



UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA

FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA:

Degree in English Studies:

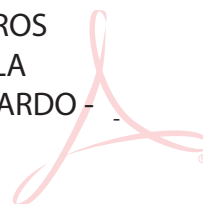
Language and Literature

**Giving Voice to the Voiceless: Letters in “Children
of the Sea”, by Edwidge Danticat**

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2023

BARROS
GRELA
EDUARDO



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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this BA dissertation is to analyze the use of the epistolary genre in a short story of North American/Haitian Diasporic literature: “Children of the Sea”, by Edwidge Danticat. The author organizes the story throughout a series of letters which two lovers “send” to each other: she, a young woman who lives in a dictatorial state; and he, a young man who is forced to flee his country due to political reasons. Danticat uses these letters to criticize the regime in which Haiti is under. By using this young couple as the writers of the letters, she gives voice to the voiceless. Furthermore, by making this couple anonymous (neither of their names are ever mentioned in the story), she gives voice to all those people who would otherwise have remained silenced in history.

1. Introduction

Literature—the same way as history—is a genre that has been used for centuries as a tool to impose the ideas of the powerful against those who are in the margins. Those in power saw in literature an opportunity to influence people by imposing a norm. This and the fact that there have existed many ways to control what could be published or not have helped to establish a literary canon conformed by people (mostly white males) who do not deviate from the norm. Furthermore, it is important to mention that literature has also been (and still is) used to represent history and history has mainly been written by those who won. All of this implies that the stories of those people who inhabit the margins have been silenced or minimized, not only by history books, but also by literature. Nonetheless, literature can be also used as a tool to defy the norm, the system. Literature can transform history. As expressed by Blanco, “[a] literatura é un crisol da sociedade e dos seres humanos que a forman, unha metáfora na que ambas realidades se atopan sintetizadas, un microcosmos dun cosmos, un espello que reflecte a vida pero que tamén axuda a creala e modificala” (14).

Among all the authors who have consciously opposed the norm (Maya Angelou, Fredrick Douglass, Sally Morgan, Salman Rushdie, Chinua Achebe, or Toni Morrison among others) is Edwidge Danticat. Danticat is an author who inhabited the margins and decided to take the stories and the voices from the people who preceded her and the voice from her contemporaries so that they would never be silenced again. As a black feminist author, Danticat “... explore[s] Black women’s fragility, the obstacles they face in a patriarchal, racist, and sexist society, and approach[es] their victimization with the aim of exemplifying their struggles for freedom, giving them a voice against a cruel world that has oppressed and silenced them” (Sousa). Through her works we know the history of Haiti, of how the colonization had and still has a huge impact on the island (both Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and on those people who had and still have to flee the place they once called home. Furthermore, we get to know

how Haitian people who had to migrate to the United States (US) experience living in the diaspora.

In this dissertation, I decided to focus on how Danticat uses the epistolary genre to give voice to the voiceless in one of her short stories: “Children of the Sea” (included in her book *Krik? Krak!*, 1996). This short story caught my attention because of the way Danticat uses the epistolary genre to expose the reality of many Haitians who, after hundreds of years of suffering, still suffer. That is why it is important to take a brief theoretical look at the epistolary genre and how it is perceived within literary theory. Through the letters, Danticat also criticizes the historical processes that have led to this situation and, by presenting the experiences of women, she contributes to the creation of a feminist Haitian diasporic literature. Considering that the story is set both at sea—the young man escapes Haiti by boat—and on land—the girl is in Haiti—the short story could not be fully understood without addressing Haiti and its diaspora from a historical and literary perspective, as well as without studying the main events of the country’s history. Afterwards, an analysis of the contents of the letters is introduced, distinguishing between the letters written by the young man and those written by the young woman. Through this analysis, I intend to demonstrate how Danticat’s use of the epistolary genre is innovative, as she uses letters to denounce, by giving voice to two anonymous lovers, the injustice political system which resulted in thousands of deaths as well as the world’s (especially the US) abandonment of Haitians.

2. Epistolary genre¹

Before analyzing how Edwidge Danticat uses the epistolary genre in “Children of the Sea”, it is important to provide an overview of the epistolary genre and how it is perceived within literary theory.

Even though the letter as a means of communication originates in China 4000 years ago (Bastons, Krasniqi) and “... is probably the most ancient form of attested writing ...” (Del Lungo 17), they start to be used as a literary genre in Greece, being the *Iliad* by Homer one of the most well-known examples (Pulido 435). It is at that time when letters not only work as a communicative tool, but also as a way to express ideas. The range of topics covered by the epistles increases with the start of the Middle Ages (Bastons 234). It is also during this period when letters start to be used “... con fines y sobre objetos estrictamente ficcionales” (Krasniqi).

