

Reyita and The Dew Breaker Comparative Analysis

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Trauma, Violence, and Memory in Reyita and The Dew Breaker

In modern society, the themes of traumatic events, distant relationships, psychological trauma and violence are dominant in modern literature. *Reyita* is a biographical story of a black Afro-Cuban woman who goes through a series of traumatic events throughout her life. *The Dew Breaker* by Edwidge Danticat is a series of short stories that revolve around the Haitian people and their traumatic events and their aftermaths. This argumentative essay provides a comparative analysis of *Reyita* and *The Dew Breaker* through significant themes of cultural significance, modern literary elements, and traumatic events.

“Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century” is based on the biographical testimonies revolving around the life events of “Maria de los Reyes Castillo Bueno” (1902–1997). The testimonies of *Reyita* were in oral form, and later, these oral testimonies were penned down by Daisy Rubiera Castillo (Reyita’s daughter) in 1997. This book revolves around Reyita’s life experiences and the traumatic changes in social and political disputes in Cuba.

Edwidge Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker* is a group of short stories which reflect upon the traumatic events, emotional turmoil and its impact/ consequences upon Haitian people. This book was published in 2004. The title of this book has its roots in the Haitian Creole language and reflects upon a renowned Haitian torturer. The book consists of nine short stories, which are “The Book of the Dead, Seven, Water Child, The Book of Miracles, Night Talkers, The Bridal Seamstress, Monkey Tails, The Funeral Singer, and The Dew Breaker”.

Cuban and Haitian History as Literary Context

The Cuban and Haitian culture/ history play a significant role in conveying the theme of these literary pieces. *Reyita* envisages the story of political and social trauma in Cuba through the perspective of a black woman. Reyita maintains and preserves her cultural identity throughout her life as an Afro-Cuban woman with a low socioeconomic status. Despite all of the struggling situations, she preserves her African culture within herself through association with “Spiritualism” and “folk Catholicism” (Reyita). Furthermore, *Reyita* becomes the voice of her culture and community by mentioning her extended family and community members. The story entices the reader to the modern (20th Century)

era of atrocities and trauma through the heart of a black woman in Cuba named Reyita. This biographical testimony reflects upon the traumatic experiences such as racism, inferiority, and violence a black woman has to face in Cuba. Likewise, *The Dew Breaker* sets its background in Haitian culture and its people. Edwidge Danticat uses her book to convey the stories of Haitian people. *The Dew Breaker* talks about their traumatic past and its impact on their present lives. The book projects the struggles of Haitian people who desire to forget their traumatic past and move on. However, they fail to cut themselves from their painful past and are constantly suffering from psychological trauma and haunting memories of the past in their present lives. The cultural background and historical past are significant in both literary pieces, as analyzed above.

Both books view the significant impact of modernism and its prominent literary features. *Reyita* reflects upon the traumatic themes of racism, gender issues, class system, and violence, which took away a major part of her happiness. She lost her son in a sabotage explosion, which has engraved a never-ending torment in her memories. She was always looking for ways to survive within the political and social unrest. Reyita faces racial discrimination in the field of education and employment throughout her life. She always struggles to bring her children up to the evolving modern society. She does not enjoy any healthy and prosperous relationship with her husband. She always received betrayal and psychological trauma from society. Similarly, *The Dew Breaker* envisages the modern themes of communication lack backs and fragmented relations, which are affecting their present life.

According to the literary critic Aitor's review, Danticat's book is a captivating portrait of suffering individuals who are unified by their painful past, traumatic events, and loss without their awareness and will. This book is a collection of different perspectives that provide a reflection of a community struggling to get out of the clutches of tragedy and its traumatic past memories (Aitor). This critical analysis points out all the modern themes encapsulated within this book. For instance, the couple who is separated from each other for seven years in the short story "Seven" reflects the familial distancing and communication failures in the modern world. Although they were husband and wife, they were distant from each other for seven years because of their social circumstances. There are evident communication failures within the relationships of families because of the traumatic past events in all short stories. The above analytical points explicate that both literary pieces share similar modern platforms for their themes.

Psychological and Physical Trauma Across the Two Narratives

The mutual alliance of psychological trauma and physical trauma is one of the most significant themes reflected by the characters of both literary pieces. *Reyita* exhibits major psychological and physical trauma in the form of racial discrimination in Afro-Cuban society. This testimonial novel revolves around the traumatic events faced by the Afro-Cuban community because of this racial bigotry and double standards prescribed by the society. This novel propagates the voice of the Afro-

Cuban community by explicating the violence inflicted upon them by society. Reyita always faced humiliation and criticism during her college and professional career. She was even criticized by her own family for attending college. Throughout her life, she has dealt with these traumatic events to flourish and maintain her identity.

Similarly, *The Dew Breaker* exhibits the most traumatic and atrocious past events through the characters and their emotional consequences upon their present. Danticat creates a stunning plot by interviewing its characters about their past horrors, traumatic events, and emotional consequences. Danticat uses the modern elements of literature to reflect upon the characters of the short stories. The main focus of this book is to reflect upon the traumatic events and violence that happened in the lives of the characters in the past and the consequences these individuals are going through due to these traumatic events. For instance, the last short story "The Dew Breaker" reflects upon the brutal assassination of a Baptist Preacher who was gruesomely killed by his prisoner. In the short story "Seven", the wife is suffering through constant psychological trauma for cheating on her husband during the seven years when they were not together. She is in constant turmoil for her past actions and is guilty of confessing these events to her husband.

In a nutshell, the above comparative analysis entails the association of *Reyita* and *The Dew Breaker* upon the thematic analysis of cultural significance, modern thematic elements, and traumatic events. Both novels exhibit the characters who are haunted by their traumatic past, pain, and loss. These literary pieces explicate Haitian and Afro-Cuban history through their narratives. The main focus of these two writers is to unveil the lives of the victims of psychological and physical trauma caused by their social and political unrest.

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