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Reconstructive Textual Surgery in Edwidge Danticat's Krik? Krak! and The Dew Breaker

Judith Misrahi-Barak

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A high-contrast, black and white close-up portrait of Edwidge Danticat. She is looking slightly to the left of the frame with a thoughtful expression. Her hair is short and dark. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her face. A teal vertical bar is on the left side of the cover.

The Bloomsbury Handbook to **EDWIDGE DANTICAT**

Edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Nadège T. Clitandre

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THE BLOOMSBURY HANDBOOK TO
EDWIDGE DANTICAT

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	ix
I Literary Beginnings	1
Editors' Introduction: A Literary Life and Legacy: Danticat's Writerly Inheritances	3
<i>Jana Evans Braziel and Nadège T. Clitandre</i>	
1 "All Geography Is within Me": Writing Beginnings, Life, Death, Freedom, and Salt	11
<i>Edwidge Danticat</i>	
2 Interview with Edwidge Danticat	19
<i>Nadège T. Clitandre</i>	
II On Violence and Violated Bodies: Biopolitics in Danticat's Texts	39
3 Reconstructive Textual Surgery in Danticat's <i>Krik? Krak!</i> and <i>The Dew Breaker</i>	41
<i>Judith Misrahi-Barak</i>	
4 "I Might Lose All My Life": <i>Brother, I'm Dying</i> and (Black) Immigration Discourse in the United States	63
<i>Myriam J. A. Chancy</i>	
5 Alleys, Capillaries, Thorns: The Violated Terre-Natale of Ville Rose	81
<i>Jana Evans Braziel</i>	
III On Death and Dying: Necropolitics in Danticat's Texts	99
6 Losing Your (M)Other: Danticat's Narratives of Un/Belonging and Un/Dying	101
<i>Simone A. James Alexander</i>	
7 <i>Lòt bò dlo</i>: Producing Haitian Spaces of Death and Diaspora in Danticat's <i>The Dew Breaker</i>	121
<i>Anne Brüske</i>	
8 Death and the Maiden: Writing Death in Danticat's Fiction	145
<i>Marie-José Nzengou-Tayo</i>	

Contents

IV TIFIS AK Fanm, Girls and Women	159
9 “Somebody, Anybody Sing a Black Girl’s Song ...”: Danticat and Haitian Girlhood <i>Régine Michelle Jean-Charles</i>	161
10 The Good Daughter: Danticat’s Migrating Memories <i>Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw</i>	177
11 “I Am the One Telling It”: Resilient Children, Familial Bonds, and Haitian Heritage in Danticat’s Picture Books <i>Cara Byrne</i>	189
V ECRI Angaje: Political Writing: Danticat as Public Intellectual	209
12 Haiti Faces Difficult Questions Ten Years after a Devastating Earthquake <i>Edwidge Danticat</i>	211
13 <i>Create Dangerously: A Poetics of Writing as Memorial Art; the Text as Echo Chamber</i> <i>Anja Bandau</i>	213
14 Haiti’s Past, Present, and Uncertain Future: Danticat’s <i>New Yorker</i> Column as Platform for Public Intellectualism <i>Megan Feifer and Maia Butler</i>	231
VI Food, Haiti, and Haitian Culinary/Literary Inheritances	241
15 Edwidge Danticat’s Kitchen History <i>Valérie Loichot</i>	243
16 “A People Do Not Throw Their Geniuses Away”: Danticat’s “Kitchen Poet” Literary Antecedents <i>Wilson C. Chen</i>	267
17 Scattering and Gathering: Danticat, Food, and (the) Haitian Experience(s) <i>Robyn Cope</i>	283
VII Theoretical Approaches	303
18 Sea, Stone, Sky, and Cemetery: Vodou’s Divine Nature and Religious Archetypes in Danticat’s <i>Krik? Krak!</i> and <i>After the Dance</i> <i>Kyrah Malika Daniels</i>	305
19 “So Much Had Fallen into the Sea”: An Ecocritical Approach to Danticat’s <i>Claire of the Sea Light</i> <i>Kristina S. Gibby</i>	347

	Contents
20 “Aha!”: Danticat and Creolization	365
<i>Carine Mardorossian</i>	
21 Memory and the Possibilities of the Short Story Sequence in <i>Krik? Krak!</i>	375
<i>W. Todd Martin</i>	
VIII Haiti, The Dominican Republic, and Transnational Hispaniola	387
22 “Neither Strangers nor Friends”: Transnational Hispaniola and the Uneven Intimacies of <i>The Farming of Bones</i>	389
<i>John D. Ribó</i>	
23 “Walk Too Far in Either Direction and People Speak a Different Language”: Navigating Hispaniola in Danticat’s <i>The Farming of Bones</i>	405
<i>Ramón Ant. Victoriano-Martínez</i>	
IX Critical Sources	415
Bibliography of Writings by Edwidge Danticat	417
Bibliography of Literary Criticism on Edwidge Danticat	421
Notes on Contributors	441
Index	449

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PART II
ON VIOLENCE AND VIOLATED
BODIES: BIOPOLITICS IN DANTICAT'S TEXTS

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CHAPTER 3

RECONSTRUCTIVE TEXTUAL SURGERY IN DANTICAT'S *KRIK? KRAK!* AND *THE DEW BREAKER*

Judith Misrahi-Barak

More than twenty-five years elapsed between the publication of “Children of the Sea” and “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” in the short story collection *Krik? Krak!* (1991) and that of “Without Inspection” in *Everything Inside* (2019). Célianne, gang raped by the *Tontons Macoutes*, tries to disfigure herself by inflicting razor cuts to her face. Once she discovers she is pregnant, she flees Haiti, hoping to obtain refugee status in the United States. She becomes one of the “Children of the Sea,” just like the young man who is the narrator of the story. In “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” an unnamed woman, whose female body is vividly described in the story, is the narrator’s mother who survived the 1937 “Parsley” Massacre on the Haitian–Dominican border. A survivor once but not twice, she remains unnamed in “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” but can be identified as Défilé by the reader in another story in the collection. She was also persecuted, then jailed, by the *Tontons Macoutes* many years later. The male body that is falling into a cement chute in the story “Without Inspection,” is that of Arnold, a Haitian refugee who entered the United States “Without Inspection,” as the title suggests, and thus condemned to remaining undocumented. It takes him “six and a half seconds to fall five hundred feet.”

Whether it is Célianne’s on a refugee boat, Défilé’s in a prison yard, or Arnold’s on a construction site, the bodies are used and abused, commodified, separated on either side of the Atlantic Ocean and pulled apart, transformed, tortured and scarred, denied their freedom, or made absent to themselves. The very process of leaving and arriving, of leaving and never arriving, of forever migrating, of always remembering and already forgetting inscribes itself in the body of the characters and in the reader’s relation to them. In the first two short stories, both Célianne and Défilé are seen through the eyes of either the male narrator of “Children of the Sea” or those of the female narrator of “Nineteen Thirty-Seven.” Neither speaks for themselves; neither can be granted their own voice. In the third one, voice and perspective are disjointed. The reader sees through the character-focalizer eyes of Arnold, one of the Haitian “boat people” who has landed in the United States without meeting with an immigration officer upon arrival, but Arnold’s voice is not to be heard directly; the narrative remains locked in the third person.

Bodies haunt Edwidge Danticat’s short stories and inhabit all their cracks; they bear the marks of the traumatic Haitian past and those of the traumatic American present, one reverberating the other. They become a historically scripted text, a site of oppression, dispossession, and violation, left as an open wound, floating in limbo spaces, drowning or attempting to fly, erased and washed away, assaulted by crises of epilepsy, maimed by laryngectomies, plagued by phantom limb pain, shattered by nightmares. Bodies often appear in Danticat’s narratives as what one—the master, the powerful, the sovereign, the dictator, or any other oppressor—has

power *upon*, not what creates its own agency or has power *over* anything, or anyone. Excluded from the nation-state, stripped of their political rights, of any form of citizenship, they are often reduced to what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life” (*Homo Sacer*), life as it takes shape in the natural cycle (*zôè*) and not as it is organized in the political context of a human group (*bios*). Danticat animates the tension between the bodies that have power and the ones that do not. Through their very suffering and destitution, Célianne, Défilé, and Arnold epitomize the power *over* life that shackles the power *of* life.