Nevertheless, the boom of the fictional use of the epistles occurs between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries. The emergence of the Renaissance first and of the Enlightenment later brought a series of more open ideas which were further removed from the theocratic way of thinking (Bastons 244). These new ideas led to the appearance of the modern epistle in the eighteenth century (Bastons, Pulido, Del Lungo). In fact, “[t]he importance of letters in the development of eighteenth-century fiction is paramount” (Lorenzo 50). It is in this century and in the previous one when the letter, as an integral part of a literary work, “... alcanza su mayor relieve ...” (Beltrán 242). As Lorenzo further explains, the introduction of this genre into fiction

... offer further (*sic*) possibilities in the development of characters’ feelings and thought.

They add spontaneity and frankness to characters’ words when addressing other characters and when showing their true personality, for want of other techniques of

¹ Parts of this section were inspired by my dissertation to obtain the Degree in Galician and Portuguese Studies: Language and Literature: *As cartas en Circe ou o pracer do azul: unha ferramenta revolucionaria* (2019).

expressing it that would be fully developed in the beginning of the twentieth century (stream of consciousness and interior monologue). (50)

The rise of the modern epistle is also linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie, since the epistle was the only means of writing which this social class had access to (Pulido 436). During this period, men employed letters in the public sphere to express ideas which would be later published. Meanwhile, women saw in the epistle an ounce of freedom, that is, women used the letters to express themselves freely with the tranquility of knowing that their letters would never leave the private sphere.

One of the main formal characteristics of a letter is that it has a sender—the person who writes the content of the letter—and a receiver—the person who receives that content and answers it. Thus, emulating, in a way, an oral conversation (Pulido 440). When this social text (Krasniqi) enters the literary and, consequently, fictitious sphere, a pact is made between the writer and the reader. As Marín (738-739) defines it, the epistolary genre is a literary game in which the reader believes that the letters written by the author of the book/story are real.

As Krasniqi explains, there are not enough studies about the modern and contemporary epistolary genre because it suffered, as a discursive genre, a process of codification and structural subjection which led it to lack rhetorical, fictitious and artistic objectives. In this sense, it is important to make a distinction between the common/formal letter and the literary letter, as the formality in the composition of the former does not occur in the latter (Beltrán 240). This is due to the fact that the literary letter needs a lot of liberty for its elaboration (Beltrán 240).

As I have previously mentioned, letters can be seen as a glimpse of freedom since they can be relegated to the (semi)private sphere. In the case of the letters written by the protagonists of “Children of the Sea”, these never escape that private sphere, as they are neither sent nor seeing by anyone else but themselves. The act of writing is, for the authors of the letters, a way

to express freely their anger and frustration provoked by the harsh situation(s) they are living and to remember each other (before he parted, they promised to write every day). Thus, these missives work as an interior monologue and, in the case of the girl's letters, as a sort of stream of consciousness. In addition, these letters function as a rewriting of a past which history had purposefully decided to erase, as the epistolary genre plays an important role in "... the reconstruction of past cultures or sociohistorical contexts ...” (Del Lungo 21).

3. Brief approach to Haitian history

In order to fully comprehend “Children of the Sea”, it is important to provide an overview of Haiti's history, starting with a brief summary of the colonization period and focusing on the Haitian Revolution in 1791 and on the 20th century.

3.1. Slavery, the Revolution and independence

Before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers to Hispaniola in 1492, the island population consisted of Taino and Ciboney people, who were the first groups to be enslaved. Due to the harsh working conditions, war and the diseases brought from Europe by the colonizers, most of the native inhabitants of Hispaniola were wiped out by the sixteenth century. This resulted in the beginning of slave trade in the early seventeenth century. After the Spanish, the French came and continued with the slave trade, which was the main basis of Haiti's economy until its independence in 1804.

Haiti is the “... first black republic in the Western Hemisphere, home to the only slave revolt that succeeded in producing a nation” (Danticat, *Create* 70). This slave revolution took place between 1791 and 1804 and was a conflict involving different groups and countries. In 1791, the population of the French colony consisted mostly of African slaves and a small percentage of *affranchis* (mostly mixed-race people and some descendants of Africans) and

European colonists. Clashes between them were common. In fact, Maroons—slaves who escaped from the plantation and other types of forced labor to the mountains—had been in guerilla warfare against the colonizer’s armies before the revolution. However, the French government’s 1791 plan to concede citizenship to the *affranchis* was the turning point that culminated in the start of the revolution.

