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# Oral Narrative as Short Story Cycle: Forging Community in Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!*

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Only when ethnic literature liberates its sources of meaning from hegemonic impositions and begins to inform theory and subvert traditional signifying strategies can it begin to reconfigure cultural interpretation. As though responding to this challenge, ethnic fiction demonstrates a proliferation of the short story cycle, a form until now most clearly defined within the Euro-American literary tradition, that many ethnic writers have adapted for the formulation of their processes of subjectivity. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* emblemize how ethnic writers appropriate the specifics of this narrative genre to engage with the dynamics of meaning. This article will explore the short story cycle as a vehicle for the development of ethnic literature by analyzing Haitian-American Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* to show how the drama of identity and community is mediated through a genre that is linked to the oral narrative, itself a way of fostering imaginative communities and developing identities.

The dynamics of the short story cycle make it appropriate for the quest for a definition of the cultural pluralism that incorporates immigrant legacies while adapting to the practices of the culture in which these works are created. A cycle may be defined 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" (Ingram 15). The term "short story cycle" implies a structural scheme for the working out of an idea, characters, or themes, even a circular disposition in which the constituent nar-

ratives are simultaneously independent and interdependent. The challenge of each cycle is twofold: the collection must assert 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, with recurrence and development as the integrated movements that effect final cohesion (Ingram 20).

The essential characteristics of the short story cycle abound in the literatures of the world: Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the Indian *Panchatantra*, the Arabian *A Thousand and One Nights*, and Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur* reflect the fundamental separation and cohesion of the form as defined by twentieth-century critics. Cycles figure prominently in twentieth-century American literature: Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Ernest Hemingway's *in our time* and Raymond Carver's *Cathedral*, among others, have constituted and popularized the form within the "mainstream" canon. By appropriating and transforming this narrative genre as established and defined by "mainstream" writers and critics, Danticat, like other ethnic writers, intervenes in the dominant Euro-American literary tradition. A text such as *Krik? Krak!* challenges hegemonic discourse on several levels, as the author exploits the advantages of the established structure and theme to present her version of the immigrant story, blending cultural traditions and codes for innovative literary representation.

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. The experience of the oral narrative, of telling and listening to stories, has been a vital part of the development of the body of thought and tradition that has formed culture and united diverse peoples. As Walter Ong argues, in its physical constitution as sound, the spoken word manifests human beings to each other as persons and forms them into close-knit groups: when a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with

the speaker (74). Much of the vividness of the oral narrative comes precisely from the fact that it resists writing, preserving the spoken word as always “an event, a movement in time, completely lacking in the thing-like repose of the written or printed word” (Ong 74).

Sarah Hardy’s comparison of the short story and the oral narrative is, I believe, equally applicable to the story cycle: “A single theme or episode. . . pulls in the direction of its own self-contained narrative line, towards other similar and parallel stories, and towards certain patterns of language or a particular set of symbols . . . . In other words, the presence of an audience is vital to the completion and validity of the short-story [cycle] form just as it is in an oral setting” (355). The title of Danticat’s cycle sets it clearly within the oral narrative. She invites the reader not merely to read the book but to participate in a traditional Haitian storytelling ritual. “Krik? Krak! is call-response but it’s also this feeling that you’re not merely an observer—you’re part of the story. Someone says, ‘Krik?’ and as loudly as you can you say ‘Krak!’ You urge the person to tell the story by your enthusiasm to hear it” (Shea 12).

In the stories, Danticat examines the lives of ordinary Haitians: those struggling to survive under the cruel Duvalier regime and others who have left the country, highlighting the distance between people’s dreams and the distressing reality of their lives. As Ethan Casey points out: “Writers will spend precious time accounting for what has happened, it is true; the *literary* challenge is to write about Haiti in the vocabulary of human tragedy and human survival” (525). As such, the book becomes a literary response to the Haitian situation and a feeling description of the immigration of the 1980s. Importantly, Danticat’s presentation of the *theme* of storytelling through the *technique* of storytelling locates her writing within what Jay Clayton has called the “narrative turn” in recent ethnic fiction, which stresses the political dimensions of form, making the pragmatics of traditional narrative a theme in the fiction (378, 387). Through technical experimentation with the story cycle, Danticat heightens the power of narrative, elucidating the significance of the oral mode to her characters by positioning the theme within a genre that engages it on different levels. Importantly, the blending of the performative dimension of storytelling

in form and content allows Danticat to expand the reach of her art by making the text dramatize as well as signify.

