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## EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S MASTERY IN INDIRECT CHARACTERIZATION ("THE BRIDAL SEAMSTRESS")

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**Abstract.** This article provides an in-depth analysis of the literary technique of indirect characterization used in the short story "The Bridal Seamstress" from the book *The Dew Breaker* by Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat. It examines how Danticat employs subtle details, actions, dialogue and contrasting character foils to indirectly convey the personalities, backgrounds and inner lives of two main characters: Beatrice Saint Fort, an aging Haitian-American immigrant bridal seamstress, and Aline Cajuste, the young journalism intern sent to profile her. By masterfully making use of indirect characterization, Danticat represents a Haitian-American generational division between Beatrice and Aline. Having lived in solitude, Beatrice separates from her earlier identity and creates a new self. Despite being generationally divided, both characters remain connected through their entrenchment in the diasporic community. The article explores how this short story provides a vivid description of indirect characterization about the lasting personal and inter-generational impacts of trauma experienced under the brutal Duvalier regime in Haiti have an influence on Beatrice's life and the differences between characters, manners and behaviours in Beatrice and Aline, who belong to different generation.

**Keywords:** Haitian diaspora literature, indirect characterization, generational divide, trauma, community relations, national history, generational dynamics, painful memories.

## КОСВЕННАЯ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА В РАССКАЗЕ "THE BRIDAL SEAMSTRESS" В "THE DEW BREAKER"

**Аннотация.** Статья предоставляет анализ литературного приема косвенной характеристики, использованного в рассказе "The Bridal Seamstress" из книги "The Dew Breaker" Эдвидж Данतिकат. В ней исследуется, как Данतिकат использует тонкие детали, действия, диалоги и характерные параллели, чтобы передать личности и прошлое главных персонажей, Беатрис Сент-Фор и Алин Кажуст. Рассказ представляет собой разрыв между поколениями персонажей и исследует долгосрочное воздействие травмы, пережитой Беатрис под режимом Дювалье в Гаити, на ее жизнь. В статье также обсуждаются различия в манерах и поведении между персонажами, принадлежащими к разным поколениям, и их связь через укоренившееся в диаспоре сообщество.

**Ключевые слова:** литература гаитянской диаспоры, косвенная характеристика, разделение поколений, травма, общественные отношения, национальная история, динамика поколений, болезненные воспоминания

## EDVIDJ DENTIKETNING "BRIDAL SEAMSTRESS" HIKOYASIDA BILVOSITA TAVSIFLASHDAN MAHORATLI FOYDALANISHI

**Annotatsiya.** Ushbu maqolada gaiti-amerikalik yozuvchi Edvidj Dantikatning "The Dew Breaker" kitobidan "The Bridal Seamstress" hikoyasida qo'llangan bilvosita xarakterlashning adabiy texnikasi chuqur tahlil qilingan. Unda Dantikat ikki asosiy qahramonning shaxsiyati, kelib chiqishi va ichki hayotini bilvosita yetkazish uchun nozik tafsilotlar, harakatlar, dialoglar va qarama-qarshi xarakterlardan qanday foydalanganini ko'rib chiqiladi: Beatris Sent-Fort, qarigan gaitilik-amerikalik immigrant kelin tikuvchisi va yosh jurnalist Aline Kajuste uning hikoyasini yoritish uchun yuborilgan. Dentiket bilvosita tavsiflashdan mahoratli foydalanib Beatris va Alina o'rtasidagi qarama-qarshilik gaitiliklar va amerikaliklar o'rtasidagi avlodlar bo'linishini ifodalaydi. Beatris yolg'iz hayot kechirib, o'zining oldingi shaxsiyatidan ajraladi va yangi Beatrisni yaratadi. Avlod jihatidan bir-biridan ajralganligiga qararamay, ikkalasi ham diaspora jamjamiyatiga aloqadorligi tufayli bog'langan. Maqolada ushbu qisqa hikoyaning Gaitidagi shafqatsiz