Yet, Célianne and Défilé, if not Arnold, have a lingering presence in the short stories they dwell in. They are mentioned here and there; they keep reappearing. If they are to be interpreted only as suffering and obliterated bodies, why are they made to bob up about the text, as if refusing to go down once and for all? What is it about those bodies that is shown as still resisting, and always already resisting? They are not the only ones either who are lost and found. A whole host of characters echo each other, reverberate, call, and respond to one another. Such reflections seem to be facilitated by the very format of the short stories, those shards of fiction that assemble and reflect, absorb the obscurity, and bounce the light back. How is the reader to understand the sophisticated complexity of the tension between what the text *says* at its surface and what it *does* underneath?

This chapter thus seeks to determine what exactly happens *in* the short stories and *between* them that breathes new life into what has been ravaged, forging a new space of living that allows Haitian voices to recompose themselves and come together, converting the interdictions they have suffered into what April Shemak calls “inter-diction.”¹ The corpus I address here includes *Krik? Krak!* (1991) and *The Dew Breaker* (2004), two collections that bring together short stories that take place in Haiti and/or in the United States, or in-between, with brief references to the novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and to the short story “Without Inspection” published first in the *New Yorker* (2018).

Using the framework of biopolitics, and particularly Foucault’s “docile bodies” and what he calls the “disciplines” (“Les Corps dociles,” *Surveiller et punir*, 1975), this chapter explores the traction between the violence that is described in Danticat’s short stories and the dynamics of the text whose very elasticity opposes and contradicts the destructive forces it denounces. While it first posits the centrality of the traumatized and tortured body in Danticat’s short stories, it eventually examines how that body is simultaneously dismantled, reassembled, and reconstructed as a textual body. The narrative of abuse and violence, pain and death, within or without the frame of the migrating experience, authorizes the reconstruction of the self in between the cracks of the text, thus bringing about the possibility of a reembodied self. Going against the endless repetition of the cycle of violence, the feeling of homelessness, insecurity, shame, and alienation, the interstices between the stories and the collections generate what could be called a habitable space, the process of connecting the shining of a torch to the process of becoming.

¹April Shemak, *Asylum Speakers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 46–7.

Biopolitics 1: The Tortured Body, the Body in Servitude

“Nineteen Thirty-Seven” does not take place in 1937. But the shadows of the “Parsley” Massacre hover over it ominously. The female narrator was born during the massacre of October 1937 planned by Generalissimo Trujillo to extirpate the Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic: “My mother had escaped El Generalissimo’s soldiers, leaving her own mother behind. From the Haitian side of the river, she could still see the soldiers chopping up *her* mother’s body and throwing it into the river along with many others.”² The young woman visits her mother who was jailed many years later by the *Tontons Macoutes*, along with other women, the purpose of such arbitrary incarceration being to terrorize the people, and break them.

The short story, the second in the collection *Krik? Krak!*, contains the seeds of the novel *The Farming of Bones* to be published seven years later.³ The arrest of the narrator’s mother, whose name is, as the reader is told eventually in “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” Défilé, happens one morning, a short while after the two women have arrived in Port-au-Prince. As they are “new to the city,” they are more vulnerable and easily fall prey to the fear and anger of the population as it has been stirred up by the manipulations of Duvalier and his *Tontons Macoutes*:

One morning, when I woke up, Manman was gone. There was the sound of a crowd outside. When I rushed out I saw a group of people taking my mother away. Her face was bleeding from the pounding blows of rocks and sticks and the fists of strangers. She was being pulled along by two policemen, each tugging at one of her arms as she dragged her feet. The woman we had been staying with carried her dead son by the legs. The policemen made no efforts to stop the mob that was beating my mother.

“*Lougarou*, witch, criminal!” they shouted.⁴

This moment of kidnapping happens earlier chronologically; but whether the body is already locked up in jail or still outside, it is never free and only exists as dismembered body parts: Défilé’s “bleeding” face, “the fists of strangers” that are as many “rocks and sticks,” her arms that are “tugg[ed]” at, her feet that are “dragged.” Once in the jail the dehumanization process materializes in ever more horrifying ways as the women are made to lose their humanity and femininity: “she was like a snake, someone with no bones left in her body”; their shaved heads “make them look like crows, like men.”⁵

Beyond the short story the reader also hears the proleptic echoes of the description of the massacre in *The Farming of Bones* and the parallel that is made by Danticat between the violence perpetrated under Trujillo’s dictatorship and that under the Duvaliers:⁶

²Edwidge Danticat, “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” in *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Soho Press, [1991] 1995), 40.

³I explore *The Farming of Bones* in two earlier articles. The first one focuses on trauma and translation: “Exploring Trauma through the Memory of Text: Edwidge Danticat Listens to Jacques Stephen Alexis, Rita Dove and René Philoctète,” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 19, no. 1 (2013): 163–83. The other one adopts the frame of biopolitics: “Biopolitics and Translation: Edwidge Danticat’s Many Tongues,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 17, no. 3 and 4 (2014): 349–71. <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue,id=2781/>.

⁴Danticat, “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” 39.

⁵Ibid.

⁶François Duvalier (“Papa Doc,” 1957–71) was succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (“Baby Doc,” 1971–86).

Yves and I were shoved down onto our knees. Our jaws were pried open and parsley stuffed into our mouths. . . . I coughed and sprayed the chewed parsley on the ground, feeling a foot pound on the middle of my back. Someone threw a fist-sized rock, which bruised my lip and left cheek. My face hit the ground. Another rock was thrown at Yves.

The faces in the crowd were streaming in and out of my vision. A sharp blow to my side nearly stopped my breath. The pain was like a stab from a knife or an ice pick, but when I reached down there was no blood. Rolling myself into a ball, I tried to get away from the worst of the kicking horde. I screamed, thinking I was going to die. My screams slowed them a bit. But after a while I had less and less strength with which to make a sound. My ears were ringing; I tried to cover my head with my hands. My whole body was numbing; I sensed the vibration of the blows, but no longer the pain. My mouth filled with blood.⁷

The description of Amabelle's and Yves's bodies harks back to that of Défilé in "Nineteen Thirty-Seven." The bodies are reduced to knees, jaws, feet, lips, and cheeks, to the parts that are thrashed. The face that is hit seems almost detached from the body it belongs to. "The pounding blows of rocks and sticks and the fists of strangers" that had left Défilé reeling in "Nineteen Thirty-Seven" find their extension in *The Farming of Bones* in the visualization of the "fist-sized rock" thrown at Amabelle. Reduced to the ears, the head, the hand, or the mouth, the adjective "whole" is made null and void as it is paired with the "numbing" of that same "whole body," one that can only "sense the vibration of the blows" but is not alive enough to feel "the pain."

Both descriptions in the short story and in the novel also anticipate "Without Inspection" and Arnold's "free fall." His body is "slammed into the cement mixer" and "tossed inside a dark blender full of grout" (two verbs that are not generally used for a human being), ultimately reduced to a mouth and a nose "trying to inhale."⁸ If *The Farming of Bones* focuses directly on the Parsley Massacre and the twenty years following it while "Nineteen Thirty-Seven" pivots on the "post-memory" generation after the massacre,⁹ both texts echo each other and pulsate together. "Without Inspection" stages the immigrant's body, not as it is expelled from the host country or as it is unable to dwell in its own country but as it cannot be accepted in the host country.

All three texts underline the centrality of the tormented body in Danticat's writing. Whether it is persecuted and victimized in the home country, or persecuted and victimized for being what Shemak calls "peripheral migrants,"¹⁰ or hovering in an undocumented, indeterminate space between countries, the body is always traumatized, exploited; it always bears the marks

⁷Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (London: Abacus, 1998), 193–4.

⁸Edwidge Danticat, "Without Inspection," in *Everything Inside* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), e-book (94 percent, location 2450 of 2607).