An important figure of the Haitian Revolution is the general Toussaint L’Ouverture (ca. 1743, Haiti-7th of April 1803, France), a man born a slave who got freed in 1776. At first, he allied himself with the Spanish, with whom he negotiated to give the slaves more rights. He eventually shifted his way of thinking and ended up fighting for the abolition of slavery, thus becoming the leader of the revolution. When the French government granted the abolition of slavery in 1794, he allied himself with them and started ruling Saint-Domingue (as Haiti was known before its independence). He united both parts of the island (Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo) in 1801 and abolished slavery on the Spanish side. His wish for a ruling constitution for the island was considered a threat to French rule and led to his arrest and subsequent imprisonment in France, where he died in 1803, right before the independence was achieved.

After more than 300 years of colonization, Haiti became an independent nation in 1804, thus being a symbol of freedom to many slaves from other parts of the world (Cope 99). This was not well-perceived by the “West”, especially by the US. Thomas Jefferson, one of the founding fathers of the US and the main author of the US Declaration of Independence, was concerned that the Haitian Revolution might entail a slave revolt in the US. Being a slaveowner himself, “... he couldn’t manage to reconcile dealing with one group of Africans as leaders and another as chattel” (Danticat, *Create* 97). Thus, Haiti’s independence was not recognized by the US until six decades later. From this time onwards, US relations with Haiti have always been tumultuous, and its involvement in the country has seriously affected Haiti.

3.2. Recent history of Haiti

Haiti goes from being seen as a utopia to those territories which were still under colonialist control to being seen as a kind of dystopia in current times (Loichot 94). This is due to the fact that Haiti's recent history has been negatively affected by its occupied past and by nearly 30 years of dictatorship (1957-1986). In recent times, Haiti was occupied for 19 years (1915-1934) by the United States. They "... shut down the press, took charge of Haiti's banks and customhouses, and instituted a system of compulsory labor for poor Haitians. By the end of the occupation, more than fifteen thousand Haitians had lost their lives" (Danticat, *Create* 67). The US influence affected Haiti in the following years (and in current times). For example, the US supported the 1991 coup d'état which overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

From 1957 to 1986, Haiti was under two dictatorships in which the rulers were first father François Duvalier (1957-1971) and, after his death, his son Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986). In 1957, François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier becomes president of Haiti. He implements a dictatorship and, in 1959, he creates a paramilitary army known as Tonton Macoutes to terrorize the population (Loichot 112). They were "henchmen and henchwomen who would assassinate their own mothers and fathers if so ordered by the dictator" (Danticat, *Create* 66). François Duvalier wanted to eradicate any kind of opposition to his regime, so he introduced censorship of all kind and public executions were normal.

Danticat presents an example of this in *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*: the execution of Marcel Numa (21) and Louis Drouin (31), two young men from the group Jeune Haiti (Young Haiti) who, after escaping Haiti during the convulsing 1950s, come back in 1964 to start a guerrilla warfare in Jérémie to fight the dictatorship. She further explains that "[o]n the day of the execution [November 12, 1964], he [François Duvalier] decreed that government offices be closed so that hundreds of state employees could be in the crowd. Schools were shut down and principals ordered to bring their students. Hundreds of people from

outside the capital were bused in to watch” (Danticat, *Create* 11). He wanted to make their deaths a spectacle and he did not want people to forget it, as their execution was displayed constantly in cinemas and on TV (Danticat, *Create* 17). François Duvalier was also known to kill not only those who openly fought against the regime, but he also imprisoned, tortured and killed many of their relatives. When his son Jean-Claude Duvalier became the dictator in 1971, he continued his father’s steps and, as previously mentioned, helped turn Haiti into a sweatshop factory for “white” countries. This entailed an increase in poverty and, by the 1980s, thousands of people from all social classes fled Haiti by boat. Discontent spread throughout the country, which resulted in the start of popular uprisings. After many attempts to stop the revolts, he eventually went into exile in 1986.

The ending of the dictatorship did not mean, unfortunately, the end of repression. The following years, Haiti was mired in instability. The country’s efforts to become a democracy were steadily sabotaged. This situation changed during the elections of 1990, won by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first democratically elected president of Haiti. However, Aristide’s government did not last long. In September 1991, a coup d’état overthrew him. The same way as during the Duvaliers dictatorship, the paramilitary men, known as attachés, wanted to eliminate all kind of dissent in the cruelest ways (Danticat, *Create*). Until Aristide’s return in 1994², Haiti was governed by a junta which left “... more than eight thousand ...” dead (Danticat, *Create* 85). This junta had its own Tonton Macoutes, known as FRAPH³, a paramilitary group organized by former Tonton Macoutes. It is said that these “new” Macoutes were worse than the “old” ones. The hard fact is that, “[i]n 1994, after an embargo against the Haitian *de facto* government, Human Rights Watch and National Coalition for Haitian Refugees

² 1994 is considered by Michelet Divers, “... the worst political crisis in the history of this turbulent little country” (Danticat, *After the Dance*... 118).