In a note distributed by her publisher, Danticat defines the challenge she set herself: "I look to the past—to Haiti—hoping that the extraordinary female story tellers I grew up with—the ones that have passed on—will choose to tell their stories through my voice. For those of us who have a voice must speak to the present and the past" (qtd. in Casey 525-26). Danticat's narrative presents the voices and visions of women, usually mothers and daughters, whose personal tragedies impel them to form community in the midst of oppression and exile. Because the practice of breaking silence has become one of the shaping myths in the writings of ethnic women, storytelling in the cycle becomes both a medium of self-inscription and subjectivity and an instrument for dialogue. The telling of stories heals past experiences of loss and separation; it also forges bonds between women by preserving tradition and female identity as it converts stories of oppression into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment. The manner in which Danticat links the stories with the processes of self-inscription by the different women becomes a metaphor for the negotiation of the characters' strategies of survival.

The profoundly oral character of Haitian culture is illustrated on both textual and contextual levels in *Krik? Krak!*. The epigraph to the cycle, a quote from Sal Scalora from "White Darkness/Black Dreamings," discloses the purpose of the old tradition: "We tell the stories so that the young ones will know what came before them. They ask Krik? We say Krak! Our stories are kept in our hearts." Seven of the nine stories are told in the first person, with two of them written as monologues, and the rest alternating two voices in the narration. The epilogue, "Women Like Us," is written in the second person, a technique with rich connotations in a contemporary text inspired by the oral tradition. The art of storytelling figures importantly in several of the tales. The game of "Krik? Krak!" is played in the first story as a way for the refugees on the boat to wile away the fearful hours. In "Wall of Fire Rising," the inhabitants of the town who watched a state-sponsored newscast every evening "stayed at the site long after this gendarme had gone and told stories to one another beneath the big blank screen" (60). The night woman whispers her mountain stories in her son's ear, "sto-

ries of the ghost women and the stars in their hair. I tell him of the deadly snakes lying at one end of the rainbow and the hat full of gold lying at the other. I tell him that if I cross a stream of glass-clear hibiscus, I can make myself a goddess" (86). "We know people by their stories" (185), one of the characters declares, signaling how storytelling, which educates people in imaginative history and community values, provides an organic link between the past and the lives of the people in the present.

Other stories present verbal games that serve both as entertainment and strategy for identification and survival. Among the rituals that unite the women in the stories is the verbal code established in times of trial which was used to signal belonging. When Josephine meets a woman who claims to be part of the group who went on pilgrimages to the Massacre River, she questions her in the secret way because "if she were really from the river, she would know . . . all the things that my mother had said to the sun as we sat with our hands dipped in the water, questioning each other, making up codes and disciplines by which we would always know who the other daughters of the river were" (44). This question-and-answer ritual is kept alive by Gracina and Caroline in Brooklyn: "We sat facing each other in the dark, playing a free-association game that Ma had taught us when we were girls. . . . Ma too had learned this game when she was a girl. Her mother belonged to a secret women's society in Ville Rose, where the women had to question each other before entering one another's houses" (165). This game, played in the United States, carries within it memories of the lost country and links to those who have died. Gracina will be charged, in a dream, with remembering the lost past through the paradigm of the game: "If we were painters, which landscapes would we paint? . . . When you become mothers, how will you name your sons? . . . What kind of lullabies do we sing to our children at night? Where do you bury your dead? . . . What kind of legends will your daughters be told?" (210-11). The commission, which emphasizes the power of the word, implies that the daughters must be similarly creative and constructive. The words and the hidden meanings in their mothers' verbal games form a significant starting point from which they can develop their own voice and autonomy because a space is created within the inherited contest in which their own representation is possible. Drawing from a rich source of

oral traditions, as well as from their own experience and imagination, the daughters can then construct and claim their own subjectivity.