*Dyuvalier rejimi ostida boshdan kechirilgan shikastlanishning doimiy shaxsiy va avlodlararo ta'sirining Beatrisning hayotiga ta'siri va turli avlodlarga mansub bo'lgan Beatris hamda Alina xarakteri, xulq-atvori va xatti-harakatlari o'rtasidagi farqlar haqida bilvosita tavsifning yorqin tavsifi qanday tasvirlanganini o'rganadi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *Gaiti diasporasi adabiyoti, bilvosita tavsif, avlodlar bo'linishi, travma, jamoa munosabatlari, milliy tarix, avlodlar dinamikasi, o'g'riqli xotiralar.*

**Introduction** Indirect characterization in literature refers to the process of identifying character's traits, motivations, and beliefs through their actions, dialogue, thoughts, and interactions with others in an explicit way instead of describing directly by the author. The main reason why this technique is commonly used in today's literature is that it allows readers to create their own impressions of a character and visualize it as they would like. Several methods of indirect characterization such as dialogue, actions, thoughts, and interactions with others can make indirect characterization more vivid to the reader. Through these methods, authors are able to give readers elaborate information about the way that characters behave, think, respond towards a particular action. Dialogues are the most common type of indirect characterization which can be used mainly to reveal character's speech patterns, through this they can make the readers aware of their thoughts, viewpoints, emotions and choices. In turn, a character's thoughts and viewpoints can serve to reveal their desires, fears and motivations. Another important feature is that the character's speech style. If the character tries to use formal and eloquent manner, it is clear that he is educated and come from a higher social class. The use of indirect characterization in modern literature has been extensively discussed by David Lodge, a prominent literary critic and novelist. Lodge discusses the importance of showing rather than telling when it comes to character development in his book "The Art of Fiction." He claims that indirect characterization allows readers to form their own opinions about characters based on their actions, dialogue, and interactions with other characters, rather than being told what they should think about them explicitly. Lodge also emphasizes the importance of point of view in indirect characterization, stating that the perspective from which a story is told can have a significant impact on the reader's understanding of the characters. He contends that by incorporating multiple points of view, authors can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive picture. In her short story collection "The Dew Breaker", acclaimed Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat employs literary techniques such as indirect characterization to provide nuanced explorations of the Haitian diasporic experience and analyze characters's traits implicitly. This article provides an in-depth analysis of Danticat's masterful use of indirect characterization specifically in the short story "The Bridal Seamstress," which profiles the encounter between two Haitian-American women from different generations: Beatrice Saint Fort, an aging immigrant bridal seamstress living in Queens, New York, and Aline Cajuste, the young journalism intern sent to write a retirement profile on her for a Haitian-American weekly paper.

Through subtle narrative details regarding the women's contrasting appearances, manners, environments and backstories, Danticat conveys volumes about these characters' personalities, backgrounds and inner emotional lives without directly stating such information. Analysis of this indirect characterization reveals Danticat's on the lasting impacts of trauma across generations within the Haitian diaspora. Beatrice remains haunted into old age by brutal treatment that she received from a torturer. Alternatively, Aline's youth masks such painful knowledge, yet she stands to inherit its burdens as she comes of age. This article will analyze how Danticat's masterful employment of indirect characterization techniques serves to highlight enduring personal and inter-generational impacts of trauma within the Haitian diasporic community

### **Literature review**

Few researchers and literary critics have studied literary period and works of Edwidge Danticat elaborately. One of them is Dr. Celucien L. Joseph, a scholar of Haitian studies and postcolonial literature provides insights about Danticat's works within the context of Haitian diaspora and emphasizes the importance of the central themes such as memory, trauma, identity in her novels. In addition, Dr. Joseph examined the period that he lived had a great impact on shaping her writing and the ways in which she addresses a number of problems of that time including displacement, the complexities of identity within Haitian diaspora. Dr. Martin Munro, a professor of French and Francophone studies, points out that Edwidge Danticat responds to issues such as colonialism, political upheaval and social injustices in Haiti through her writing. He also considers that her way of writing incorporates the elements of oral storytelling and folk traditions. Indeed, when her parents immigrated to the United States, Danticat stayed with her aunt and watched struggles of Haitians and Haitian- Americans, all of which influenced her burgeoning interest in story writing and practice of oral-story telling.



