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Edwidge Danticat Writes the Refugee: “Children of the Sea,” “Caroline’s Wedding,” “Without Inspection”

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EDWIDGE DANTICAT WRITES THE REFUGEE:
“CHILDREN OF THE SEA,” “CAROLINE’S WEDDING,”
“WITHOUT INSPECTION”

There is a pregnant girl on board. She looks like she might be our age. Nineteen or twenty. Her face is covered with scars that look like razor marks. (“Children of the Sea” 18)

The . . . lawyer told Arnold that he had entered the country “without inspection.” That is, he had not gone before any immigration official the day he arrived in the United States, which meant that, technically, he wasn’t even there. (“Without Inspection”)

Caroline had been born without her left forearm. . . . After my mother was arrested in the sweatshop 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. (“Caroline’s Wedding” 159)

Célianne flees Haiti when she discovers she is pregnant after she was gang raped by the *Tontons Macoutes*, the militia that was created by dictator François Duvalier in 1958 and which remained active until after the end of his son Jean-Claude Duvalier’s dictatorship in 1986. She becomes one of the “Children of the sea,” just like the young man who speaks about her, also fleeing the persecution. Arnold is a Haitian refugee who enters the United States “without inspection,” thus condemned to remain illegal, hardly a *guest* worker, a *ghost* worker rather, in the *g-host* country. As she is about to become

a documented American citizen, Haitian-born Gracina, or Americanized Grace, narrates her own story through her sister's: Caroline was born in the United States, but she is the one who suffers from phantom limb pain.

“Children of the Sea” and “Caroline’s Wedding” were published in Edwidge Danticat’s first short story collection *Krik? Krak!* (1991), while “Without Inspection” belongs to her latest collection, *Everything Inside* (2019). The three characters stand at different stages of their journey as refugees. Whether it is Célianne lost at sea on a raft between Haiti and Florida, or Arnold, working in Miami as an undocumented worker, or Gracina getting her naturalization papers, all three characters go through the radical experience of leaving everything and everyone behind, traveling the limbo space between spaces. All three hope for a new *host* country that would not be *hostile*, and which cannot but recall how Jacques Derrida develops the complex and paradoxical filiation of *hospitality* and *hostility* through the concept of *hostipitality*.¹

Yet, Célianne and other refugee and / or migrant figures have an *organic* presence in the short stories they dwell in. They linger, they keep reappearing from one story to the next, breaking the limited circle of the individual short story, as if refusing to go down once and for all. What is it that causes that *host* of characters, not to cross over and disappear, but instead to cross over *and* reappear, resorting to call and response from one story to the next? In the short narratives written by Danticat, something else is at stake that goes against what is apparently happening in the stories—oppression, escape, departure, severance, dispossession, exclusion. I am interested in that “something else,” in what it is that links the characters together and prevents all moorings from being broken.

Regarding the figure of the refugee and of the migrant, I will first have to posit the complex issue of definitions before I can focus on a selection of short stories and their allegedly invisible and humble characters, those who have been cast out. I will then examine Danticat’s choice of the short story and short story cycle as genre in this context. Why is it the short story cycle that is chosen to frame the narrative of migration / exclusion? To what extent does it authorize the *resettlement* of the self in-between the cracks of the text,

1. Jacques Derrida speaks of “l'étranger (*hostis*) accueilli comme hôte ou comme ennemi. Hospitalité, hostilité, *hostipitalité*” (*De l'hospitalité*, Empl. 701). Something is already lost in translation since the English word *host* only refers to the person who welcomes whereas in French *hôte* is both the person who welcomes and is welcomed. Derrida reminds us that *hospes* and *hostis* both derive from the Latin verb *hostire*, thus drawing the attention to the ambivalence between the one who is *hosted* but could turn *hostile*, or to whom one could turn *hostile*. Incidentally, Michel Agier’s *L'Étranger qui vient: repenser l'hospitalité* revisits Derrida’s conceptualization of hospitality to analyze it as enmeshed in a network of social, political and legal conditions.

possibly generating what could be called a *hospitable* space, possibly a *refuge*? I will explore the traction between the savage brutality that is described in Danticat's short stories and the dynamics of those short forms whose elasticity and inclusivity oppose and contradict the destructive forces they denounce. I want to touch upon the sophisticated complexity of the tension between what the text *says* at its surface and what it *does* underground, and argue that the poetics of hospitality in Danticat's writing comes to life through the generic choice of the short story cycle.

MIGRANTS, ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

Speaking of hospitality and refuge, we need to keep in mind that there are vast differences between a refugee, an exile, a political asylee, an asylum seeker, a postcolonial *émigré*, a transnational corporate expatriate, an emigrant, an immigrant, a migrant, an Internally Displaced Person (IDP), an undocumented worker, an Involuntarily Relocated Person (IRP), a resettled person, a returnee, a stateless person, etc. Recently, many scholars such as Robin Cohen, Jana Evans Braziel, Thomas Lacroix, April Shemak, among others, have pointed to these differences.² With its innumerable moments that created the conditions for massive displacements of populations, the twentieth century is strewn with national and international resolutions trying to provide nation states and individuals with a definition of what an asylum-seeker or a refugee is, as well as a frame within which they are accommodated or kept at bay. In the post-World War II and post-Indian Partition contexts, to name only two of the genocides that led to mass displacement, there were many occasions to contrast the definitions and the reality on the field. The nation states adopted myriad strategies to organize rehabilitation, resettlement, asylum, relocation, expulsion or return, to quote a few of the actions carried out.