Moreover, the narrative structure of short story cycles mirrors the episodic and unchronological method of oral narration. Most cycles do not have a linear plot, emerging rather as portraits of persons or communities pieced together from the diverse elements offered in the individual stories. The fundamental structure of a cycle lies in the interaction of the elements in the independent stories, as connective patterns on all levels draw these together into a totality strengthened by varying types of internal cohesion: a title, the development of a central character, the delineation of a community, or an explicit theme. Nonetheless, the most pervasive unifying pattern of short story cycles appears to be the dynamic of recurrent development (Ingram 17). The repetition of a theme from different angles and its ensuing growth in depth in the mind of the reader may unify a cycle at the same time that it individualizes each story. Moreover, the genre, as with the oral narrative, intensifies the normally participatory act of reading by insisting that we “fill in the blanks” as we go along; the discovery of connections is transformed into the reader’s task. In a text that centers on the forging of community through the relationships of mother and daughters, “the structure nicely evinces not only the varied perspectives the women have regarding similar events but also the tenuous balance between separation and connection that many psychoanalytic theorists argue is a key to understanding mother-daughter relationships” (Kelley 306).

Recurring images that appear in *Krik? Krak!* create a bond of mystical unity between the characters, their lives, and their destinies. The butterfly, one of the principal images in almost all the stories, becomes a symbol of both continuing life and transformation (Shea 15). The butterfly’s life cycle, which involves a manner of death and rebirth, becomes a paradigm of the need to emphasize the existence of life and the search for beauty in situations of precarious survival. The most vivid evocation of butterflies is in “Children of the Sea,” where the young woman left behind in Haiti speaks to her boyfriend on the refugee boat: “i don’t sketch my butterflies anymore because i don’t even like seeing the sun. besides, manman says that butterflies can bring news. the bright ones

bring happy news and the black ones warn us of death" (5). This character looks to the butterflies to bring her tidings of her boyfriend's fate and, when the awaited sign comes, refuses to accept what it implies: "there it was, the black butterfly floating around us. i began to run and run so it wouldn't land on me, but it had already carried its news. . . now there are always butterflies around me, black ones that i refuse to let find my hand" (28). In other stories, images of butterflies acquire expanded meaning. The sleeping son, fragile in his innocence, in "Night Women," is described as "a butterfly fluttering on a rock that stands out naked in the middle of a stream" (85). Lamort and Raymond in "The Missing Peace" play with "leaves shaped like butterflies" (103), this game heightening the pathos in the characterization of the adolescent who already works for the military.

Complementary to the image of the butterfly is the image of flight, another constant in the cycle. Défilé, in the story "1937," was accused of being a witch because she was seen flying. After her mother's death, Josephine understands the truth of this charge, that on the night of the massacre "my mother did fly. Weighted down by my body inside hers, she leaped from Dominican soil into the water and out again on the Haitian side of the river" (49). Guy, in "Wall of Fire Rising," dreams of flight. His wife tries to rid him of this absurd obsession by pointing out that "if God wanted people to fly, he would have given us wings on our backs." To which her husband replies, "You're right, Lili, you're right. But look what he gave us instead. He gave us reasons to want to fly. He gave us the air, the birds, our son" (68). Guy will die in a foolish attempt to fulfill his dream and, looking at his dead body, Lili can only say to the men who want to close his eyes, "my husband, he likes to look at the sky" (80). These desperate images of flight attest to the need to escape from the violence and oppression of the old country, another central concern of the characters.

Images of death also recur, in particular the death of infants. Josephine contemplates the women in jail with her mother and realizes that they were all there for the same reason: "They were said to have been seen at night rising from the ground like birds on fire. A loved one, a friend, or a neighbor had accused them of causing the death of a child" (38). Célianne gives birth to a stillborn baby on the refugee boat and later throws herself into the sea after it.