³ FRAPH: Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti or, in French, *Front pour l’Avancement et le Progrès Haitien*.

... “found” that the paramilitary that replaced the *tonton macoutes* used rape and sexual assault to punish and intimidate women” (Jean-Charles 45).

4. Haiti and the diaspora

The Haitian diaspora cannot be understood without considering the migration patterns in Haiti, as “... there is a strong and direct echo between migration patterns and the economic and political situation in Haiti” (Mirabal and Danticat 28). Whereas this migration patterns started before 1957, it is during the start of François Duvalier’s dictatorship when Haitian migration peaks. One of François Duvalier’s first objectives was to get rid of as many opposers to the regime as possible, which was characterized by a brain drain during the 1950s and 1960s (Mirabal and Danticat 27-28). As explained by Clitandre, many “... writers, journalists, politicians, and professionals of the elite and educated class, emigrated during this period to escape state-sanctioned persecution and violence” (101). This migration pattern changed in the 1980s, during Jean-Claude Duvalier’s dictatorship. He nurtured

... an atrocious sweatshop culture that added another layer of despair to the lives of a population that could not refuse to work, no matter how meager the pay. Other poor Haitians were sold by the Haitian government in secret deals to work in the sugarcane field of the Dominican Republic and were shipped off like slaves to the other side of the island. (Danticat, *Create* 65)

This migration wave—in opposition to the one from the first years of the dictatorship—affects people from all social classes who are not only escaping from political consequences, but who are also seeking for better life opportunities outside the country (Mirabal and Danticat 27-28). This migration was also characterized by its means of transportation, which was by boat, and continued in the following years, especially during the 1990s (Aspedilla 4).

The Haitian diaspora was seen, especially during the Duvaliers dictatorship, as something negative. In fact, Haitian migrants were not welcomed back. No matter the reason why they left, people who were deported or returned to Haiti during this period faced being imprisoned, tortured, or killed. Haitians' situation was aggravated by their abandonment by countries like the US, the Bahamas or the Dominican Republic, whose immigration laws were (and are) very harsh against Haitians⁴ (Moore and Danticat). In *After the Dance: A Walk through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* (2002), Danticat informs that, after the coup d'état that overthrew President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991, "[a]ccording to Amnesty International, ... thirty-eight thousand Haitians took to the high seas, crossing five hundred miles of rough waters to Miami" (145). Danticat further states that, "[o]f those, less than 5 percent received asylum and the rest were repatriated. Between that time and now [2002], thousands have perished at sea, their boats sinking or simply disappearing somewhere between Haiti and Miami" (145-146). The treatment of Haitians by other nearby countries is a reminder "... of the geo-political borders that circumscribe the bodies and the voices of the most marginalized" (Glover).

The association of the diaspora with some negative connotations in Haiti has made authors like Danticat struggle with being in the diaspora:

I meant ... to list my own experiences as an immigrant and a writer, of being called *dyaspora* when expressing an opposing political point of view in discussions with friends and family members living in Haiti, who knew that they could easily silence me by saying, "What do you know? You're living outside. You're a *dyaspora*." I meant to recall some lighter experiences of being startled in the Haitian capital or in the provinces

⁴ Another example of the US' abandonment occurred after the January 12, 2010, magnitude 7.0 earthquake in Haiti, in which thousands of people lost their homes and another thousand died. The US Coast Guard's "... primary purpose is to make sure that Haitians are intercepted if they try to get on boats and head to the United States" (Danticat, *Create...* 146).

when a stranger who wanted to catch my attention could call out, “*Diaspora!*” as though it were a title like *Miss*, *Ms.*, *Mademoiselle*, or *Madame*. I meant to recall conversations or debates in restaurants, at parties, or at public gatherings where members of the *diaspora* would be classified—justifiably or not—as arrogant, insensitive, overbearing, and pretentious people who were eager to reap the benefits of good jobs and political positions in times of stability in a country that they’d fled and stayed away from during difficult times. Shamefacedly, I’d bow my head and accept these judgments when they were expressed, feeling guilty about my own physical distance from a country I had left at the age of twelve during a dictatorship that had forced thousands to choose between exile or death. (*Create* 54-55)

This feeling of not belonging, of finding that one’s country “is one of uncertainty” (Danticat, *Create* 54)⁵, is common in many diasporic writers, who find themselves in an in-between undefined space, “whether as limbo state or space of creative tension or the variations in-between” (Page). However, this situation seemed to change when, during the campaign elections in 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide—having also been in exile—decided to include all those people living outside the borders of Haiti by calling them the 10th Department of Haiti (Page). This “... floating homeland, the ideological one, ... joined all Haitians living outside of Haiti, in the *diaspora*” (Danticat, *Create* 54).