If one only focuses on the European and North American zone, the League of Nations established an office in 1921 to address the displaced persons and exiles after the Russian Revolution or the Armenian genocide. Immediately after World War II, the International Refugee Organization was established (1946), followed by the United Nations High Commissioner's Office for Refugees (1949). Only in 1951 was the United Nations Convention

2. The definitions given by the UNHCR show how complex it is to handle those terms linked to migration and refugee status, and try to provide common ground. See <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld> (Accessed 29 Apr. 2020). Please also refer to final bibliography.

on Refugees signed, a text in which the *refugee* was defined in clear terms for the first time, albeit very Euro-centric ones.³ One had to wait until 1980 for Congress to pass the Refugee Act, including the earlier mention of persecution and “the well-founded fear of future persecution.”⁴ In the 1990s further and more restrictive legislation was passed, such as the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996.

The meaning of the word *refugee* has been fluctuating and the term is still fairly unstable in common parlance, or should I say *unsettled*, so much so that the UNHCR had to publish definitions and provide common ground (see Footnote 2). Even before the end of World War II and before the creation of the International Refugee Organization, Hannah Arendt was examining such variations and her seminal essay “We Refugees” in 1943 set the tone for much of the reflection about refugees in the second half of the twentieth century. The opening of her essay remains in the memory of many of us, whether or not we are descendants of former Jewish refugees:

In the first place, we don't like to be called “refugees.” We ourselves call each other “newcomers” or “immigrants.” Our newspapers are papers for “Americans of German language”; and, as far as I know, there is not and never was any club founded by Hitler-persecuted people whose name indicated that its members were refugees.

A refugee used to be a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true we have had to seek refuge; but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical opinion. With us the meaning of the term “refugee” has changed. Now “refugees” are those who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by Refugee Committees. (110)

The conclusion of her essay still resonates with us in the twenty-first century as we have been confronted, once again, with innumerable displacement upheavals and refugee crises, from the Cold War to the so-called Arab Spring and the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean:

3. “[A person who owing to a] well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html> (Accessed 14 June 2019). The subsequent Protocol on Refugees (1967) was finally signed by the United States—they had in the meantime welcomed some 30,000 Hungarians after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

4. See the Introduction to April Shemak's *Asylum Speakers* (2011) and particularly pp. 5-8 for a useful overview of the different phases and the resolutions that were passed.

History has forced the status of outlaws upon both, upon pariahs and parvenus alike. . . . the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples—if they keep their identity. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations. The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted. (119)

One perceives, then, how crucial the issue of definition is. A refugee is the one who “seeks refuge” but can also be the one who is granted “refugee status,” thus ceasing to be a refugee in the common parlance definition. One passes from a status one would like to dodge (*we don't like to be called “refugees”*) to a new, craved for status (*to be helped by Refugee Committees*). One keeps hovering between the two definitions, a sad tell-tale state of affairs in itself, which shows only too painfully how difficult it has been for nation states, peoples and individuals to come to grips with a never-ending and always volatile predicament. Whether one chooses to assimilate in the new hosting society (*parvenu*), or not to conform to the standards of that society (*pariah*), the question at heart is whether one can be defined as a human being if one has been accidentally, or deliberately, stripped of one's citizenship. In his reflection upon Arendt's essay, Nikita Nelin points to what he calls “the illusion of national and social assimilation”:

For all of us who retain some cultural memory of this refugee status, there exists within us a tiny voice that can only be buried and never extinguished. It cries out in our most solitary moments, balking against a world that can define a human as politically non-existent, still wishing for some universal moral law in action that accepts us as worthy of being seen, our humanness recognized, even when we have lost our national allegiance.

Having to let go of the agency granted by self-definition is unfortunately not the prerogative of the refugee in its administrative and political definition (being granted refugee status). It is burning the skin and soul of any refuge-seeking refugee (common parlance definition), of any asylum-seeker, of any migrant. This question is precisely one that is asked repeatedly by Edwidge Danticat: what defines us as a human being if one is oppressed by one's own nation state, if one has been stripped of any national allegiance?