The description of the baby foreshadows that of another dead infant in a later story: "I never knew before that dead children looked purple. The lips are the most purple because the baby is so dark. Purple like the sea after the sun has set" (25). In "Between the Pool and the Gardenias," Marie, haunted by her repeated miscarriages, the babies "my body could never hold" (92), retrieves an abandoned baby that the reader understands is dead: "She was very pretty. Bright shiny hair and dark brown skin like mahogany cocoa. Her lips were wide and purple, like those African dolls you see in tourist windows but could never afford to buy" (91). These three recurring images—the butterfly, the wish for flight, and death of infants—highlight the themes of innocence and the price paid for its loss, of the need to escape and of freedom. The violent histories and continuing dreams of many of the characters find symbolic expression in these images. Because these symbols are present in stories about leaving Haiti and seeking a future elsewhere, they emphasize the presentation of many of the painful realities of the immigrant situation.

The specificities of the form make the short story cycle a pertinent vehicle for the distinctive characteristics of ethnic fiction in general. The short story cycle is itself a hybrid, occupying an indeterminate place within the field of narrative, resembling the novel in its totality, yet composed of distinct stories. Interestingly, as Jerome Bruner and Susan Weisser show, "genre is a way of characterizing a text in terms of certain formal and content properties, but it is also a way of characterizing how a reader or listener *takes* a text, whatever its actual content and its formal characteristics may be" (131). Ethnic fiction lends itself to new strategies of reading, enhancing awareness of immigrant issues through renewed ethnic creativity. The ethnic short story cycle may therefore be considered the formal materialization of the trope of doubleness as the between-world condition is presented via a form that itself vacillates between two genres.

Elizabeth Ordoñez has pointed out that the "disruption of genre" is a common thread that links various ethnic texts by women: "the text itself becomes both the means and embodiment of modifying and reshaping female history, myths, and ultimately personal and collective identity" (19). Subverting narrative styles characterizes much of this writing; the fiction of Amy Tan, Julia Alvarez, Louise

Erdich, Toni Morrison, Theresa Cha, Fae Myenne Ng, among others, attests to their emancipation from the confines of traditionalist theories and practices. Specifically, Danticat's cycle, the writing of a subversively oral matrilineal tradition, permits the reader to read beyond cultural nationalism toward a "re-vision and revitalization of female ethnicity in a more broadly conceived context" (Ordoñez 20).

On different levels, ethnic short story cycles may project a desire to come to terms with a past that is both personal and collective: this type of fiction often explores the ethnic character and history of a community as a reflection of a personal odyssey of displacement, and search for self and community. More specifically, the two principal thematic constituents of the ethnic story cycle are the presentation of identity and community as separate entities and the notion of an identity within a community, again, a common theme of ethnic fiction. In Danticat's case, the textual tension arises from the presentation of women who struggle to establish and preserve the bonds of the Haitian community in the United States through powerful links with the mother country. Her stories, centering on the politics and the people of Haiti and Haitian immigrants to the United States, illustrate the numerous and varied connective strands that serve to draw the individuals of the short story cycle into a single community. The passage from appreciation of individual stories to the whole presented in the cycle marks the shift from the individual to community, setting the individual against the social group to which he or she belongs. The connections that are established will therefore yield what J. Gerald Kennedy has called the "defining experience" of the short story cycle: a vision of community accumulated by the reader's discernment of meanings and parallels inherent in the composite scheme (196). This movement, witnessed in other cycles by women such as Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*, constitutes the collective protagonist, the community, as the central character of the cycle.

The individual stories in *Krik? Krak!* present versions of life in and away from Haiti that create a composite portrait of the Haitian and her world. Although the stories are independent and written in different styles, they inform and enrich one another. In "Caroline's Wedding," the protagonist and her mother attend a funeral service

for those who died at sea in the first story. The seaside town of Ville Rose figures in the lives of many of the female characters: the young woman and her parents in "Children of the Sea" seek refuge there when she is being sought by the police; this town is also the setting of the stories "The Missing Peace," "Night Women," and "Seeing Things Simply." More importantly, a common ancestry links the women in the diverse stories. The main character of "Between the Pool and the Gardenias" is the goddaughter of Lili from "A Wall of Fire Rising" and the granddaughter of Défilé, imprisoned for witchcraft in "1937." As Renée Shea signals, these details serve to show that the many narrators come to understand their connections and their place primarily "through the bonds of women" (14).

