

The Sun Never Sets: Perseverance Through Persecution

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For most of the West, the term of persecution has been shifted from its intended use to something much more benign. While America laments and considers being asked to wear a cloth mask during a pandemic and labels this stripping of freedom to be persecution, a reader does not have to wander far to discover this is not the truth. Even in the first half of the 21st century, there are individuals, groups, and cultures who are not even asked of their opinion on life-changing, or potentially life-ending choices for themselves. Rather than simply raising one's hands and conceding to the powers-that-be, authors throughout ENG255 have provided substantial evidence to the importance of recognizing difficult times and striving with perseverance through them. In comparing Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (FOB), and Lu Wenfu's, "The Man from The Peddler's Family," ("Peddlers"), the character development of major characters illustrates the importance of perseverance, and not simply giving up during conflicts both internally and externally.

As life eagerly reminds us, sometimes choices are out of one's control. This can be seen both in FOB and in, "Peddlers," as characters from both of the stories struggle to find any semblance of joy in a world that would rather they not exist. For FOB, Amabelle, a Haitian native living in the Dominican Republic (DR), fights for her life through the Parsley Massacre, a traumatic week at the end of 1943. For, "Peddlers," the reader is introduced to a friendly salesman named Zhu Yuanda who is beaten and partially exiled through China's Cultur-

al Revolution between the 1960's and 1970's. Both of these characters explore how surviving hardships and growing from them, and provide strategies for self-improvement through perseverance.

Amabelle and many of the characters she interacts with in FOB are terrorized by the DR's usage of propaganda, xenophobia, and violence against Haitians living there (Danticat 96, 133). While some of the interactions with external forces are stronger than others, such as Fr. Romaine's capture and mental-torture, all of the characters are affected by this Massacre. Even with this information, the two the reader is able to follow the most intimately are Yves and Amabelle. The pair arrive in Haiti and begin their new life, and the differences in their coping becomes evident as Yves begins farming, and Amabelle begins contemplating alone in a property they live together in (270). Both characters begin reconciling their external pressures within themselves by speaking of, "dead seasons," one is handled by Yves' constant toiling to remain absent-minded to process the horrific events of the Massacre, while Amabelle's is much more internal, finding joy in activities and relationships, but feeling as though she is in, "never ending night" (263-265). Unfortunately, these external shifts are not isolated events, and happen throughout the world.

In Wenfu's, "Peddlers," rapid, external conflict appears to Zhu, a village's food-seller, as he is eventually beaten, his home raided, and is sent away for being a Capitalist during China's Cultural Revolution. During the story, we see Zhu begin as a jovial salesman, only to

receive a formal citation from the government authority, being threatened that the Chinese Community Party (CCP) will destroy anything that, “smacks of Capitalism” (Wenfu 201). These threats rise to fruition as Zhu is exiled from his home-village and sent outward to find a way to live (208). Zhu, however, seems more jovial than either Amabelle or Yves through external pressures, being both friendly with those who reported his peddling stand, as well as after being injured and sent to a new village for work. This can be seen in his humor, as even being prosecuted for profiteering, he simply winks and promises to, “be a little smarter next time” (203). While these are examples of external expressions of trauma, all three characters begin to understand perseverance in a different way.

For Yves in FOB, his internal trauma is eerily silent, likely due to Amabelle and his’ relationship over the years since the Massacre, as Amabelle thinks, “[her] mere presence reminds him of a great betrayal” (Danticat 270). Seeing almost always working, Yves appears to have created himself into an automaton, simply too busy to think about what he has gone through. Amabelle, however, can be seen constantly considering and contemplating her calamities. In remembering Sebastien, Amabelle laments that, “[The] past is more like flesh than air,” showing that her past has become intertwined with her, and her drive to be at peace with the new addition is insatiable (281). This is a situation that Zhu finds himself in during China’s Cultural Revolution.

While a revolution happens around Zhu in, “Peddlers,” an internal interaction was fermenting between the protagonist, Gao, and Zhu. The two had a very close relationship in the beginning of the story, but tensions quickly arose as seeing eye-to-eye would not be possible. Despite the wry demeanor of Zhu, it can be argued that the arguments between both characters suggest that Zhu cares deeply for Gao, and may even be attempting to show a new per-

spective to the cadre. Rather than letting feelings of contempt, such as the potential of Gao being the one who reported Zhu, he continues to remain upbeat to the best of his ability, perhaps to remain stoic for his family’s sake (Wenfu 204-205). What these relationships can teach the reader is that being kind and open-minded can be difficult when coupled with hard times, but is entirely possible, as we see through Amabelle.

During the last quarter of the book, managing about 30 years of Amabelle’s life, the reader finds closure at the final three chapters in FOB. She finds this in three distinct ways: by confronting Señora Valencia, by coming to terms with Sebastien’s death, and with finding peace within herself. All three of these situations involve both internal and external conflicts being resolved through perseverance, as can be seen with the interrogation in order to simply see Señora (Danticat 296). While it may be considered an easier idea to simply give up, she remains steadfast until the very last sentence of finding her own dawn (310). This process of reconciliation is not entirely supported, however, as author Nadège Clitandre writes for the *Journal of Haitian Studies* in the fall of 2001. In her article, titled, “Body and Voice as Sites of Oppression,” she believes that the symbolism of completion is an allusion to the suicide of Amabelle in her final riverbank scene, being unable to live in a world of so much trauma (Clitandre 46). In my own opinion, this concept would challenge the entire theme of Amabelle’s survival from water as a child, and reinforces her finding of peace: nothing in this world may break her any more (Danticat 143). Similarly to Amabelle being made whole, Zhu has a similar situation happen to him in, “Peddlers.”

With the limited information about Zhu, the only progression we see in his character comes from the relationship between Zhu and Gao, as well as his reaction to returning home. What is interesting about their relationship is that both parties attempt to reconcile, and both

have as much right to deny the other. This is seen through Gao saving one of Zhu's heirlooms, and with Zhu returning to discuss life with Gao (Wenfu 211). While both may have resented one another, both have shown personal growth in being able to have a cigarette and discuss with each other what their life plans are in a way more intimate than simple banter. Because of Zhu's overall attitude throughout the story, it seems that his attitude towards life may be more cavalier than most, seeing laughter, humor, and the performance of selling items as part of his own internal-processing. In a report written for Lesley University, Alison Landoni explores using role-playing and humor with patients for therapy in her article titled "A Laughing Matter." In her conclusion, she writes, "[in] understanding that [the patient's] perspective matters, they transform their world into a laughing matter" (Landoni 29). For Zhu, life may have seemed so backwards that all one

may do is laugh and try their best.

In conclusion, this cadre of characters provide evidence of both internal and external pressures against them, as well as practical solutions to persevere through life. As Westerners, the narrative is created to avoid pain, and to simply medicate until the pain is no longer relevant, but these beautiful stories provide a greater truth: the experiences of life, good or bad, create stronger, more empathetic people to make the world a grander place to live in. Even those the world rejects, such as FOB's Pwofese, seen as a madman to everyone but himself, continues to be a beacon of hope for Amabelle and myself in his blessed words, "'Grass won't grow where I stand'" (Danticat 284).. As the decade of the 2020's begins to reveal itself, there will be challenges for everyone, but characters and writers of the past have endured, and invite others not only to endure, but to thrive.

WORKS CITED

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