Etymologically, the refugee is the one who flees (see Latin etymology: *re-*, meaning “back,” and *fugere*, “to flee”), the one who is pushed “outside” and forbidden to come back “inside,” thus enabling a nation to construct itself

through exclusion more than inclusion (Le Blanc). They are banished from the nation state, stripped of their political rights, divested of their inner and outer being. They become the *excluded* ones (from the Latin *ex-*, “out,” and *cludere*, “to shut”), the *precarious* ones, who obtain their status by entreaty rather than by right (from the Latin *prex*, *prec-*, meaning “prayer”), the *strangers* (from the Latin *ex-*, “out,” and *traneus*). They become “invisible” and *demonetized* (“démonétisés,” Le Blanc 32). Their lives do not hold any value anymore, they are “borne across the world” but they cannot be “translated,”⁵ only *transported*. The refugee is often reduced to what Giorgio Agamben calls “bare life,” life as it takes shape in the natural cycle (*zôè*) rather than as it is produced in the political context of a human group (*bios*), as it is produced through a “state of exception” where the sovereign suspends the order of law and reigns supreme. Far from being post-human, refugees become sub-human, infra-human. They are the weak and vulnerable ones who have to be cut off from the main body of society. They are the ones whose lives are “precarious” (Butler). They are what Michel Agier calls “les Restes du monde,” the “remnants of the world.” Trying as they may to cross the borders between worlds, they are, ultimately, disposable.⁶

REFUGEE SEEKERS

To come now to Edwidge Danticat’s short stories, from *Krik? Krak!* (1991) to *The Dew Breaker* (2004) to *Everything Inside* (2019), emigrants, immigrants, migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and returnees are the ones who are brought to the fore. Each short story seems to have been made into a separate case for each one of them and as they are brought into the daylight, one after the other, they appear to be locked out, locked in, sometimes locked up. They are all refugee seekers. As in real life and in very simple terms, Danticat’s refugees and migrants have all left their home country because they could not stay. Yet, unable to leave and arrive in a clear and definitive way, they often keep hovering in an undocumented space between the place they have left and the place they cannot settle in, living in what Nick Nesbitt calls “a world overcoded by highly policed borders and limitations” (79), unless they are maintained in a limbo space after departing and even after arriving.

5. “Having been borne across the world, we are *translated* men” (Rushdie 17).

6. Agier sees the world as partitioned between two categories: “on the one hand, a clean, healthy and visible world; on the other, the world’s residual ‘remnants,’ dark, diseased and invisible” (*Managing* 4). The phrase in French derives its power from the ambivalence of meaning between the phrase in the plural or in the singular: “le reste du monde” vs. “les restes” du monde (the rest of the world vs. the leftovers of the world).

In all three collections, those refuge seekers are shown as the migrations have used and abused them. They are separated on either side of the Atlantic Ocean, as the couple in “Children of the sea” (1991), or the other couple in “Seven” (2004), separated for seven years but also reunited beyond speech and silence through letters. They are caught between past and present, between countries, as in “The Missing Peace” (1991) when American Emilie comes back to Haiti to look for her assassinated Haitian mother’s buried bones. They are commodified and fill in the poorly paid or dangerous positions nobody else wants, as the sex workers in “Night Women” (2004), the maid in “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” (2004), or Arnold on the construction site in “Without Inspection” (2019). Separated and ejected out of their home countries, they are assaulted by crises of epilepsy, as Anne in “The Dew Breaker” (2004), haunted by nightmares and disabled by phantom pain as in “Caroline’s Wedding” (1991). They are spewed out by the host country back to the native country, as Claude who is forcefully sent back to Haiti in “Night Talkers” (2004) after being imprisoned in the US.⁷ They flee the political dictatorship of their native country but find their former torturer living on their street in the host country, as Beatrice Saint Fort in “The Bridal Seamstress” (2004). Diaspora can be a refuge from horror. It can also be the repetition of horror.

The very process of leaving and arriving, of leaving and never arriving, of forever migrating and seeking refuge, inscribes itself in the different spaces of the short stories. The refugee raft and the construction site become sites of destitution for Célianne and Arnold; Darline, by hosting Arnold when he lands on the Miami beach, manages to turn a site of exclusion into a site of hosting / hospitality. She is the refugee turned refuge, a host in the French double meaning of *hôte*, both hosted and hosting, as if one should always be a guest in order to know what a host should be like. As they are oppressed and rejected, ignored or exploited, neither body nor mind can find enough peace to move away from the trauma of migration. In a terrifying “microphysique du pouvoir” (Foucault, *Surveiller*), the migrant / refugee is what one has power *upon*, while he/she has power *over* nothing, no one. Danticat’s characters enact this biopolitical tension between the bodies that *have* power and the ones who do *not*.⁸ Célianne in “Children of the Sea,” Arnold in “Without Inspection,” Gracina and Caroline in “Caroline’s Wedding,” all embody this

7. The US have never stopped organizing deportations to Haiti, even at times when it was most ‘unconscionable.’ And Edwidge Danticat has never stopped denouncing the practice: <https://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article242631891.html> (Accessed 11 May 2020).

8. Other articles analyze Danticat’s work while taking the angle of biopolitics and focusing on the “microphysics of power.” See Misrahi-Barak.

infra-humanity, this body that is still warm but almost dead, that lives on the brink of the abyss, or just above it.

CÉLIANNE, ARNOLD, GRACINA AND CAROLINE

“Children of the Sea,” the story that opens *Krik? Krak!*, takes place after the 1991 military coup that forced Jean-Bertrand Aristide out of power and pushed thousands of Haitians onto rafts, in the hope of reaching the US coast. The short story is composed of the letters that are written, if not sent, by two lovers who cannot be together any longer. Interestingly, the different sections of the story can be read as letters, as diary entries, or even as log-book entries of a new genre, that revisit the slave ship captains’ log-books.⁹ The young man, who is one of the thirty-six “deserting souls” (3) on board, was involved in a dissident radio programme. He flees Haiti to save his life from the *Tontons Macoutes*, hoping to be granted refugee status in the United States. The young woman who has remained in Haiti has also fled from Port-au-Prince. She is internally displaced with her family to another part of the island, and has thus lost her freedom of movement.