⁹I am using Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" as one that

characterizes the experience of those who . . . have grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration. It describes as well the relationship of the second generation to the experiences of the first—their curiosity and desire, as well as their ambivalences about wanting to own their parents' knowledge. (Hirsch 2001: 12)

¹⁰Shemak, *Asylum Speakers*, 165.

of the suffering it has gone through, forever remaining a ghostly presence. Be they maids, cane cutters, or illegal construction workers as seen in the three examples above, Haitian bodies are often shown as they are employed to fill poorly paid or dangerous jobs nobody else wants, not the Dominicans, not the North Americans.

The protagonists of *The Farming of Bones* are the direct heirs of the field slaves: they are “corporeally marked.”¹¹ The name of one of the characters in *The Farming of Bones*, Kongo, is a testimony to his African origin and his “map of scars on his muscular back”¹² to the number of years he has been working in the cane fields, not a slave *stricto sensu* but definitely in servitude. Sebastian’s body, loved by Amabelle, is stigmatized by the cane: “the cane stalks have ripped apart most of the skin on his shiny black face, leaving him with crisscrossed trails of furrowed scars” and his “palms have lost their lifelines to the machetes that cut the cane.”¹³ The women’s bodies are also damaged by their work in the fields as much as by the massacre: “Among the oldest women one was missing an ear. Two had lost fingers. One had her right cheekbone cracked in half, the result of a runaway machete in the fields.”¹⁴

The machete symbolically connects the fieldwork during slavery, the cane cutting work that Haitians do in the Dominican Republic to earn a meager living, and the Parsley Massacre. It is the object that sustains life and the one that strikes it out. If Kongo and Sebastian recall the field slaves, Amabelle summons up the domestic slave, tied to the master’s house. Before the massacre, even though her body is not scarred, Sebastian remarks as he undresses her how it is identified with her position as a domestic servant: “Your clothes cover more than your skin,” he says. “You become this uniform they make for you. Now you are only you, just the flesh.”¹⁵

Défilé, Amabelle, and Arnold, and now Sebastian and Kongo, introduce the reader to the myriad ways Danticat writes Haitian bodies as the “visual and palpable testaments to their oppression” and how they are “the material reminders, historical markers in a sense, of [the] attempt to obliterate them.”¹⁶ And when they are not the “material reminders” of historical violence or state control, the bodies are still fantasized as potentially falling under blows. The rocks and sticks and fists that Défilé and Amabelle had fallen under in “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” or in *The Farming of Bones* are also summoned back in such a story as “Night Talkers” (in *The Dew Breaker*). Dany comes back to Haiti to visit his Aunt Estina, whom he has not seen since he settled in New York ten years before, after the fire that caused his parents’ death and his aunt’s blindness. He comes back to Haiti of his own accord in the hope to tell his aunt that, in New York, he saw the man responsible for the fire. But the story also stages another young man who was deported back to Haiti after he killed his violent father and served a prison sentence in the United States: “Claude was probably in his late teens, too young, it seemed, to have been expatriated twice, from both his native country and his adopted land.”¹⁷ More American than Haitian, Claude imagines people will throw stones at him upon his forced return:

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Danticat, *Farming of Bones*, 62.

¹³Ibid., 1.

¹⁴Ibid., 61.

¹⁵Ibid., 2.

¹⁶Shemak, *Asylum Speakers*, 167. A substantial part of April Shemak’s third chapter in *Asylum Speakers* focuses on *The Farming of Bones* (157–76) and is extremely enlightening. Her first chapter on refugee narratives also includes illuminating pages on “Children of the Sea” (72–7).

¹⁷Edwidge Danticat, “Night Talkers,” in *The Dew Breaker* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 100.

“When I first got here,” he continued, “I thought I’d get stoned. I mean, I thought people would throw rocks at me, man. Not the other kind of stones. I mean, coming out of New York, then being in prison in Port for three months because I had no place to go, then finally my moms, who didn’t speak to me for the whole time I was locked up, came to Port and hooked me up with some family up here.”¹⁸

Claude is forced back to a native land that he has left and does not know anymore. He knows it so little that he is obsessed with the possibility of his own destruction at the hands of his (former) fellow citizens.

In “Monkey Tails,” set between February 7, 1986, and February 7, 2004, after the destitution of Baby Doc, Rosie is another instance of the commodified bodies that are ensconced in the stories. Contrary to Claude, who features in the dialogue and is listened to by Dany and the reader, Rosie’s voice is never heard. A *restavèk*, she is remembered by Michel, the 30-year-old narrator whose wife is expecting and who recollects the time when he was 12 and in love with Rosie, “a distant cousin [his] mother had summoned from the provinces to do such things as cook and wash and sweep under the beds, when she’d promised Rosie’s poor peasant parents that she’d be sending her to school.”¹⁹ If Rosie belongs to that “crowd of maids, menservants, and indentured children, *restavèks*,” Michel is also one of them, called upon by Monsieur Christophe who is in need of “more hands” to work at his water station.²⁰ Michel, the “outside” child of Monsieur Christophe, still finds it painful, thirty years later, to “be reminded that [he] had a father who lived and worked so close to [him] and still didn’t call [him] his son.”²¹

More than forty years after the publication of *Surveiller et punir* (1975), Foucault’s masterful analyses of the disciplinary processes at work in societies that exert control over people’s bodies to coerce them remain highly pertinent and enlightening.²² The measures that had become, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, what he terms the “disciplines,” force individuals into a relation of subjection to the central authority. In the chapter entitled “Les corps dociles” (“Docile bodies”), Foucault emphasizes the different practices that allow the state or the institutional authority to manage the population through the control of their bodies. Through these “disciplines,” a relation of “docilité-utilité” (docility-utility) is implemented.²³ Whether it is through the direct appropriation of the body as a commodity (slavery) or a relation of constant domination (domesticity) or submission (vassalage), bodies will bear the marks of this control and coercion. But the “disciplines,” in Foucault’s conception, are different from slavery, domesticity, or vassalage in that they aim to obtain the same effects with less obvious violence.

In *The Farming of Bones* and the short stories I have mentioned so far, economic exploitation as well as political and ethnic domination is what constitutes the complex web of domination, appropriation, submission, and vassalage in which the characters are enmeshed, caught up

¹⁸Ibid., 101.

¹⁹Edwidge Danticat, “Monkey Tails,” in *The Dew Breaker* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 142.

²⁰Ibid., 145, 146.

²¹Ibid., 159.

²²This aspect is also examined in Judith Misrahi-Barak, “Biopolitics and Translation: Edwidge Danticat’s Many Tongues,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 17, nos. 3 and 4 (2014): 349–71. Available online at the following URL address: <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-issue?id=2781/>.

²³Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), “Les corps dociles,” 161.

as they are in a Foucauldian “microphysique du pouvoir” (microphysics of power). Whether these bodies are actually stoned, finally obliterated, eventually erased, or not, these protagonists encapsulate the ways the Haitian body is subjugated and controlled by an authoritarian power, in the context of slavery or dictatorship, state control, or simply through the persistence of internalized oppression and economic exploitation.

Many short stories feature the physical and psychological brutality the individual is subjected to in what can be called “a world overcoded by highly policed borders and limitations.”²⁴ Sometimes the symbolization of the space the body is physically restricted to is enough to connote this power held over the body and its ability to sustain itself and live on. The individual is constrained to a space they have been coerced into, that gradually shrinks and closes in upon them. A few instances will have to suffice.