From a literary perspective, it is important to remember that, during the Duvaliers dictatorship, many books were banned, especially those which could encourage acts of rebellion. Writers who decided to publish “controversial” books, even outside of Haiti but about Haiti, could be punished. An example of this is Marie Vieux Chauvet, who “... was about to be published in France, but was pulled by the family because the Haitian Ambassador in France

⁵ “When I say ‘my country’ to some Haitians, they think I mean the United States. When I say ‘my country’ to some Americans, they think of Haiti” (Danticat, *Create* 54).

told her that if this book came out her family would be wiped out” (Moore and Danticat). Therefore, many people had to read and write those books clandestinely, which was also an act of resistance (Danticat, *Create* 19). In Danticat’s opinion, to read and to create under those circumstances is a dangerous enterprise, but one that is worth taking:

Create dangerously, for people who read dangerously. This is what I’ve always thought it meant to be a writer. Writing, knowing in part that no matter how trivial your words may seem, someday, somewhere, someone may risk his or her life to read them. Coming from where I come from, with the history I have—having spent the first twelve years of my life under both dictatorships of Papa Doc and his son, Jean-Claude—this is what I’ve always seen as the unifying principle among all writers. (*Create* 19)

When even reading and writing in your home country is dangerous, when it seems that there are only two options to survive—keep quiet or leave—, many decide to escape. This was the case of Danticat’s parents and “[t]his may be one of the reasons I live in the United States of America today, writing in this language that is not mine. This could possibly be why I am an immigrant and hopefully an artist, an immigrant artist at work” (Danticat, *Create* 23).

Even though being a diasporic (not exiled) writer has its advantages—“... we are not risking torture, beatings, execution, ... exile does not threaten us into perpetual silence”—, they are creating dangerously for those at home who, even facing harsh political situations, decide to keep “... reading, and writing, quietly, quietly” (Danticat, *Create* 26). This demonstrates the desire of many diasporic Caribbean writers “... to interpret and possibly remake his or her own world” (Danticat, *Create* 26) by voicing the silences, by stepping out of the shadows.

However, the work of diasporic writers is not always an easy endeavor, as they face harsh criticism both at home and in the diaspora if they decide to write about something that is perceived as negative. In the case of Danticat, she has faced criticism for exposing a practice that

some Haitian women suffer(ed) in her 1994 novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*⁶. This is due to the fact that Haitians in the diaspora were negatively represented in the media, “as disasterprone refugees and boat people and AIDS carriers” (Danticat, *Create* 39). This led Danticat to write, in 1999, a letter to Sophie⁷—one of the novel’s characters—explaining that not all Haitian women go through that “testing”.

This harsh criticism and her difficulty to not be perceived as a foreign in her home country have not restrained Danticat’s desire to contribute to the formation of a Haitian diasporic literature from a feminist perspective. Danticat believes that writing “... gives you deeper insight into the truth. It is as if you are telling a series of lies to arrive at a greater truth” (Horn and Danticat 20). What Danticat does in her works is “... put the characters in the context of some events in Haiti, examine what their lives mean, who they are under the umbrella of history” (Horn and Danticat 21). Thus, creating is for Danticat a way of changing and participating in history. As Claudine Michel affirms, “[t]his is what Danticat is about: standing up for social justice giving voices to those who have been silenced for too long” (Danticat, “Stories”).

5. Letters in “Children of the Sea”: a revolt against silence

As previously mentioned, Danticat uses her works to give voice to the voiceless, to tell stories which would otherwise be silenced and forgotten. This is one of the reasons why she chooses black women as her protagonists, as they inhabit the margins within the margins. As Danticat herself expresses, “[b]lack women certainly are at the center of my stories. I think part of this is from my personal experience of growing up with women who are very powerful—to me—

⁶ “All these women [the protagonists of the book] share a trauma: all had mothers who regularly inserted the tips of their fingers into their daughters’ vaginas to check that they were still virgins” (Danticat, *Create*... 38). “[T]hough I was not saying that “testing” happened in every Haitian household, to every Haitian girl, I knew many women and girls who had been “tested” in that way” (Danticat, *Create*... 39).