Everything in the short story points to disconnection, severance and loss. The two different scripts on the page, in bold and in roman, highlight the separation of the two characters whose voices cannot be heard nor uttered in the same soundscape. Time loses its contours: “I don’t know how long we’ll be at sea” (3). Space has both shrunk and expanded with the absence of bearings: “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” (6).

The refugee raft is the very symbol of precarious space, of a space that has been banished outside society and literally cannot be *documented*, a speck lost in the immensity of the sky and sea, a burr that can be carried off in the wind or submerged in the ocean. The limits of the boat are gradually blurred, just like Célianne’s body with which it is fused: after she was gang raped, the young woman inflicted razor cuts to her own face to disfigure herself and, in a desperate act of self-destruction and reinvention, force the one she used to be to disappear. As the boat is leaking and water gets in, Célianne’s body starts leaking as well and is about to split, like the boat—her waters break. Shemak

9. Nick Nesbitt, for instance, speaks of “diary entries” while others like April Shemak speak of “letters.” The ambivalence is interesting in all its fluctuations and refusal to stay put in one category.

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” (75). Edouard Glissant and his conceptualization of the Atlantic slave ship as the “matrix” or the “womb” of the Caribbean is never too far away (*Poétique, Introduction*). The text asks the same question as Charles Heller in his work on forensic oceanography and in his film *The Left-to-Die-Boat*: “How to reconstruct violations when the murder weapon is the water itself?”¹⁰

Moving on from *Krik? Krak!* to *Everything Inside*, a refugee raft is also what brings Arnold to the United States. Prominence is given this time not to the refugee raft lost at sea and never reaching land but to one of its passengers, who arrives *without inspection*, an undocumented worker off everybody’s radar. Another story of disconnection, severance and loss. Arnold was just lucky enough not to be “ditched in the middle of the sea and told by the captain to swim ashore” (“Without Inspection” 2358). When he lands on the beach in Miami, he is also luckier than his companions in misfortune who have drowned or been picked up by the police patrols. After pleading with Darline, a woman sitting on the beach, he convinces her to help him and give him back what she had been given by somebody else years before: she, who arrived on a raft and sought refugee status once, gives him refuge now. She adopts Arnold and he, in turn, adopts Paris, her son, whose father did not make it and drowned when Darline had to choose who she would rescue—her husband or her son.

The construction site is an extension of the refugee raft but this time it is not a space banished from society, it is a space *of* banishment settled *within* society itself. The social and political hypocrisy is clearly denounced by Danticat: migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are only the logical result of global geopolitics whereby the North uses and abuses a constructed poverty and dependency in the South, on an intricately interconnected planet. Arnold’s employer happily benefits from Arnold working illegally on the construction site, so does the whole of American society, which could not thrive without undocumented workers hired as cheap labor. Whether the scaffold and the safety harness meet conditions of security or fail to do so is not their concern—not any more than the status of Arnold’s body as a telling image of the consideration migrants and undocumented workers get, or rather do not get, as Arnold’s free fall shows at the beginning of the story:

10. <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-left-to-die-boat> (Accessed 7 May 2020).

It took Arnold six and a half seconds to fall five hundred feet. During that time, an image of his son, Paris, flashed before his eyes: Paris, dressed in his red school-uniform shirt and khakis the day of his kindergarten graduation. That morning, Paris's mother, Darline, had slipped around the apartment changing dresses, as if she were the one graduating. Closing his eyes tightly as the hot wind he was plunging through battered his face, Arnold saw Paris at the classroom ceremony. He saw himself, too, standing next to Darline, who had finally chosen a billowing sapphire-colored satin dress. He was in the one black suit he wore to everything, to weddings and to funerals. (2239)

Story-time is entirely contained within those six and a half seconds during which Arnold falls from the scaffold and into the cement chute. It is the time that is threaded throughout the story, and to which the reader is brought back to, now and then:

He was still falling, faster by the second. The wind felt increasingly resistant, each gust a hard blue veil to pierce through, even as the ground rose to meet him. His body veered farther left and directly below him was an open cement-mixer chute, attached to the truck, the kind that has always looked like a spaceship to him. (2347)

A couple of pages later, it becomes clear that Arnold and all the other undocumented workers are less than human, less than the *humus* we tread on (the etymological root of *humble*) and that nourishes us. And yet they are, literally, the cement our societies are built with:

This landing was even more abrupt than his last one. His free fall ended as his body slammed into the drum of the cement mixer. He was being tossed inside a dark blender full of grout. Every few seconds, his face would emerge from under the wet, pounded sand and pebbles, and he would keep his mouth closed, trying to force air through his nose and push away the grainy mix that his body was trying to inhale. (2453)

In the same way as the young man on the refugee raft does not know "how long [h]e'll be at sea" (*Krik? Krak!* 3), Arnold does not know "how long he had" (*Everything Inside* 2517), "how long this half-consciousness would last, his being able to think and remember, so he wanted to keep pushing, to see how far he could take it. What if he made himself float out of the cement mixer?" (2474).