The presentation of women and their relationships, specifically that of mothers and daughters, is pivotal to Danticat's narrative. In this sense, she reflects the same concerns as another emblematic mother-daughter short story cycle, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. Both complex ensembles of stories told by mothers and daughters are innovative variations of the traditional mother-daughter plot, which focuses on the daughter's perspective and the foregrounding of the voices of mothers as well as daughters (Heung 599). The women in both cycles are primarily responsible for the perpetuation of culture and bonds with the lost homeland. The mothers play major roles in the daughters' lives and growth, a role that provides the daughters with models for self-affirmation. Although the mothers all have different names and individual stories, they seem interchangeable in that their role as mother supersedes all others. The discrete identities of the women are woven into a collectivized interchangeability through the cycle's juxtapositions of characters and motifs. Through the narrative interweaving of time frames and voices, both Danticat and Tan unite generations of women within a relational network that links grandmothers, mothers, daughters, aunts, and sisters. For these women, however, "mutual nurturance does not rise from biological connections alone; rather, it is an act affirming consciously chosen allegiances" (Heung 612-13).

In stories where the mother/daughter bond is broken by the mother's death, this loss is viewed as devastating and must be compensated for by the daughter's taking the place of the mother or finding mother substitutes. Josephine, in "1937," is taught early

in life the importance of a mother and need to belong to a history of women: "Manman had taken my hand and pushed it into the river, no further than my wrist. . . . With our hands in the water, Manman spoke to the sun. 'Here is my child, Josephine. We were saved from the tomb of this river when she was still in my womb. You spared us both, her and me, from this river where I lost my mother'" (40). She joins the yearly All Saint's Day pilgrimage to Massacre River with the women who had lost their mothers there:

My mother would hold my hand tightly as we walked toward the water. We were all daughters of that river, which had taken our mothers from us. Our mothers were the ashes and we were the light. Our mothers were the embers and we were the sparks. Our mothers were the flames and we were the blaze. . . . The river was the place where it had all begun. "At least I gave birth to my daughter on the night that my mother was taken from me," she would say. "At least you came out at the right moment to take my mother's place." (41)

The narrator of "Between the Pool and the Gardenias" reiterates the idea of the loss of a mother and importance of the link with past generations: "For no matter how much distance death tried to put between us, my mother would often come to visit me. . . . There were many nights when I saw some old women leaning over my bed. 'That there is Marie,' my mother would say. 'She is now the last one of us left'" (94). As exemplified in this story, Danticat locates subjectivity in the maternal and employs it as a axis between the past and the present.

Other daughters feel the need to complete the work their mothers had left undone. Emilie, in "The Missing Peace," comes to Ville Rose to search for her mother, a journalist who disappeared while on assignment in the area. Part of her pursuit involves an attempt to bond with her lost mother by fulfilling one of her dreams: "I am going to sew [the small pieces of cloth] onto that purple blanket. . . . All her life, my mother's wanted to sew some old things together into that piece of purple cloth" (114). Her search parallels that of Lamort, named because her mother died when she was born: "'They say a girl becomes a woman when she loses her mother,' [Emilie] said. 'You, child, were born a woman'" (116). An epiphany comes for both women as they are forced to face and accept the loss of their mothers: "I became a woman last night. . . .

I lost my mother and all my other dreams” (121), Emilie says. Lamort will take her mother’s name, Marie Magdalène, as her rightful heritage. Though these stories reflect loss and a sense of a lack of affiliation, the overwhelming movement is toward reconciliation and pertinence, confirming the necessity and the possibility of seeking connection even after death.