⁷ This letter is, since 1999, part of the epilogue of the book.

but very vulnerable in their society” (Moore and Danticat). By putting black women as the center of her stories, Danticat interferes in the patriarchal and male chauvinist conception of the diaspora—which considers mostly males’ points of view and males’ narratives—and changes it by exploring women’s voices and stories (Glover, Jean-Charles, Clitandre). This way, she presents another perspective, a feminist one, to the canonical (Haitian) diasporic literature, one in which women’s experiences are not obliterated (Aspedilla, Clitandre).

*Krik? Krak!*⁸ is a good example of this. In this compilation of short stories, women’s voices and experiences are the protagonists. In fact, all the stories have women narrators, being “Children of the Sea” the only one in which both a man and a woman are narrators. Having a male narrator does not mean that she is no longer contributing to the feminist perspective of the Haitian diasporic literature. Quite the contrary, she is opposing both the boy’s and the girl’s experiences in order to better represent what it typically meant to be a (political active) man in a hostile political situation versus what it meant to be a woman in that same given situation. Furthermore, readers never get to know the protagonists/narrators’ names. By making them anonymous, Danticat is not telling the story of just two people, but of many others who, unfortunately, suffered the same consequences as them⁹. In addition, their anonymity is also a symbol of political repression: writing their names on the letters could endanger their lives if these are found by the paramilitary man or the government.

“Children of the Sea” is a compilation of 20 letters which two young lovers write to each other, but which are never sent. The young man is forced to flee the country to escape being killed by the new imposed regime, while the young woman has no other option than to stay in Port-au-Prince. Neither escaping nor staying are easy or safe solutions. The young man

⁸ The name *Krik? Krak!* comes from a Haitian tradition in which—before telling a story—somebody says “Krik?” and the other answers “Krak!” as a way to get involvement: “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 ...” (Danticat, *Krik* 16).

⁹ “When I am writing about a person, I am writing about a community” (Moore and Danticat).

confronts dying at sea before reaching the coasts of Miami, while the young woman can be at any moment tortured, raped, or killed by the paramilitary attachés. Nonetheless, they are able to maintain some kind of mental sanity by writing letters to each other, something they had promised to do before he escaped, so “it will seem like we lost no time” (Danticat, *Krik* 11).

In *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*, Danticat explains what it means for her to create dangerously: “... Albert Camus, like the poet Osip Mandelstam, suggests that it is creating as a revolt against silence, creating when both the creation and the reception, the writing and the reading, are dangerous undertakings, disobedience to a directive” (26). If writing anything against a harsh political situation is dangerous, the letters in “Children of the Sea” can also be considered a written revolt against silence. In fact, Danticat affirms that “[p]erhaps at a time when one could be shot so easily, assassinated so publicly, not reading or writing was a survival mechanism” (*Create* 26). The protagonists of the story are creating dangerously just by writing those letters which will never be sent, especially the girl, as she is writing them while being in Haiti, which means that someday, somebody, a Tonton Macoute, could enter her parents’ house, find her letters, and execute her for that.

5.1. Setting of the story

Many fragments of the letters suggest that “Children of the Sea” is set sometime between the 1980s and 1990s. It is known that the young man was participating in a radio show and that he—among others—gave freely his opinion about different topics (including politics): “It was nice to have radio like that for a while, where we could talk about what we wanted from government, what we wanted for the future of our country” (Danticat, *Krik* 9). This radio show might have aired during the first Jean-Bertrand Aristide’s presidency (February 1991-September 1991). For the first time in many years, Haiti seemed to finally have a brighter future. Things that were banned during the Duvaliers 29-year dictatorship were finally being allowed and

people stopped being afraid of speaking their minds. This suggests that the story takes place during the years that followed the 1991 coup d'état (1991-1994).

5.2. Letters in “Children of the Sea”

Even though any of the letters are signed/have a name, it is easy to identify which ones correspond to the young man and which ones to the young woman due to their contents. While the letters written by the young man mainly revolve around his experience at sea, the letters written by the young woman provide a background of everything that has led to the situation they encounter themselves in.

Another important distinction between the letters by the young man and the letters by the young woman is the format, that is, the way in which they are written and structured and the kind of language that is being used. It is important to mention that any of the letters follow a standard format, that is, none of them have neither greeting nor closing and signature. However, the letters written by the young man follow a more formal format than those of the young woman. His letters have a more cohesive structure, while her letters tend to jump from one topic to another. In this sense, he also uses punctuation marks and capital letters, while she writes in a more freely style with very little punctuation marks and no capital letters. Another distinction is that the young man writes only in English, while the young woman includes sentences in French.