Braided with story-time, text-time is what gives Arnold the "kind of freedom he's never had before" (2463). As he is falling through the sky, he is "moving too fast to be identifiable as a human being when the footage [isn't]

in slow motion” (2557). Yet this is exactly what the text does: through the wonderful way story-time and text-time are made to work together and against one another, the reader perceives how the freedom Arnold never had through *story* is given back to him through *text*. “Without Inspection” is a short story that uses slow motion: during the six and a half seconds of his fall, Arnold remembers, projects himself, dreams, reconstructs. Through slow motion, his fall is stretched and slowed down. It is drawn out long enough for the reader to take it in and, hopefully, reflect on it and take action.

“Caroline’s Wedding,” the third story under scrutiny, closes *Krik? Krak!*. Gracina, the first-person narrator and Caroline’s sister, has just obtained her naturalization certificate and the whole story revolves around the accommodation to the new situation of the two young women. Gracina is becoming an American citizen and Caroline is getting married and about to leave home: it is thus a narrative of arrival and departure. As the elder daughter, Gracina was born in one of the shanty-towns in Port-au-Prince. She used to be called the “misery baby” (189) and was left behind with relatives in Haiti while her parents tried their luck with migrating to the United States. Caroline has never known Haiti and is the “New York Child” (189). Eric, the groom-to-be, is looked down upon by Caroline’s mother because he is a Bahamian, a fiancé from “outside” (161). In the mother’s eyes his major shortcoming is not so much the learning disability that affects his speech (183) and makes him sound like “a retard” (194), but his status as a foreigner. He threatens the constitution of the family more than *diaspora* does.

Gracina has finally *arrived*, she can finally stop feeling like “unclaimed property” (158) and can settle down as an American citizen, even if only as “an indentured servant who has finally been allowed to join the family” (214). Obtaining her American citizenship is another step in her *arriving* process. On the other hand, Caroline is ready to leave the family but not quite ready to depart for good. Even though she has never been in Haiti, there is something that keeps her “attached to Haiti” (159), as was announced in the epigraph:

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 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. (159)

“Caroline’s Wedding” is thus also a story that points to disconnection, severance and loss, between the family and Haiti, and within the family. Even

though she chose to leave Haiti, the mother can still be considered as having been forced to leave. She did not have a choice if she wanted to save her family and herself from the dictatorship. She was the direct victim of a violent migration that took her away from home for ever. Yet, beyond the disconnection, severance and loss, all three short stories point to the creation of an alternative space of connection and transformation.

FROM TIDALECTICS TO HETEROTOPIA

Far from disappearing into nothingness, the thirty-six “deserting souls” (3) on board the refugee raft of “Children of the Sea” are brought into the same history that has made the sea central to the Caribbean. As Liz DeLoughrey points out, “the sea is not inscribed as a void, *aqua nullius* to be imprinted with the expectations of the migrant, but has its own history into which the subject is incorporated” (qtd. in Shemak 77). When they go under, they will be reunited with the Africans who jumped or were thrown overboard during the Middle Passage. A whole collective history claims the raft as part of “the sea [that] is history” (Walcott 364), suggesting continuity across the oceans through what Valérie Loichot calls “the art of the unritual,” bringing together all those who have been deprived of official funeral rites when lost at sea or submerged by ocean-connected devastations.

The young man’s notebook on which he writes his letters, unless they are diary entries, will be bathed in the same waters as Minta’s diary on board *Zong* in Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts*, the diary that has gone missing and is irretrievable. All the migrants on the raft are included in what Kamau Brathwaite has termed *tidalectics*, this oceanic worldview in which the world breathes with the rhythms of the sea, far from the Western terrestrial “obsession for fixity, assuredness, and appropriation” (34). The two voices we imagine we can hear in the story are paradoxically brought together through the visual representation on the page. We can also hear them as they call and respond to each other, the narrative form reflecting and implementing the unbroken swelling and receding of the tides.

Arnold invents his own tidalectics on the construction site where he works. The call and response of the letters in “Children of the Sea” is replaced by the call and response of his thoughts and memories in flux. The metaphor of the construction site will not be lost on the reader. In the same way as Darline’s son becomes the very site of his father’s dreams by wearing the name of the city he had always dreamt to go to, Arnold creates a new persona for

himself and his own space of transformation. Not only does he borrow a Cuban name and identity, Ernesto Fernandez from Santiago de Cuba, to get the job, thus pointing to a fluid Caribbean identity, but the power of imagination steers the text: “What if he made himself float out of the cement mixer?” (*Everything Inside* 2471). While Danticat underlines the exploitation to which he falls victim, the power of imagination gives new contours to the text as it is being written:

He was back at the construction site. Not wounded but whole, just as he had been when he left home that morning. He was still wearing his bright-orange overalls and matching hard hat. Was time playing with him, or was he playing with time? Was he skirting the yellow police tape in the present or in the past? (2543)

Wrapping his thoughts around Darline and Paris, flying over the Cuban restaurant where he has guava cake and coffee before he goes to work, or remembering his childhood as a *restavec*, his love for Darline and her son does not stop when his body plummets like one of the falling paper airplanes he makes with Paris: “There are loves that outlive lovers” (2553).