“Children of the Sea” takes place after the 1991 military coup that forced Jean-Bertrand Aristide out of power and pushed thousands of Haitians onto small boats, in the hope they would reach the US coast. The young man, who was involved in a dissident radio program, flees Haiti to save his life from the *Tontons Macoutes*, hoping to obtain refugee status in the United States. The young woman remains in Haiti but loses her freedom of movement when she is internally displaced with her family as they flee the capital. The story is composed of the letters they write to each other.²⁵ It provides the first image in the collection of the persecution individuals endure, of the tightness of the space they are reduced to, of its compression into near-nothingness: “I don’t know how long we’ll be at sea. There are thirty-six other deserting souls on this little boat with me.”²⁶ No space is tinier than a raft indeed, where not even the bare necessities of life are available and life itself hangs in the balance:

I can’t tell exactly how far we are from [America]. We might be barely out of our own shores. There are no borderlines on the sea. The whole thing looks like one. I cannot even tell if we are about to drop off the face of the earth. Maybe the world is flat and we are going to find out, like the navigators of old . . . When I do manage to sleep, I dream that the winds come of the sky and claim us for the sea. We go under and no one hears from us again.²⁷

The refugee raft is the very symbol of precarious space, of a space that cannot be *documented*, a speck lost in the immensity of the sky and sea, a straw that can be carried off in the wind, annihilating the lives it carries on board.

In “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” the journey Défilé’s daughter makes to visit her mother in prison takes her from Ville Rose to Port-au-Prince. It starts in the open air, on “the roads to the city [that] were covered with sharp pebbles only half buried in the thick dust”²⁸ that take

²⁴Nick Nesbitt, “Diasporic Politics: Danticat’s Short Works,” in *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader’s Guide*, ed. Martin Munro (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 79.

²⁵It is interesting some critics like Nick Nesbitt speak of “diary entries” while others like April Shemak speak of “letters.” It is certainly up to the readers to reach their own interpretations of these pages written in different typesets depending on which protagonist is speaking. Whether we read them as diary entries or letters, they are never read in the diegesis by the protagonist they are addressed to—only by the reader.

²⁶Edwidge Danticat, “Children of the Sea,” in *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Soho Press, 1995), 3.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 6.

²⁸Danticat, “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” 33.

her to the fort. After reaching the “yellow prison building . . . as large and strong as in the days when it was used by the American marines who had built it,”²⁹ the space seems to contract, it grows smaller and smaller as the narrator arrives at the prison yard, and then at the cell in which the women have been locked. The narrator’s mother’s body has also shrunk, as if to fit into the restricted space she has been shoved into: “My mother has grown even thinner since the last time I had seen her.”³⁰ Her body functions have also been reduced to the minimum, her body has shrunk, and her clothes have become too large:

I held out the fried pork and plantains to her. She uncovered the food and took a peek before grimacing, as though the sight of the meat nauseated her. Still she took it and put it in a deep pocket in a very loose fitting white dress that she had made herself from the cloth that I had brought her on my last visit.

. . .

Manman pulled the meat and plantains out of her pocket and started eating a piece to fill the silence. Her normal ration of food in the prison was bread and water, which is why she was losing weight so rapidly.

“Sometimes the food you bring me, it lasts for months at a time,” she said. “I chew it and swallow my saliva, then I put it away and then chew it again. It lasts a very long time this way.”³¹

Eating does not fill the stomach, it fills “the silence.” Food does not nourish the body: it is to be placed in pockets and sucked upon eventually. *Défilé* reminds the reader of *Célianne* in “Children of the Sea.” The space of the boat is fused with *Célianne*’s body, just as the prison yard and the cell were fused with *Défilé*’s shrinking body, gradually erased out of existence. The boat is leaking, and so is *Célianne*’s body: “Some water starting coming into the boat in the spot where [*Célianne*] was sleeping. There is a crack at the bottom of the boat that looks as though, if it gets any bigger, it will split the boat in two. The captain cleared us aside and used some tar to clog up the hole.”³² The boat is leaking, water is getting in. When *Célianne*’s waters have broken, she is leaking as well and her body will “split . . . in two,” like the boat. In the extract that featured at the beginning of this chapter, the hole in the boat and the hole out of which the baby will be born almost become one. Shemak writes about this “paralleling of birth and the leaky boat” to underline how “the boundaries of the boat and of the woman are crossed simultaneously so that the sea is configured as a kind of womb that is at once nurturing and deadly.”³³ She also reminds the reader of Glissant’s description of the slave ship as “both a generative and banishing space”:³⁴ “This boat is a womb, a womb abyss . . . This boat is your womb, a matrix, and yet it expels you.”³⁵ The boat at sea is always already a reference to the

²⁹Ibid., 35.

³⁰Ibid., 36.

³¹Ibid., 36, 38.

³²Danticat, “Children of the Sea,” 10.

³³Shemak, *Asylum Speakers*, 75.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵This passage from *The Poetics of Relation* is quoted by Shemak, 75, in the first very illuminating chapter of *Asylum Speakers* on refugee narratives. The original text from *Poétique de la Relation* is “Cette barque est une matrice, le gouffre-matrice. . . . Cette barque est ta matrice, un moule, qui t’expulse pourtant.” Edouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 18.

Middle Passage, where the commodified and tortured body could end up at the bottom of the ocean and become “food for fish”³⁶ or “food for sharks.”³⁷ The abused bodies of Défilé and Célianne, constrained in spaces that compress and oppress them, summon a third instance, the eponymous short story in *The Dew Breaker*. “The Dew Breaker” closes the collection and ties in with the first story in the collection, “The Book of the Dead.” I will return to this interstory connection but for the moment, I want to complete my analysis of how Danticat’s text emphasizes the Haitian body through the space it is granted or, rather, deprived.

The last story of the collection is organized in different sections, all of them combining the third-person narrative voice and an internal focalization. Three protagonists are pitted against each other: the torturer, whom the reader realizes is the father of Ka, the young female narrator of the first story of the collection, “The Book of the Dead”; the preacher who is tortured and killed in Fort Dimanche by the torturer but manages to wound and scar him for life; and Anne, the preacher’s epileptic sister who believes in the redeeming power of love and becomes the wife of the torturer, and Ka’s mother, to whom I also return later.

The reader understands from one of the torturer’s sections that his family had lost all their land soon after François Duvalier took power in 1957 and that his life from then on revolved around retribution and retaliation: “He had joined the Miliciens, the Volunteers for National Security, at nineteen,”³⁸ after his father had gone mad and his mother had left. As his power over people grows, so does his body:

“I volunteered to protect national security. Unfortunately, or fortunately as you like, this includes your own.”

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.³⁹

The sense of power is constructed through the amount of place that the body takes, or cannot take. When the preacher is kidnapped from his church in Bel-air, L’Eglise Baptiste des Anges, and shoved into the truck that takes him away,

A group of Miliciens piled on top of him. He raised his feet close to his chest as they shoved him from side to side, pounding rifle butts on random parts of his body. His face was now pressed against the metal undulations of the truck bed, boot soles and heels raining down on him, cigarette butts being put out in his hair, which sizzled and popped like tiny grains of rock salt in an open fire. He was hit with jolts of shock from what felt like portable electric devices pressed against the heels of his now bare feet.⁴⁰

The scene is a painful reminder of the massacre scene in *The Farming of Bones* and of the prison scene in “Nineteen Thirty-Seven.” The itemization of the body parts enhances the dehumanization and amplifies the impossible translation of the pain for the reader. When

³⁶David Dabydeen, *Turner: New and Selected Poems* (London: Cape, 1994), 1.

³⁷Fred D’Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 4.

³⁸Edwidge Danticat, “The Book of the Dead,” in *The Dew Breaker* (New York: Knopf), 191.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 211–12.

blindfolded, the preacher loses all notion of space and time, like the young man on the refugee raft earlier on: “He lost track of his own movements, his body cringing at every strike. . . . A shot was fired somewhere.”⁴¹ He is dragged out of the truck and pushed onto the concrete of the curb and again, the body is gradually taken apart:

With each yank forward, a little bit of him was bruised, peeled away. He felt as though he was shedding skin, shedding voice, shedding sight, shedding everything he’d tried so hard to make himself into, a well-dressed man, a well-spoken man, a well-read man. He was leaving all that behind now with bits of his flesh in the ground, morsel by morsel being scrapped off by pebbles, rocks, tiny bottle shards, and crack in the concrete.⁴²

Yet, there is something in the focus of the text that goes against this splitting apart. The internal focalization through the preacher battles against the third-person narrative voice that deprives the reader of the preacher’s direct, albeit mediated, voice. The traction between what the text *shows* and what it *says* grants it a paradoxical power, precisely that power that is being snatched away from the brutalized man. It is a productive tension located at the heart of the narrative.