These differences between their letters may be due to the fact that the young man was attending university—as it is mentioned several times in the story—, while there is no information in this regard about the young woman. Her being educated is mentioned just once in the story and the readers never get to know how far educated she actually is: “but you are an educated girl [says the mother of the girl], what she counts for educated is not much to anyone but us anyway” (Danticat, *Krik* 15).

5.2.1. Letters written by him

As previously mentioned, one of the main tropes in Danticat's literary work is that of giving voice to the voiceless, of telling the stories of those who could not so that they will never be obliterated again. This fear of being forgotten is exemplified in one of the story's first lines. The young man writes that he knows that "... there are timeless waters, endless seas, and lots of people in this world whose names don't matter to anyone but themselves" (Danticat, *Krik* 7). In this world, voices of ordinary people do not matter, and even less the voices of those who are "renegades", who were born in a system in which, from the moment they were born, they never had a voice. Furthermore, this quotation also signifies the erasure of Haitian's matters and, especially, the suffering of Haitian people throughout the entire history of Haiti¹⁰.

He and all the other "... thirty-six deserting souls ..." (Danticat, *Krik* 7) who are with him on the small boat symbolize that erasure. They also represent "... the hopelessness of the future in our country [Haiti]" (Danticat, *Krik* 9). There are people like him who are escaping being imprisoned, killed or tortured by the government, there are others who are escaping the horrendous economic situation and there are others who are escaping to forget the torture they have already suffered. By including people who are fleeing the country for different reasons, Danticat is representing the migration waves that occurred in Haiti from the start of François Duvalier's dictatorship until the 1990s, but, especially, the one which started during the 1980s—under Jean-Claude's dictatorship—until the 1990s.

Through his letters, Danticat wants to show how harsh the conditions of these Haitian migrants were before reaching a supposed safe space like the United States. These conditions are normally forgotten by the media, which presents these migratory waves as simple voyages, perpetrating negative stereotypes about Haitians and creating an anti-immigrant sentiment

¹⁰ For example, the US "... tried to silence the Haitian Revolution", characterizing "... it as a savage race war and an unjustifiable attack on (white) property rights" (Byrd).

among citizens. An example of this is "... in the representation of Haitians as "boat people" in the 1980s, an image developed through media coverage of Haitian emigrants entering the United States by boat and being intercepted on the shores of South Florida" (Clitandre 122-123). This representation of Haitians would continue during the following years, affecting and influencing a young Danticat to refute this type of discourse and show the reality.

As shown in the young man's letter these journeys were neither safe nor short: "I don't know how long we'll be at sea" (Danticat, *Krik* 7); "I can't tell how far we are from there. We might be barely out of our own shores. There are no borderlines on the sea. The whole thing looks like one" (Danticat, *Krik* 9). Not only the journey was long, but also very dangerous, as the conditions under which they traveled were not safe. Many people used to travel on small boats which were not meant to make long journeys, since they could be easily wrecked, and they did not have many materials to properly repair the possible damages:

Some water started coming into the boat in the spot where she was sleeping. There is a crack at the bottom of the boat that looks as though, if it gets any bigger, it will split the boat in two. The captain cleared us aside and used some tar to clog up the hole. Everyone started asking him if it was okay, if they were going to be okay. He said he hoped the Coast Guard would find us soon. (Danticat, *Krik* 12)

Besides, being saved by the Coast Guard was not a guarantee of arrival at the destination because of immigration laws (of the United States or the Bahamas, for example), which did not want Haitians to enter their countries. They might be rescued by the Coast Guard and subsequently sent back to Haiti, ignoring the fact that these people would probably be killed once they set foot in Haiti. Their blackness was not wanted anywhere, as the young man expresses in the third letter:

The faces around me are showing their first charcoal layer of sun-burn. “Now we will never be mistaken for Cubans”, one man said. Even though some of the Cubans are black too. The man said he was once on a boat with a group of Cubans. His boat had stopped to pick up the Cubans on an island off the Bahamas. When the Coast Guard came for them, they took the Cubans to Miami and sent him back to Haiti. Now he was back on the boat with some papers and documents to show that the police in Haiti were after him. He had a broken leg too, in case there was any doubt. (Danticat, *Krik* 11)

With this, Danticat also criticizes the hypocritical US immigration laws. The United States deported Haitians, but accepted Cuban immigrants/exiles due to the strong anti-communist sentiment which ruled the US government. Cubans, who were at the time under the government of Fidel Castro, had (and have) it easier to enter the United States and to be recognized as refugees and, eventually, to get the American citizenship. Nonetheless, this was not the case for Haitians, who were escaping a hostile situation and place in which the government wanted them dead or in which they had no ways of surviving. This abandonment of Haitian people seems less surreal when one acknowledges that the US government supported both the Duvaliers dictatorship and the 1991 coup d'état that overthrew President Jean-Bertrand Aristide (Jean-Charles).