As “Children of the Sea” or “Without Inspection,” “Caroline’s Wedding” is just as much about continuity and attachment. Even while still in her mother’s womb, Caroline has found a way to help her body adjust to her mother’s trauma. She retained the trace of the “shot” her mother had received (a word so powerful in its ambivalence), she physically integrated it in order to survive, symbolically leaving a part of herself in Haiti. It is the daughter’s body that was indirectly affected, and the missing limb is a symptom of the severity of the aggression. Caroline explains to her mother that she has this “shooting pain in [her] stub” (*Krik? Krak!* 198, another variation of the *shot*) and it feels as if her arm were hurting. According to the doctor, a prosthesis would help with her “phantom limb pain . . . , a kind of pain that people feel after they’ve had their arms or legs amputated” (198-99). Her mother reminds her that her arm “was not cut off” from her (199). 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”” (199). Indeed, we do.

When Caroline makes her wedding preparations, she buys herself a wedding present in the form of “a robotic arm with two shoulder straps that controlled the motion of the plastic fingers” (198). Once again, Caroline has transformed a space of death into a new space, “a space of transformation” (Michael Taussig, qtd. in Mehta 76) and connection. Caroline’s body does not

aim at abolishing the past, it only relocates itself in a present that makes the past habitable again.

At this stage of the argument, and in addition to the reference to Kamau Brathwaite's tidalectics, the short stories under scrutiny here could also be enlightened by resorting to the very versatile Foucauldian notion of *heterotopia*. The nodal spaces at the center of "Children of the Sea" and "Without Inspection" can indeed be read as heterotopias, as defined by Foucault.¹¹ Several principles are put forward to define those spaces. Like utopias, a heterotopia is a "placeless place" ("Of Other Spaces") and one that "gives [one's] own visibility to [oneself]." Heterotopias are not culture-specific, they can be found in any culture in the world. They can be divided into "crisis heterotopias" or "heterotopias of deviation."¹² The same heterotopia can also, "according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another." The heterotopia is capable of "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible." As in the case of the garden, the cemetery, the theatre or the cinema, it acts as a microcosm. Heterotopias are also linked to "slices of time" or "heterochronies," such as museums or libraries, i.e. "a sort of general archive of time . . . , a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages." The last two principles are particularly interesting as regards the refugee raft and the construction site. Heterotopias always "presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable." Barracks, prisons, hammams and even saunas belong to that category. Foucault underlines the illusion of those heterotopias: "Everyone can enter these heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion—we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded." Finally, "they have a function in relation to all the space that remains" in that they expose the illusion and the partitioning of the sites we usually inhabit.

11. See Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres," Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales, 14 Mar. 1967, *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984): 46-49. The text published in the French journal is based on a lecture given by Foucault in 1967 and not reviewed by the author before publication. As pointed out on the website Foucault.info, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an exhibition in Berlin shortly before Foucault's death. The text is available in English under the title "Of Other Spaces (1967). Heterotopias."

12. The former heterotopias are in Foucault's definition "privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc." The latter are "those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed. Cases of this are rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons, and one should perhaps add retirement homes that are, as it were, on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation" ("Of Other Spaces").

The spaces formed by either the refugee raft or the construction site function on their own, with their own laws, but they are also linked to all the other spaces outside them. Neither of them would exist if our societies had not produced them. The material abundance in the North would not exist without the penury in the South. The refugee raft and the construction site also expose the constructed production of vulnerability (and we may want to remember the Latin etymology, *vulnus*, the wound). Both sites could come under the definition Foucault gives of the ship: “a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea” (“Of Other Spaces”). Both sites are closed in upon themselves and connected to the outside. They are absolutely *other* and they absolutely tell us about ourselves.

In the context of the collections under study here and especially in the case of short story cycles like *Krik? Krak!* and *The Dew Breaker*, each short story can be read as a heterotopia, closed in upon itself yet connected to all the other stories in the collection. The question is now to understand why such an organizational choice was made.

FROM FRAGMENT TO FRACTAL

The three short stories discussed here underline the increased vulnerability engendered by disconnection, as has been shown at the beginning of this contribution. The fragmentariness at the core of the genre seems in complete adequation with the precariousness and frailty that is etched on the bodies and souls of the characters. Yet, the stories point just as much to connection and reconnection, as the section above on tidalectics has started to show—how can that be? Danticat uses many connecting devices to create a dynamic movement *in* the stories but also *between* them. In the Epilogue of *Krik? Krak!* Danticat compares writing with the braiding of hair that her grandmother and her mother would practice, thus engaging in transgenerational transmission and interpersonal relatedness: “When you write, it’s like braiding your hair. Taking a handful of coarse unruly strands and attempting to bring them unity” (220). I want to insist here on the multiple ways in which what is said in one story is echoed in another, threading up the text as so many braids in one’s hair.