The masterful use of indirect characterization in the story “Bridal Seamstress” is not much studied by earlier researchers. Therefore, this article provides in-depth information about the skillful use of indirect characterization by E.Danticat and what actually he tries to imply to the reader by not revealing details about the characters directly.

**Discussion.** Danticat first indirectly characterizes Beatrice and Aline through contrasting descriptions of their appearances and environments. Sixty-seven-year old Beatrice Saint Fort, the aging bridal seamstress, is described as a “*tiny woman*” yet with a “*giant alto voice*” who takes half an hour from her nap to slowly put on full makeup, don a wig and purple dress before answering her door, wanting to look her best to receive the journalism student. Her home contains traditional domestic touches like doilies and porcelain figurines [122].

Alternatively, twenty-two-year old Aline Cajuste arrives on Beatrice’s doorstep described as a “*young woman with long dreadlocks and a small stud in her nose*” wearing a plain white t-shirt and army green backpack. Aline resides not with family but a thirty-years-older female psychology professor girlfriend in Florida. Through these initial contrasting details, Danticat deftly establishes the two women as generationally divided — Beatrice as traditional and domestic versus Aline as contemporary and alternative [121]

Danticat continues painting a portrait of a slowly-paced, formal Beatrice devoted to tradition contrasted by impatient yet curious Aline indirectly via depicting how the women behave. Despite Aline’s eagerness to commence the interview, Beatrice insists on leisurely preparing and sharing coffee slowly made from scratch, calling it “*one of her secrets*” and saying, “*I always take time, whether it’s getting dressed, making coffee, or sewing wedding gowns*” [124]. Beatrice later gives Aline a slow, wandering tour of her neighborhood where she introduces the precise nationalities and occupations of all surrounding residents.

Aline exhibits semi-bored impatience with Beatrice’s slow pace and deep entrenchment in local community relations, yet remains curiously engaged enough to indulge her questions. These indirect manners and behavioral details further establish the women’s contrasting temperaments and worldviews that correlate to their ages and backgrounds. Aline Cajuste is a young Haitian American lady who recently graduated from college and is a journalistic intern at the Haitian American Weekly. Aline travels to interview Beatrice about her company and retirement after a recent breakup with a much older lover who was a professor. Danticat observes that Aline has lived a somewhat sheltered existence, having been born in Somerville, Massachusetts. Aline initially views Beatrice as “a bit nutty,” but as their conversation progresses, she takes a deeper and more empathetic interest in her and decides she wants to learn more about terribly damaged people like her. Although Beatrice is described as patient and tolerant lady with her actions and manners, the description of Aline shows that she is quite impatient and curious who attempts to get to know about the life of Beatrice thoroughly.

Additional key indirectly characterizing details emerge through the women’s dialogue exchanges, where more is revealed about their personal backgrounds. Aline explains she is in New York after her graduate studies in French Literature as an effort to impress her parents and win back her ex, indirectly conveying her relative youth and instability. Beatrice mentions proudly making wedding dresses “since Haiti,” hints at an extremely lengthy career that has left her quite world-weary, expressing no surprise whatsoever when Aline asks if she’s married and refusing to reveal her age [126]. “You never ask a woman my age a question like that”(127). The reason why she prefers not to tell her age is the traumatic life she experienced. For a long she had to hide and escape from the torturer and the violence in Haiti shaped her as a woman. Her age is not important to her. Painful and stressful years made her forget about her age.

Danticat’s masterful use of contrasting characterization indirectly conveys rich inner lives and backstories for both Beatrice and Aline. Elderly Beatrice’s traditional style of dress, her manner of leisurely preparing coffee made from scratch, and her insistence on formally touring the neighborhood reveal her as someone who deeply values tradition, respects hierarchy and social norms, and retains strong connections to her Haitian roots even after decades spent in the New York diaspora. However, she remains psychologically tormented across years and geography by the nearness of her alleged past torturer.