Still blindfolded, the preacher is then pushed into the restricted space of the cell and is eventually taken to the interrogation room. The “death chamber” is in fact a “nine-by-twelve foot mustard-colored prison office.”⁴³ The chair the preacher is made to sit on “was much lower than the fat man’s desk, and it was obvious that the height and size of the chair were meant to make the preacher feel smaller than the fat man, who was a whole lot larger than most people anyway.”⁴⁴ The small size of the room is meant to make the preacher feel oppressed, dominated, threatened. It feels “as though it had been suddenly sealed shut.”⁴⁵ As the fat man “leans in,” “mov[es] closer,” and “grow[s] wider,” the chair the preacher is sitting on “squeak[s] underneath him and crashe[s], breaking the wooden legs into several pieces and dropping him on the floor.”⁴⁶ The displacement of the anticipated breaking of the preacher’s legs to the breaking of the “wooden legs” of the chair provides enough time and space for the preacher to grab one of the chair’s broken pieces and aim at his torturer:

He grabbed the piece of wood and aimed. He wanted to strike the fat man’s eyes, but instead the spiked stub ended up in the fat man’s right cheek and sank in an inch or so.

The fat man’s shock worked in his favor, for it allowed him a few seconds to slide the piece of wood down the fat man’s face, tearing the skin down to his jawline.⁴⁷

The reader remembers the scar on the cheek of Ka’s father in the first story of the collection, “The Book of the Dead.” Even if the father had already revealed he wasn’t the victim, as his daughter had believed all along her childhood, but the torturer, the revelation of the *how* of the scar is finally made in the last pages, once the imposition of brutal and callous force has

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., 213.

⁴³Ibid., 222, 223.

⁴⁴Ibid., 223.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., 224, 225.

⁴⁷Ibid., 226.

been displayed through the construction of the complex relationship of the body and the space it finds itself in. The “death chamber” of “The Dew Breaker” prolongs the prison yard of “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” and the refugee raft of “Children of the Sea.” It also proleptically announces the cement mixer of “Without Inspection.”

The abused and suffering body populates the stories of *Krik? Krak!* and *The Dew Breaker*. It is often reduced to a festering wound, a corpse, a scar. Or the image thereof. Only a few examples can be taken here. In the short story “Night Women” (1991), the female narrator’s first-person internal monologue revolves around her son as he sleeps while men come to her at night for sex. No scene of violence, no abduction, no body that appears to be *visibly* tortured or abused. Yet, the way the son is described as he slaps the mosquitoes that disturb his sleep is striking: “He always slaps the mosquitoes dead on his face without even waking. In the morning, he will have tiny blood spots on his forehead, as though he had spent the whole night kissing a woman with wide-open flesh wounds on her face.”⁴⁸ Even in a story that is apparently devoid of any intended physical violence, the “wide-open flesh wound” still stamps its mark: the body in Danticat’s narratives is never anodyne or unblemished; it always bears the mark of a trauma, one that is remembered, or one that is envisaged.

The live body can always unexpectedly turn into a dead body. In “The Missing Peace,” a 14-year-old Haitian girl, named Lamort (death) after her mother who died in childbirth, is guiding an American academic on the traces of her own mother who was killed years before. As Lamort takes Emilie Gallant to the mass burial site, they bump into soldiers who are getting rid of a body freshly murdered:

Two other soldiers passed us on their way to the field. They were dragging the blood-soaked body of a bearded man with an old election slogan written on a T-shirt across his chest: ALONE WE ARE WEAK. TOGETHER WE ARE A FLOOD. The guards were carrying him, feet first, like a breech birth.⁴⁹

In fact, the precise date is not given but, as Nick Nesbitt explains, the reader can recognize the context of the coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide since the slogan on the T-shirt is that of Aristide’s Lavalas party, recalling “the brutal aggression FRAPH members visited upon anyone openly calling for Aristide’s return after 1991.”⁵⁰ The bodies of the past that Lamort and Emilie are looking for are replaced by the bodies of the present, always quick to materialize.

Sometimes the body stops short of dying, one wonders how, but it goes on ailing and wailing, in silence or aloud. In “The Bridal Seamstress,” Aline Cajuste is an intern preparing an interview with Beatrice Saint Fort, a famous seamstress who makes wedding dresses for Haitian girls in Queens, New York, and is about to retire. Toward the end of the interview, Beatrice exposes the scarred soles of her feet and reveals how the Haitian prison guard (who now lives in the same neighborhood as she) had inflicted it to her:

Beatrice removed her open-toed sandals and raised her feet so Aline could see the soles of her feet. They were thin and sheer like an albino baby’s skin.

⁴⁸Edwidge Danticat, “Night Women,” in *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Soho Press, [1991] 1995), 84.

⁴⁹Edwidge Danticat, “The Missing Peace,” in *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Soho Press, [1991] 1995), 117.

⁵⁰Nesbitt, “Diasporic Politics,” 79.

“He asked me to go dancing with him one night,” Beatrice said, putting her feet back in her sandals. “I had a boyfriend so I said no. That’s why he arrested me. 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 road. 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.”⁵¹

Diaspora certainly offers refuge, an area protected from the persecution one was subjected to. Yet, as Brinda Mehta astutely analyzes, “it offers simultaneous asylum to economic and politically disenfranchised Haitian immigrants in America and the political henchmen responsible for persecuting them with impunity in Haiti.”⁵² While “dyaspora” is at the same time a space of protection and vulnerability, the body is this space where the memory of the past is inscribed in the present, encased in the scar that is scripted into the soles of our feet.

Always more damaged bodies invade the narrative, the ones produced by dictatorships, or by the sca(r)ring effects of destitution or migration. Repeated miscarriages and everyday abuse affect the female narrator of “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” so deeply that she adopts the corpse of a baby abandoned in the street, and looks after her as if she was still alive and her daughter. The reader is reminded of Célianne’s still-born baby but unlike the baby of “Children of the Sea” who is slipped into a liquid grave and immediately followed by her mother, the reader is made to watch little Rose’s decomposition until the moment when even her deranged but loving adoptive mother cannot bear the smells and sights of putrefaction: “I once had an uncle who bought pigs’ intestines in Ville Rose to sell at the market in the city. Rose began to smell like the intestines after they hadn’t sold for a few days.” A hole is dug among the gardenias. Not in the sea this time, in the earth. If Lamort finally adopts her mother’s name, Marie-Magdalène, and goes back to life in “The Missing Peace,” Rose will never travel to the city she is named after, nor will she ever smell (of) the flower her name evokes; however, like the body when it has to fight an infection, the narrative of trauma, of pain and death, produces its own antibodies. There is no “microphysics of power” without a *microphysics of life*, no power *over* life that does not come up against the power *of* life.

Biopolitics 2: Body and Text, Reconstructed

As has been shown above, the Haitian body in Danticat’s short stories is often displayed as it is in the grip of an authoritarian power, disciplined and subjugated, violated and broken. Scars are the reminders of such violence, of what remains scripted in the body itself, impossible to erase. The soles of her feet that Beatrice shows Aline in “The Bridal Seamstress,” “thin and sheer like an albino baby’s skin,” are one such reminder of a past Beatrice has carried with her to the not-so-safe diaspora.⁵³ The “blunt, rope-like scar that runs from [Ka’s] father right cheek down to the corner of his mouth” is “the only visible reminder of the year he spent in prison in Haiti.”⁵⁴ But the scar is not the only way the body makes the traces of a painful past perceptible, or expresses the impossibility to live or even survive. Danticat’s stories are replete

⁵¹Edwidge Danticat, “The Bridal Seamstress,” in *The Dew Breaker* (New York: Knopf), 131–2.

⁵²Brinda Mehta, *Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Women’s Writing* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 66.

⁵³Danticat, “Bridal Seamstress,” 131.