Occasions in which communication between mother and child is obstructed result in confusion and unnecessary hurt. Two stories that mirror each other present the mother leading a secret life that her offspring does not know about. “Night Women,” set in Haiti, is a mother’s monologue as she gazes at her sleeping son. “There are two kinds of women: day women and night women. I am stuck between the day and night in a golden amber bronze” (84), she says. Corollary to this, the story entitled “New York Day Women” has a daughter watching, unobserved, as her mother makes her way from her home in Brooklyn to Madison Avenue where in Central Park she cares for a young child while his Yuppie mother goes jogging: “This mother of mine, she stops at another hot-dog vendor and buys a frankfurter that she eats on the street. I never knew that she ate frankfurters. . . . Day women come out when nobody expects them” (150, 153). Both stories emphasize the different worlds that mothers and children inhabit while linking the mothers. Furthermore, issues of race and class oppression suggested in both stories serve as factors that complicate maternal relationships because they lead the mothers to find ways of surviving or of asserting independence that they cannot, or will not, share with their children. The second story also suggests that the rift between mother and daughter may be brought about by attitudes towards immigration. Exile, which implies the loss of an original place, banishes belonging to memory and often causes dissociation from both the old ways and the new home. The process of diasporic self-formation is presented here through the growing distance between mother and daughter who struggle to define new identities and decide what to keep and what to relinquish.

This theme recurs in “Caroline’s Wedding,” where conflict centers on the American-born daughter’s impending marriage with a Bahamian and her mother’s reactions to it. Gracina, the daughter born in Haiti, tries to serve as buffer between the two points of view. She understands her mother’s dreams: “Ma wanted Eric to

officially come and ask her permission to marry her daughter. She wanted him to bring his family to our house and have his father ask her blessing. She wanted Eric to kiss up to her, escort her around, buy her gifts, and shower her with compliments. Ma wanted a full-blown church wedding. She wanted Eric to be Haitian” (169). For Caroline, the old country’s rules do not determine her obligations nor her mother’s authority. The traditional role of a Haitian mother has been greatly curtailed in America, and the mother has had to learn to deal with daughters whose way of life is American: “When we were children, whenever we rejected symbols of Haitian culture, Ma used to excuse us with great embarrassment and say, ‘You know, they are American.’ Why didn’t we like the thick fatty pig skin that she would deep-fry so long that it tasted like rubber. We were Americans and we had *no taste buds*. A double tragedy” (214-15). “In Haiti, you own your children and they find it natural” (215), their mother would say, which explains her sense of loss at what she considers abandonment by her younger daughter. The relationships between the mother and daughters in this Haitian American family underline some of the cross-generational and cross-cultural conflicts typical of ethnic texts. At the end of the story, the relationship will rest on the daughters’ recognition of the value of the mother’s establishment of community that provides them with the resources they need to survive on their own.

There is an obsessive need to find and establish familial and historical connections with other Haitians. Because “Ma says all Haitians know each other” (169), the community in America survives. The immigrants experience continued and profound nostalgia for the lost home though their children chaff at the extent of this loyalty: “Twenty years we have been saving all kinds of things for the relatives in Haiti. I need a place in the garage for an exercise bike” (150). The song “*Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you, I had to leave you before I could understand you*” is sung by the refugees in the first story and listened to on the radio in the last.

In consequence, history also becomes a protagonist in *Krik? Krak!* as stories set in Haiti directly or indirectly involve historical events. “1937,” for instance, centers on the Dominican Republic’s dictator Rafael Trujillo’s massacre of Haitians at the river separating Haiti from the Dominican Republic. Furthermore, Danticat has commented that the original title of the first story was “From the

Ocean Floor” but that she decided to change it to “Children of the Sea” to emphasize the link to the Middle Passage. “It’s a very powerful image—from the ocean floor,” she explains. “No one knows how many people were lost on The Middle Passage. There are no records or graves—and the ocean floor is where our fossils are. The journey from Haiti in the 1980s is like a new middle passage. Not to romanticize it, but the comforting thing about death is that somehow all these people will meet. I often think that if my ancestors are at the bottom of the sea, then I too am a part of that. So we are all children of the sea” (Shea 12). Gracina, in “Caroline’s Wedding,” reflects on this ancient belief that links Haitians: “There are people in Ville Rose, the village where my mother is from in Haiti, who believe that there are special spots in the sea where lost Africans who jumped off the slave ships still rest, that those who died at sea have been chosen to make that journey in order to be reunited with their long-lost relations” (167-68). The death of the people in the refugee boat in the first story will establish historical links, forging a community of Haitians that includes not only those alive in the present time but also those lost in the past.