Moreover, Danticat prefers to use some objects in the story in order to give a vivid explanation to the personality of Beatrice rather than describing her character explicitly. For instance, the dresses that Beatrice makes play an essential role in her life as they function as an embodiment of her soul, heart and individuality. Her soul is as white as a wedding dress. This soul has experienced intolerable torments and sufferings during the course of her life. Beatrice considers herself like a wedding dress. When her clients wear a dress, she imagines that all people are looking at her. “And the way I see it, I am that dress. It is like everyone is looking at me”[127]. The thing that can only heal this soul is getting positive comments from clients and this provides her a temporary release from the horrible experiences in the past. Working as a bridal seamstress is one of the elements that can allow the reader to identify Beatrice’s character and true personality. This profession helps her to maintain strong and affectionate relationships with her clients. Therefore, in the interview she says that



she calls her clients “my girls” and her clients call her “mother” [126]. Although Beatrice has never been married so far, she has children and her children are her clients. In short, through her work as a bridal seamstress, Beatrice is able to achieve the most glorious and respectable name “mother”, which substitutes for the tortures she experienced in the past.

During years Beatrice made a living by sewing dresses to “her girls” and feeling quite satisfied and proud of her job. When Beatrice says that she has to get retired soon, interviewer, Aline would be surprised and wants to know the reason why she would be retired soon. She simply comments that fatigue of escaping is the justification of her retiring. The author actually wants to tell the reader that Beatrice is not tired of making dresses, but living in constant fear. Beatrice believes that her torturer can find her easily because she sends notes to her “girls” when she moves (137). While making dresses she has to be in a close contact with her clients who buy her dresses and this creates a chance for her tormentor to reach her.

Beatrice’s indirect characterization reveals how the depth of past damage has a profound impact on her current life. Aline notes of Beatrice in the story “ In spite of her size she has a loud commanding voice, like someone who was accustomed to giving orders” [122]. In the story Beatrice is depicted as a tiny woman, however, this feature cannot make her a passive character rather an assertive and self-dependent strong individual. Beatrice tells to Alice “ In all that time, I’ve sewn every stitch myself. Never had anyone helping me. Never could stand anyone in my house for too long” [126]. This characterization can reveal how mature and tolerant she is. She has a strong perseverance, determination and tolerance that encourage readers to adopt these traits and never give up no matter what happens in life.

This analysis illustrates Edwidge Danticat’s masterful ability to subtly employ indirect characterization techniques to convey rich portraits of two Haitian diasporic women representing different generations—the traditional elderly seamstress Beatrice versus contemporary young journalist Aline, while also using several objects and elements to describe major trauma within Beatrice implicitly. While seemingly opposites, the two women share connection through common Haitian heritage and traumatic national history. Elderly Beatrice harbors intense memories of brutality from decades past while such knowledge is masked for Aline. Danticat’s rich indirect characterization suggests pain endured under the Duvalier regime leaves a lasting impact on Beatrice life and how she manages to create a new Beatrice that she is now.

**Conclusion.** In “The Bridal Seamstress” short story within *The Dew Breaker* collection, acclaimed Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat masterfully uses indirect literary characterization techniques and motifs to subtly convey rich, complex portraits of two Haitian diasporic women representing different generations and define a true character of the protagonist, Beatrice. Analysis of contrasting details regarding elderly bridal seamstress Beatrice Saint Fort of Queens versus twenty-two-year-old journalism intern Aline Cajuste of Florida reveals them not simply opposing characters who lived in different regimes but main differences in their characters, behaviours and attitudes towards life. The formal, slowly-paced, traditional Beatrice retains deep scars from brutal treatment by a Duvalier regime paramilitary in her youth. Several motifs such as a wedding dress, her clients and her profession are used to indirectly characterize a true personality of Beatrice. Alternatively, contemporary, alternative Aline exhibits the impatience and curiosity of youth while remaining ignorant of national-scale trauma that Beatrice experienced.

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