⁵⁴Danticat, “Book of the Dead,” 5.

with physical affections and wounds that are as many visible signs of suffering—appendicitis, blindness, and sleep talking in “Night Talkers”; laryngectomies in “Water Child,” reminding us of Joseph Dantica, Dantica’s own uncle in *Brother, I’m Dying*; muteness in “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” and in “Seven”; phantom pain in “Caroline’s Wedding”; epilepsy in “The Dew Breaker.” These are only a few instances of the impossibility to move away from the causes of trauma.

Yet, while the body evidences its suffering, and the Dew Breaker’s and Beatrice’s scars in *The Dew Breaker* are residual in the text and irradiate the other stories, it also demonstrates itself as still alive and fighting. Such affections and traumas that are made *manifest* by the body are, if one follows the definition of the word “manifest,” “clearly revealed to the eye, mind, or judgement.”⁵⁵ The multiple Latin and French etymology of the adjective reminds us that something is defined as *manifest* when it can be touched by the hand (*manus*), when it becomes palpable. The transitive verb *manifest* refers to the action of “making evident to the eye or to the understanding, to show plainly, to disclose, to reveal” but also “to prove or attest.” When they display and reveal the affections and traumas, Dantica’s narrative can thus easily become a *manifest*, “a public declaration, an open statement, a manifesto.” It shows not only how the body has suffered and been traumatized *but also* how it clings to life and puts up a fight—a *manifest* in all meanings of the word, particularly as far as the phantom limb pain in “Caroline’s Wedding” and epilepsy in “The Dew Breaker” are concerned as is going to be shown now.

Gracina, the first-person narrator of “Caroline’s Wedding” and Caroline’s sister, has just obtained her naturalization certificate and the whole story revolves around the accommodation of the change in the situation of the two young women and their position in the family. Gracina is becoming an American citizen and Caroline is getting married: it is thus a narrative of arrival and departure. As the elder daughter, Gracina used to be called the “‘misery baby,’ the offspring of [her] parents’ lean years . . . when they were living in a shantytown in Port-au-Prince and had nothing.”⁵⁶ Caroline, the younger daughter, the “New York child, the child who has never known Haiti,”⁵⁷ leaves home as a newly married woman. Eric is looked down upon by Caroline’s mother not only because he has a learning disability that affects his speech so much that she calls him “a retard” but also because he is a Bahamian, and so, a fiancé from “outside.”⁵⁸ In the mother’s eyes his major disability is that he is not Haitian. Gracina has finally arrived; she can finally stop feeling like “unclaimed property” and can settle down as an American citizen, albeit as “an indentured servant who has finally been allowed to join the family.”⁵⁹

Caroline, on the other hand, is ready to depart. Yet, additionally to everything that has been passed on to her (a few objects, stories, her parents’ memories, and her memories of her parents, their silences too), something in Caroline’s body will always keep her attached to Haiti even though she has never been there:

Caroline had been born without her left forearm. The round end of her stub felt like a stuffed dumpling as I squeezed it hello. After my mother was arrested in the sweatshop

⁵⁵Oxford English Dictionary online.

⁵⁶Edwidge Dantica, “Caroline’s Wedding,” in *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Soho Press, [1991] 1995), 189.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 183, 194, 161.

⁵⁹Ibid., 158, 214.

immigration raid, a prison doctor had given her a shot of a drug to keep her calm overnight. That shot, my mother believed, caused Caroline's condition. Caroline was lucky to have come out missing only one forearm. She might not have been born at all.⁶⁰

When Caroline is making the wedding preparations, she buys herself "a wedding present, . . . a robotic arm with two shoulder straps that controlled the motion of the plastic fingers"; she explains to her mother that she was having this "shooting pain in [her] stub," and it felt as if her arm was hurting. The doctor thought the prosthesis would help with her "phantom limb pain . . . , a kind of pain that people feel after they've had their arms or legs amputated."⁶¹ Her mother reminds her that her arm "was not cut off" from her.⁶² And when Caroline justifies the pain in her missing limb with the recent pressures she has been submitted to, her mother snaps back: "In that case, we all have phantom pain."⁶³ The mother was a direct victim of violent migration, and her daughter's body has been affected. Just like the scar that marks the body permanently, or the "port-wine mark shaped like Manhattan island" that shows on the back of Caroline's mother's neck, the disabled body in Danticat's short stories is the stigma that retains the past in the present.⁶⁴ It is the mark that keeps the past migration alive in the present, providing palpable, manifest evidence. In Mehta's words, "The past occupies a living present in a traumatic continuum."⁶⁵ Yet, Caroline's body has adjusted to her mother's trauma, by carrying the trace of the *shot* her mother received, physically integrating it in order to survive it, almost flaunting it. Caroline has transformed a space of death into "a space of transformation."⁶⁶ Caroline's and Beatrice's bodies make their histories *manifest*, and by doing so, they relocate themselves in a present that does not aim at abolishing the past, only at making it habitable in the present.

Anne, the preacher's sister who has married his torturer in "The Dew Breaker," has a strange way of inhabiting the present time and space. The epileptic crises that rack Anne's body manifest her inability to speak while at the same time give her body a way of expressing itself:

Even though it was pitch-black, she felt a slight pinch in both her eyes, another curtain of darkness settling in, further deepening the obscurity around her. Her face was growing progressively warmer, as though the candle she now so longed to light had already been ignited beneath the skin on her cheekbones. A high-pitched sound was ringing in her ears, like a monotonous flute, just as her nose was being bombarded with the sweet, lingering smell of frangipanis in bloom. Anticipating the convulsions to follow, she lowered herself to the ground and lay on her back, spreading her arms and legs apart. She imagined observing herself from somewhere high above, perhaps perched from the ceiling, watching herself on the cool cement floor, looking like a butterfly whose wings had been fractured, forcing it to set down and slowly die. Her breathing was shallow,

⁶⁰Ibid., 159

⁶¹Ibid., 198, 198–9.

⁶²Ibid., 199.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid., 166.

⁶⁵Mehta, *Notions of Identity*, 71.

⁶⁶Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 4. Quoted by Mehta, *Notions of Identity*, 76.

the pauses growing longer between each cycle. Her body stiffened and the inside of her mouth felt crowded, her tongue swelling and spreading out over her teeth, filling them with the briny taste of dirty seawater. Fragmented moments from her life were filing past her, event after event streaming by at high speed on the giant puppet screen she now imagined her mind to be: her younger brother's drowning, her stepbrother's departure from their seaside village, perhaps to avoid the waters that had taken her brother's life, their respective parents' death from either chagrin or hunger or both, her recent move to the city to join her older brother, his inability to stop speaking about his wife's death, which, it seemed, was not so unlike this death she was sure she was experiencing.⁶⁷

Contrary to the limbo space of Haitian migration examined by Shemak in *Asylum Speakers*, in which individuals keep hovering between countries and borders, at sea, departing but never arriving, the limbo space that emerges through Anne's epileptic fits creates a time and space where the body belongs only to itself, creating a time and space to be found nowhere else but then and there. The fit heightens the sensations; all the senses of sight ("obscurity"), sound ("high-pitched sound"), smell ("frangipanis"), taste ("briny taste of dirty seawater"), and touch ("tongue swelling," "cool cement floor") are more alert than usual. Anne is able to experience her body having a fit and to watch the fit as if it was happening to someone else ("imagined observing herself from somewhere high above," "watching herself"). The shallow breathing combined with the stiffening of her body makes the experience almost sexual, comparable to a *petite mort*—the world outside is annihilated and her body opens up to those "fragmented moments from her life . . . filing past her."⁶⁸ The choice of verbs (feel, deepen, grow, long, ring, spread, imagine, experience, etc.) underlines the "seizure" as more empowering than inhibiting.⁶⁹ Her body becomes hypersensitive, hyper-located, yet totally fluid and porous to the outside world, liberated from external, imposed or self-imposed, constraints and limitations.