In “Children of the Sea,” the refugees at sea 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” (*Krik? Krak!* 14). The song *Beloved Haiti* that is sung on board is actually sung again in “Caroline’s Wedding,” bringing the wheel full circle. Gracina, Caroline and their mother attend a funeral service which the reader understands is for the pregnant girl, Célianne, who was on the raft trying to reach the American shore in the opening story: “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” (167). Célianne will not be completely shrouded in silence and invisibility since there is still an image and an echo of her in the last story. 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.

“Between the Pool and the Gardenias” is a key story that reveals the inter-generational connections between the daughters, the mothers and the grandmothers in the collection, as well as the interrelatedness between the stories. It is one of the stories that enable the reader to understand how the text goes *against* what it seems to be saying—the trauma, the destitution, the imprisonment, the *dedans dehors*. The narrator of “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” calls out the names she had thought of giving to the child she would have liked to have: “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” (*Krik? Krak!* 92). These are names of some of the characters encountered in the short stories of the collection (Eveline, Jacqueline and Josephine from “1937,” Hermine from “Caroline’s Wedding,” Marie Magdalène from “The Missing Peace,” Célianne from “Children of the Sea”). “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” braids all the stories together.

Clusters of themes and images also forge the cohesion of the short stories and their echoes reverberate from one story to another. Orality is developed through the powerful associations of voice and silence between characters, from the storytelling born out of despair on the raft to the life stories of the heroes of the Revolution that build Haitian history, which Little Guy has to learn at school (“A Wall of Fire Rising”), to the bedtime stories that are told to Caroline and Gracina when they are little. Motifs are drawn in one story and resurface in the next. In *Krik? Krak!* butterflies flutter across “Children of the Sea,” “Night Women,” “The Missing Peace,” “Between the Pool and the Gardenia” as so many instances of ongoing transmutations. 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,” “The Missing Peace,” and so do ghosts in “Caroline’s Wedding” and “Night Women.”

Not only are stories within one collection brought closer together but bridges are also built between the collections. The refugee raft carries the unnamed narrator and Célianne in “Children of the Sea” and Arnold in “Without Inspection.” Disembodied voices on the radio link the male narrator who left Haiti on a raft and the female character in “Seven” (2004), who joins her husband in New York after seven years of separation but has to listen to the Haitian radio and write letters home to find the passing of time bearable. The characters’ speech disabilities connect them, whether they are ridden with laryngectomies in “Water Child” (2004), muteness in “1937” (1991), or sleep talking in “Night Talkers” (2004).¹³

If the short stories taken individually lend more focus to characters and narrators by making them more visible, more touchable, more hearable, the collections take their energy from the interconnectedness enabled by the short story cycle itself, defined by Forrest Ingram as “a set of stories linked to each other in such a way as to maintain a balance between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit” (15). After connecting the short story cycle to the oral tradition of narrative,¹⁴ 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” (66). One can think of innumerable narratives in classical, modern and contemporary literature that use the format of the short story cycle, ranging from the Sanskrit *Panchatantra* to the Persian *One Thousand and One Nights* to the Italian *Decameron*. James Joyce’s *Dubliners*, Ray Bradbury’s *Martian Chronicles*, VS Naipaul’s *Miguel Street*, Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, or Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accent* are other examples closer to us.¹⁵

The genre takes on different connotations and meanings depending on the context in which it is used but it always points to the relation between the part and the whole, the detail and the overview, the fragment and the totality.

13. For more detailed analyses of the body in its biopolitical and necropolitical dimensions, see *The Bloomsbury Companion to Edwidge Danticat*, eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Nadege Clitandre (2021).

14. “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 66).

15. There has been much debate about the definition and history of the genre and how to refer to it. See Dunn and Morris, as well as Lundén, Nagel or Kennedy.

In *The Poetics of Fragmentation in Contemporary British and American Fiction*, Vanessa Guignery and Wojciech Drag approach the theory and practice of fragmentary writing, with the aim to define the specificity of its historical development and the poetics that are thus deployed. In their introduction, they situate the European origins of the writing of the fragment between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries: “The *pensée*, the sentence, the maxim, the aphorism” (xiii) are forms that tend towards closure, completeness and self-sufficiency, contrary to the Romantic fragment that is a “gesture towards an impossible totality which remains an ideal” (xiii). In that respect, Guignery and Drag lay down the lineage between Romanticism and Modernism, up to the postmodern condition that can be characterized by an “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard, qtd. in Guignery and Drag xvii) and defined as “the age of micro-narrative” (Virilio and Lotringer, qtd. in Guignery and Drag xvii). In the attempts at taxonomy that are presented in the volume, many categories of fragmentary fiction are discussed, including the braid, the bricolage or the mosaic (Merritt Moseley), the polyphonic novel (Mariano D’Ambrosio), the collage manifesto (Drag), or the shuffle narrative (Côme Martin). However, the category that proves most relevant in the context of the present contribution corresponds to what is often called the short story cycle or sequence, or the composite novel, or even what A. E. van Vogt calls the “fix-up,” which applies to “texts whose degree of coherence between consecutive chapters, regarding subject matter and genre, is greater than in the case of a collection of short stories and lesser than in a traditional novel” (Guignery and Drag xx).