Though the stories in *Krik? Krak!* have a continuity derived from recurrent themes and motifs, they are more profoundly linked by a spiritual vision where the bonds between women are imperative for survival. The most vivid metaphor for interconnections, echoes, and blending appears with Danticat’s image of braids in the final section, “Epilogue: Women Like Us,” a meditative finale to the nine stories. “When you write,” she says, “it’s like braiding your hair. Taking a handful of coarse unruly strands and attempting to bring them unity” (220). Danticat uses this ritualistic image to illustrate the inseparable strands of history and the need for community:

Your mother, she introduced you to the first echoes of the tongue that you now speak when at the end of the day she would braid your hair while you sat between her legs, scrubbing the kitchen pots. . . . When she was done, she would ask you to name each braid after those nine hundred and ninety-nine women who were boiling in your blood, and since you had written them down and memorized them, the names would come rolling off your tongue. And this was your testament to the way that these women lived and died and lived again. (224)

The persona in the epilogue pays tribute to what she calls “Kitchen Poets,” those voices “urging you to speak through the blunt tip of your pencil” (222). The storytelling tradition, essential for the transmission of lives and cultures, strengthens the connections between women: “

With every step you take, there is an army of women watching over you. We are never any farther than the sweat on your brows or the dust on your toes. . . you have never been able to escape the pounding of a thousand other hearts that have outlived yours by thousands of years. And over the years when you have needed us, you have always cried ‘Krik?’ and we have answered ‘KraK!’ and it has shown us that you have not forgotten us. (222-24)

The use of the second-person narrator implicates the reader/listener, inviting her to participate in the storytelling act, commissioning her, as with many of the characters, with the task of telling, of participating in the process of creating and preserving community through narrative.

Considering the urgency and implications of the identity politics within which Danticat works and her awareness of the dynamics of the culturally diverse audience of her story, her innovative use of narrative perspective in the concluding section of her cycle further challenges the construct of a monolithic “you.” Ethnic writers who use the second-person address are aware that “assumptions that white middle and upper class audiences bring to the act of reading are thus foregrounded and exposed—particularly the insidious assumption that they are, ‘naturally,’ the universal you addressed by the text” (Richardson 323-24). Opening up a possibility for the narratee, the second-person point of view also opens up a possibility for the reader. The use of the narrative “you” becomes one of the more interesting facets of literary theory and criticism because, while in standard fiction the protagonist/narratee is quite distinct from the actual or implied reader, this mode of narration often collapses this distinction because the “you” could refer to the reader as well.

Danticat’s epilogue to her short story cycle forces the reader to face the experience of cultural betweenness and choices in the manner that implicates most directly, pulling her into the drama



and suggesting that this is, more than just a Haitian-American story and dilemma, everyone's as well. Although the oral community figured in *Krik? Krak!* is clearly distinct from the mass readership in the US and European markets, Danticat, by identifying and contesting the assumed "you," generates a widening of discursive space, where more and more diverse voices may be heard and similarly plural subjectivities may be addressed. This concluding strategy is Danticat's *tour de force*, the final touch to the integration of theme and technique, as she weaves the formal strands of oral narrative and story cycle with the contextual telling of women's lives, expanding the reach of the stories and drawing more people into the experience.

This short story cycle, as a discourse on ethnic self-definition has recollections or personal experiences of Haiti as an important aspect of the creation of self. The questions the characters ask themselves are answered through narratives that, in reflecting the form of the oral narrative, articulate almost epic tales of survivors. Edwidge Danticat has turned to roots—family, community, and ethnicity—as a source of personal identity and creative expression. The manner in which she, like other ethnic writers, has appropriated the short story cycle as a metaphor for the fragmentation and multiplicity of ethnic lives is itself an articulation of the process towards ethnic self-identification. The subsequent narrative, in turning to past forms of narration and reflecting a tendency towards a hybrid form, provides enriching glimpses of societies in the process of transformation and growth. The vivid dream and aspiration that remains at the end of the book is succinctly proclaimed by Josephine: "I raised my head toward the sun thinking, one day I may just see my mother there. 'Let her flight be joyful,' I said to Jacqueline. 'And mine and yours too'" (49).

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