As Mehta astutely analyzes, Anne's body becomes this "scripted text in which involuntary remembering . . . gives voice to unarticulated experiences," while this type of language "inscribes its physicality on the body in the form of Anne's epileptic fits as an uncensored speaking-in-multiple tongues. Consequently, epilepsy as a narrative trope becomes memory's performative language," or what Mehta calls "memoryspeak," transcending the materiality of the body.⁷⁰ Other bodies in the short stories *Speak*, Dany and his blind aunt, Estina, for instance, in "Night Talkers":

In the dark, listening to his aunt conduct entire conversations in her sleep, he realized that aside from blood, she and he shared nocturnal habits. They were both palannits, night talkers, people who wet their beds, not with urine but with words. He too spoke his dreams aloud in the night, to the point of sometimes jolting himself awake with the sound of his own voice. Usually he could remember only the very last words he spoke,

⁶⁷Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*, 215.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Danticat, *The Dew Breaker*, 221.

⁷⁰Mehta, *Notions of Identity*, 79, 80.

but remained with a lingering sensation that he had been talking, laughing, and at times crying all night long.⁷¹

After Estina's sudden death in her sleep, Dany wants to "keep Claude speaking, which wouldn't be so hard, since Claude was already one of them, a member of their tribe, . . . one of those who spoke their nightmares out loud . . . to himself as well as to others."⁷² What Judith Butler calls the "traumatic residue" is on its way to being purged through such involuntary remembering, involuntary speaking, and crying—not a redemption, not a purification either, just an attempted purgation.⁷³ Through epilepsy or night talking, the body is moving out of normative codes of behavior, of feeling and experiencing. By making the suffering *visible* and *audible*, it revisits the ways past and present can cohabit. From a site of dispossession and violation, the body becomes one of repossession and reclaiming.

There are many other ways the body can "muster up enough heat" to try and organize its resistance against what is being done to it and empower itself.⁷⁴ Quite a few stories foreground the most basic and essential ways one can sustain and protect oneself. Ingesting food is quite obviously one of them, even if it is sometimes the lack thereof that dominates, or if certain foods can also kill depending on the ways they are consumed or administered—Célianne in "Children of the Sea" is hardly ever seen as eating, Défilé in "Nineteen Thirty-Seven" sucks on the same morsels of fried pork and plantain for days on end, and the memory of parsley haunts the short story without a single mention of the cleansing herb that was force-fed to Haitians on the border. In "Without Inspection," the newly arrived and starving Arnold has been looking forward to eating breakfast burritos, but they make him sick and he has to throw up. The narrator of "Between the Pool and the Gardenias" goes to the market and cooks for her employees in Pétion-Ville but is unable to feed and sustain the baby she considers as hers, Rose. Food is available to everyone, except to the loved ones they would like to share it with most.

The sharing of food is one of the crucial elements that connect and hold the characters together as well as the text. In the "The Missing Peace," Emilie establishes a connection with Lamort the first time they meet by offering some lemonade and butter cookies, both following circuitous routes. Butter cookies had already been mentioned in the preceding short story, "Between the Pool and the Gardenias," but only in passing: it was the epitome of food children were lucky to have, when they could get them at all. In the "The Missing Peace," the lemonade was made by Lamort's grandmother for the paying guests she is hosting: it goes outside family and comes back to family, encompassing insiders and outsiders within the same loop. Moreover, Lamort believes the cookies are American, until Emilie tells her they are French. *Le Petit Ecolier* biscuits are indeed quintessentially French; it doesn't need any context to connote happy childhoods, afternoons of *gouters* and after-school activities in comfortable homes, in sharp contrast with the situation Lamort and Emilie find themselves in. Lamort eats one biscuit after another, until the box is empty, thus taking the American woman and herself, a Haitian girl, on a detour through the former French colonizing power, and drawing an imaginary line between America, France, and Haiti.

⁷¹Danticat, "Night Talkers," 98–9.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 120.

⁷³Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 38.

⁷⁴Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Vintage, 1996), 37.

Besides its nutritional properties, food also has healing and connecting properties: it sustains the body and the mind; it builds bridges. It is connected to living and surviving, just as much as to dying and departing. In Valérie Loichot's formulation, "food represents both a tool of survival and thriving in the world, as well as a constant torment."⁷⁵ This ambiguity, mostly to be found in the short stories set in a diasporic context, certainly shapes the protagonists' psyche and drives the narrative. Yet, how torment builds resilience is what Danticat's text seeks. As most diasporic people, Haitians migrating to the United States have always relied on the culinary to organize their own survival, or as Loichot puts it, "Haitians migrating to the United States constitute the privileged example of culinary survival in exile."⁷⁶

"Caroline's Wedding" provides another example of such "culinary survival" through the strong focus on food in general and "bone soup" in particular, cooked by the girls' mother whenever there is something to celebrate, ills to cure, or comfort to give. Food traditions, ingesting and digesting, and culinary practices bond the individual who has left the history and routes of their native land and their native community to the history and routes of the new community they are joining. Elisa Sobo's concept of "body-in-relation," used by Loichot, is in sharp contrast with the "autonomous, individual, and independent"⁷⁷ body that tends to be more Western. Food is what straps the individual to the group, "bodies to the earth,"⁷⁸ the present to the past. Eating, cooking, and sharing food is always one of the ways two people or a community can share togetherness, past or present. Food passes through the body and connects it to the earth and to the other; it "mend(s) disjointed communities and restore(s) the link to their original land."⁷⁹

In that respect, "Without Inspection" interestingly pulls together the image of the restaurant in Little Haiti in Miami and that of the food truck. The former is run by Darline, the rescuer of Arnold when he has almost drowned but falls out of the raft onto the beach (a reminder of "Ambiance Créole, the sole Haitian restaurant on the Upper West Side of Manhattan," run by Rézia, a former *restavèk* in "The Funeral Singer"). The latter, run by the Lopez brothers, is the symbol of the Cubans' success story. The Haitian restaurant provides another Little Haiti at the heart of Little Haiti; it is a tentatively secure place where Haitian-Americans and undocumented Haitians can find "cornmeal with red beans," "stewed codfish," and "boiling plantains."⁸⁰ The food truck is on the move, it easily inserts itself in the social fabric provisionally, here or there, and people can grab "a guava pastry and a cup of coffee"⁸¹ as they rush to where they have to be.

In many ways, food is only one of the many connectors in the short stories, all of them associated with the body's resilience and its capacity to take the individual beyond trauma. Other forms of orality such as songs, storytelling, or voices on the radio fulfill the same connecting function in Danticat's stories, as immaterial as food can be material, but as essential and vital. Voice is the other connecting trope of intergenerational and transnational transmission. Much

⁷⁵Valérie Loichot's chapter "Kitchen Narrative—Food and Exile in Edwidge Danticat and Gisèle Pineau," in *The Tropics Bite Back—Culinary Coups in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), is a wonderful analysis of the processes that link food, narrative, and diasporic migration. Loichot, "Kitchen Narrative," 64. See also Loichot's chapter in this volume.

⁷⁶Loichot, "Kitchen Narrative," 63.

⁷⁷Elisa Sobo, "The Sweetness of Fat, Health, Procreation and Sociability in Rural Jamaica," in *Food and Culture*, ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 1997, 257); quoted by Loichot, "Kitchen Narrative," 77.

⁷⁸Loichot, "Kitchen Narrative," 77.

⁷⁹Ibid., 64.

⁸⁰Danticat, "Without Inspection," 96 percent, location 2508 of 2607.

⁸¹Ibid., 90 percent, location 2357 of 2607.

has been said about the ways Danticat connects Haitian voices in Haiti and in the *dyaspora*.⁸² For now, I simply want to briefly point out again a few echoes the reverberation of which creates a dynamic effect *in* the stories and *between* them.

Danticat uses many ways to push orality to the foreground—the connection between storyteller, storytelling, and audience features in the very title of the first collection of stories, as well as in “Children of the Sea” where the refugees tell each other stories to pass the time: “We spent most of yesterday telling stories. Someone says, *Krik?* You answer, *Krak!* And they say, I have many stories I could tell you, and then they go on and tell these stories to you, but mostly to themselves.”⁸³ The second-person narration in the epilogue of *Krik? Krak!*, “Women Like Us,” also facilitates immediate contact with the addressee/narratee. It is significant that “The Funeral Singer” is one of the stories in *the Dew Breaker* that resonates most with songs and oral text. The song *Beloved Haiti* that is mentioned in “Children of the Sea” is actually sung in “Caroline’s Wedding,” at Célianne’s funeral, bringing the wheel full circle. One-sided monologues rustle with the imagined voice of the interlocutor, albeit absent, in “Children of the Sea” or “New York Day Women,” until the monologue morphs into the desired dialogue. Little Guy in “A Wall of Fire Rising” has to work on his voice for the play he is acting in, bringing the voices of the forefathers of the Haitian Revolution closer to the present. Voice is used to connect the living together, the dead and the living, the almost dead and the still alive, the ones who are here and the ones who are there, in flesh and blood materiality or memorial immateriality.