Form, in this case the short story *and* the short story cycle, is thus used to shape and enhance what is at stake in the collections, namely what tears the communities apart but brings the individuals and their community together, what weakens the individuals but makes them stronger, what heightens their vulnerability but hampers their demise. Danticat brilliantly merges theme and rhetoric in that respect. Both collections bring together characters, echoes, reminiscences, and intertextual motifs and allusions. Be it one story, one character or one real-life person, they cannot be a negligible *detail* anymore, something or someone that has been cut off from the whole (from the Latin *talea*, “twig, cutting,” and from the French *de-tailler*). They cannot be a mere *fragment* either (from the Latin *frangere*, “to break”), dislocated and separated from the mainland, autonomous in itself.

Instead of a mere detail or fragment, the notion of the “fractal,” as Lauro Zavala defines it, could be what is needed here to understand the specificity of Danticat’s writing: “One particular type of detail is the fractal, which refers to those texts that contain generic, stylistic or thematic features

that are shared with others in the same series. The detail, or fractal, is a narrative unit that makes sense only in relation to the series to which it belongs” (296). Zavala adds: “The fragment is the opposite of the fractal: the former is autonomous, while the latter conserves the features of the series. But while the detail is the result of an authorial decision, the fractal is the product of the reading process” (297). If the fractal is a curve or geometrical figure, each part of which has the same (statistical) character as the whole, as the snowflake for instance, the fractal only exists as the result of an interacting and connecting process. Not only does the text link up and re-join what has been dislocated and crushed but it also exposes the constitutive relationship between the refugee seeker and the societies that have expelled them.

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In other words, and as a conclusion, no other genre but the short story and the short story cycle could have been chosen by Danticat for the refugee narratives she writes. Such a generic choice has crucial implications and highly political ones. It is the figure of the refugee seeker that forces us to interrogate not so much what we possess separately but what we have in common (Le Blanc 81). The unstable figure of the refugee, in all its “trespassing” capacities (Shemak 20-21), forces us to take to pieces the notion that a nation is what is contained between its borders and is defined on the basis of its exclusion of the other, whom we could trample under foot and forget. In the context of migration that brings about disconnection, severance and loss, the enhanced *Relation* (in the Glissantian meaning) between the individual component(s) and the whole it belongs to is highly symbolical of a revised, renewed and revitalized connecting process. The characters, motifs and short stories interlaced in the collections coalesce in a network which, ultimately, is activated by the reader, whose increased awareness and potential agency becomes central to the political construction of the text turned refuge.¹⁶

Following up on the hypothesis that was formulated in the introduction, I have tried to examine how the text *does* something that is different from what it *says*. It describes disconnection, severance and loss, how human beings are kept separate and segregated, but it implements fluidity and connection, diversity and cohesion. It describes the toxic effects of borders and discrimination, but it creates bonding and inter-dependence. To clear the infection, it creates its own antibodies, and in the midst of mourning and pain,

16. Arundhati Roy beautifully develops the idea of literature as shelter in her PEN America Arthur Miller Freedom to Write Lecture, delivered on 12 May 2019: “Literature Provides Shelter. That’s why we need it” (web, accessed 16 May 2020).

the text does what Christina Sharpe calls “wake work” (17): it makes us awake again.

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Migrants, réfugiés et autres demandeurs d'asile habitent les recueils d'Edwidge Danticat, Krik? Krak! (1991), The Dew Breaker (2004) et Everything Inside (2019). Ces figures sont souvent exclues de l'état-nation ; droits civiques et citoyenneté leur sont retirés. Ils sont dépossédés de leurs biens, réduits à des corps souffrants qui errent dans un espace intermédiaire entre pays, cultures et langues. Parfois réduits à un état spectral, ils peuvent recevoir l'« hostipitalité » de leurs hôtes (hospes et hostis dérivent tous deux du latin hostire, voir Derrida, De l'hospitalité). Danticat a choisi la nouvelle et le cycle de nouvelles pour aborder de plus près cette détresse. Pourquoi un tel choix ? Qu'est-ce qui, dans un tel contexte, ne peut être exprimé qu'à travers ces genres et pour quelle réinvention ? Cet article se concentre sur un choix de quelques nouvelles afin de comprendre comment le chercheur de refuge interroge la définition même de nos sociétés et peut aussi nous aider à les réinventer.

Migrants, refugees, and other asylum seekers inhabit Edwidge Danticat's collections *Krik? Krak!* (1991), *The Dew Breaker* (2004) and *Everything Inside* (2019). These figures are often excluded from the nation-state, stripped of their political rights, of any form of citizenship. They are dispossessed of their belongings, shrunk to ailing bodies that dwell in limbo spaces between countries, cultures, languages. They can be *guests*, or become their own (*g*)*hosts*, as their hosts' *hospitality* is parasitized by their *hostility* (*hospes* and *hostis* both derive from the Latin *hostire*, see Derrida, *De l'hospitalité*). Danticat has chosen the short story and the short story cycle to address more specifically this distress. Why such a choice? What, in such a context, could only be expressed through these genres? This article gives added focus to a selection of stories to understand how the figure of the refugee seeker is one that interrogates the very core of our societies and can help us reinvent them.