should be represented cloud their understanding of how the Dew Breaker has been described. The works of Anne Whitehead and Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith see the reading of trauma literature to be an issue of ethics. Readers’ responses to a perpetrator is an ethical challenge since readers will feel uncomfortable sympathizing with a perpetrator when it seems that sympathizing may displace their need to hold the individual accountable for his crimes. Whitehead, for instance,

explains that readers have a particular responsibility to respond as a witness, but also to “avoid appropriating the story as his or her own (7-8). In addition to this responsibility, Whitehead remarks, “Trauma theory readjusts the relationship between reader and text, so that reading is restored as an ethical practice” (8). If reading trauma is an ethical practice, then the question arises of how *The Dew Breaker* asks readers to ethically respond to the perpetrator in the book. This is especially difficult to navigate when we consider the purpose of trauma literature for victims. Schaffer and Smith write of how the feelings produced in participating in trauma literature can “promote healing and solidarity among disaffected groups and provide avenues for empathy across circuits of difference. . . . While affect offers a potential for change, for becoming, it is impossible to predict how sensations will be channeled into knowledge or practice” (Introduction 6-7). Schaffer and Smith see it as particularly important that readers do respond and listen to narratives of trauma and they hope that readers respond through involvement beyond their reading. They explain that their book, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, is their “attempt to listen, to follow the strands of personal storytelling, and to respond through an ethics of recognition” (Introduction 12). In this sense, their “ethics of recognition” is their suggestion for how readers ought to respond to trauma narratives and their book models how to do this. *The Dew Breaker* also seems to suggest that recognizing the difficult process of healing and change for both victims and perpetrators is valuable for creating understanding across differences that separate individuals from each other. A major difference that divides individuals is that of perpetrators and victims. It may not be ethically sound to create connections to perpetrators that will overshadow their past actions, but it is ethical to recognize the stories of perpetrators and the difficult circumstances that some individuals have faced. Likewise, it is not ethical to excuse perpetrators for their crimes, but it is ethical to imagine them as multi-faceted

human beings who can change and who need to work through the trauma they have experienced in their lives. It may be impossible to predict whether trauma literatures will lead readers to social action, but at the very least, readers leave *The Dew Breaker* with a heightened awareness of the problems of demonizing and caricaturizing perpetrators and the benefits of giving them the opportunity to work through their traumatic pasts.

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