The radio and the recorded voice also populate a variety of scenes in Haiti or in the diaspora: working for an underground radio is what forces the male narrator of “Children of the Sea” to flee Haiti; the female protagonist in “Seven” tries to fill the seven-year separation that epitomizes the severance of migration with listening to the Haitian radio and writing letters home; in “Monkey Tails,” Michel records his own voice for his son as he reminisces about his childhood as he is on the eve of becoming a father himself; Nadine in “Water Child” has not spoken to her parents on the phone for years but records their voices on the cassettes of the answering machine, while she works with the patients who have gone through laryngectomies.

Beyond the powerful associations of voice and silence, other clusters of images forge the cohesion of the narrative and their echoes reverberate from one story to another, from one collection to another. Butterflies flutter across “Children of the Sea,” “Night Women,” “The Missing Peace,” “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” “a symbol of both continuing life and transformation.”⁸⁴ The sky and stars shine through “Children of the Sea,” “A Wall of Fire,” “Night Women,” and “Seeing Things Simply.” Dreams haunt “Children of the Sea,” “Caroline’s Wedding,” and “The Missing Peace,” and so do ghosts in “Caroline’s Wedding” and “Night Women.” Death and decay are persistent motifs.⁸⁵

As has been understood by now, such a dynamic takes its energy from the format of the short story cycle, or sequence, defined by Forrest Ingram as “a set of stories linked to each other

⁸²I had focused on those issues of orality and silence in “My mouth is the keeper of both speech and silence . . .” or The Vocalisation of Silence in Caribbean Short-Stories by Edwidge Danticat,” *Journal of the Short Story in English*, Angers 47 (2006): 155–66. There are many other articles on the topic. See the volume’s final bibliography.

⁸³Danticat, “Children of the Sea,” 14.

⁸⁴Davis, “Oral Narrative as Short Story Cycle: Forging Community in Edwidge Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!*” *Melus* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 70.

⁸⁵See the chapters by Jana Evans Braziel and Anne Brüske in this volume.

in such a way as to maintain a balance between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit.”⁸⁶ After connecting the short story cycle to the oral tradition of narrative,⁸⁷ Davis also adds that it asserts “the individuality and independence of each of the component parts while creating a necessary interdependence that emphasizes the wholeness and unity of the work. Consistency of theme and an evolution from one story to the next are among the classic requirements of the form.”⁸⁸

Form is thus used to insist on what is at stake in the collection, that is, what brings the individual and their community together, or tears them apart. Danticat brilliantly merges theme and technique in that respect. Ultimately, it is the Haitian body itself that is endlessly composed, taken to pieces, and recomposed. Both collections, as has already been shown in several instances, bring together a network of characters, echoes, reminiscences, and intertextual allusions that have to be deciphered by the reader.

“Between the Pool and the Gardenias” is one of the most harrowing stories of *Krik? Krak!* Yet, it is the story that reveals the intergenerational connections between the daughters, the mothers, and the grandmothers in the volume. The narrator calls out the names she had thought of giving the child she would have liked to have had but that never managed to stay in her womb long enough to become a baby: “I called out the names I wanted to give them: Eveline, Josephine, Jacqueline, Hermine, Marie Magdalène, Célianne. I could give her all the clothes I had sewn.”⁸⁹ These are names of some of the characters encountered in the short stories of the collection. The narrator’s own mother introduces her daughter to the other women in the family, those very same ones the reader has already encountered:

Mama had to introduce me to them, because they had all died before I was born. There was my great grandmother Eveline who was killed by Dominican soldiers at the Massacre River. My grandmother Défilé who died with a bald head in a prison, because God had given her wings. My godmother Lili who killed herself in old age because her husband had jumped out of a flying balloon and her grown son left her to go to Miami.⁹⁰

The reader recognizes Eveline, Josephine, and Défilé from “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” Hermine from “Caroline’s Wedding,” Marie Magdalène from “The Missing Peace,” Célianne from “Children of the Sea,” and Lili from “A Wall of Fire Rising.” “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” brings us back to the stories (the prison yard and the Parsley Massacre) and beyond them (we hadn’t known about Lili’s suicide or Little Guy emigrating to Miami after Guy’s death). It creates a subterranean bond.

In the last story of *Krik? Krak!*, Gracina, Caroline, and their mother attend a funeral service, which the reader understands is for the pregnant girl, Célianne, who was on the boat trying to

⁸⁶Forrest L. Ingram, *Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century: Studies in a Literary Genre* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 15.

⁸⁷“The short story cycle looks back to oral traditions of narrative while embodying signs of modernity. One of its most salient features is its attempt to emulate the act of storytelling, the effort of a speaker to establish solidarity with an implied audience by recounting a series of tales linked by their content or by the conditions in which they are related.” (Davis 2001: 66)

⁸⁸Davis, “Oral Narrative,” 66.

⁸⁹Edwidge Danticat, “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” in *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Soho Press, [1991] 1995), 92.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 94.

reach the American shore in the first story “Children of the Sea”: “We make a special call today for a young woman whose name we don’t know, . . . a young woman who was pregnant when she took a boat from Haiti and then later gave birth to her child on that boat.”⁹¹ Célianne will not be completely shrouded in silence since there is still an echo of her in the last story.

Such interweaving and echoing also structures *The Dew Breaker*, in which the rarely seen former torturer is in fact the main protagonist, refracted in the consciousness of his wife Anne and daughter Ka, in the nightmares of his neighbors and former victims, lurking from one story to another. In “Night Talkers” Dany’s parents were killed by that same man who camouflages as a barber in New York. In “The Bridal Seamstress,” Beatrice is one of his former victims: “‘We called them choukèt laroze,’ Beatrice said . . . They’d break into your house. Mostly it was at night. But often they’d also come before dawn, as the dew was settling on the leaves, and they’d take you away. He was one of them, the guard.”⁹² The last story in the collection, “The Dew Breaker,” gathers all the threads, and gives all the missing clues—how the abduction of the preacher turned sour, how the torturer got his scar, how he had to flee the country, how he became a barber, how he keeps intruding in other characters’ lives.

Following up on the hypothesis that I first formulated in the introduction, this chapter has examined the centrality of the traumatized body in Danticat’s narrative while highlighting how the dynamics of the text contradicts the violence it opposes. In addition to the different ways the body thematically redesigns itself (the scar, the phantom limb pain, epilepsy), it is also reassembled in the very construction of the text. The oft-commented upon “braiding” of the hair that is at the heart of the epilogue at the end of *Krik? Krak!* presides over the two short story collections. The choice of the short story cycle, or sequence, over a mere collection of short stories, has important implications. In the context of migration that brings about a painful severance and sometimes death, the enhanced relatedness between the individual component(s) and the whole is highly symbolic of a revised, renewed, and revitalized connection process. After speaking of “a world overcoded by highly policed borders and limitations,” a quote cited earlier in this chapter, Nesbitt insists on the “formal concatenations of the short story cycle” as instantiating “a world without borders in the very process of representing their terrifying effects.”⁹³ The text *does* something that is different from what it *says*: it describes horror, division, and alienation while implementing fluidity, diversity, and cohesion. The text does not limit itself to *describing* the damaged bodies and the martyred communities, the traction between the power *over* life and the power *of* life. It links up, invokes, and balances; it brings together what has been dismantled—an operation of reconstructive surgery.

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⁹¹Danticat, “Caroline’s Wedding,” 167.

⁹²Danticat, “The Bridal Seamstress,” 131.

⁹³Nesbitt, “Diasporic Politics,” 79.

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