Nonetheless, Danticat does not only criticize the United States, but also the Bahamas, a country which “... treat[s] Haitians like dogs ... a woman says. To them, we are not human. Even though their music sounds like ours. Their people look like ours. Even though we had the same African fathers who probably crossed these same seas together” (*Krik* 16). This just demonstrates the effectiveness of the negative image which was put upon Haiti, not only during the 20th century, but also since Haiti got its independence due to a slave revolution. This caused many “Western” countries to try to diminish the ripple effect this could have in their own territories.

This reference to the “African fathers” is done during the whole story. Haitian’s blackness is not perceived as Bahamian’s or Cuban’s blackness, which creates an uncertainty of what will (or will not) happen and which connects the young man’s experience to that of many Africans during the Middle Passage. This connection is an important trope in the young man’s letters and is something that affects him psychologically, making him have nightmares in which they all die before reaching the coasts of Florida. In fact, he foresees his fate from the beginning and gives the readers clues to what is going to happen to him at the end: “When I do manage to sleep, I dream that we are caught in one hurricane after another. I dream that the winds come of the sky and claim us for the sea. We go under and no one hears from us” (Danticat, *Krik* 9). This kind of nightmares occurs often whenever he sleeps, seeing himself dying and ending up at the bottom of the sea: “The other night I dreamt that I died and went to heaven. This heaven was nothing like I expected. It was at the bottom of the sea” (Danticat, *Krik* 14). By referencing this slave trade, Danticat wants to remind her readers where the ancestors of the vast majority of Haitians came from and all the suffering they went through, especially on those voyages. In case there are any doubts about this, the young man says about him and the other thirty-six people on the boat that “[m]aybe we will go to Guinin¹¹, to live with the spirits, to be with everyone who has come and has died before us” (Danticat, *Krik* 16).

This is once again related to the young man’s fear of having his story erased. This fear escalates with the boat getting even more wrecked with the passing of the days, which means that they will start to force people to throw dispensable things, like his notebook. Throwing away his notebook represents not only that he is no longer alive, but also that his experience will be forgotten. The notebook is so important to him that he asks “... for a few seconds to write this last page ...” when he is told to throw it away (Danticat, *Krik* 26). All this makes him

¹¹ *Guinin* is a symbol which represents the African continent. In Danticat’s words, Guinin or Ginen is the “ancestral homeland from which our forebears were taken before brought to the New World as slaves. Ginen stands in for all of Africa, renaming with the moniker of one country an ideological continent which, if it cannot welcome the returning bodies of its lost children, is more than happy to welcome back their spirits” (*Create* 116).

“... feel like such a coward for running away” (Danticat, *Krik* 21). In fact, he does not “... want to be a martyr. I am no good to anybody dead” (Danticat, *Krik* 9). There have been already many martyrs in the history of Haiti (even many more after *Krik? Krak!* was published). As he says, he does not want to die, not because he is scared of dying (something he accepts), but because he would be of no help if that happened. He wants to live and keep fighting—if possible and from the diaspora—to create a brighter Haiti for all Haitians.

Once he realizes he is going to die, he asks an old man to tell his story. The same way as the young man, the old man does not want his name to be forgotten and asks him to write it down in the notebook. They do not want this part of Haitian history to be erased as if it was something that has never happened. As many others who have come before them, “[t]hey simply want that the history of their people will not be erased without leaving any vestiges” (Sousa), expressing “... the need to record the stories of those who are officially denied a voice” (Meenakshi and Mathews 281): “I asked the old man to tell them what happened to me, if he makes it anywhere. He asked me to write his name in “my book.” I asked him for his full name. It is Justin Moi’sse Andre Nozius Joseph Frank Osnac Maximilien. He says it all with such an air that you would think him a king” (Danticat, *Krik* 26).

As I have previously mentioned, one of the reasons Danticat chooses to have a male narrator is to oppose the patriarchal diasporic literature to that one which Danticat (alongside other women writers in the diaspora) is creating. From the young man’s perspective, it would have been easier to be a girl because “[i]f I was a girl, maybe I would have been at home and not out politicking and getting myself into something like this” (Danticat, *Krik* 12). He says that he is jealous of his lover, who did not need to flee the country. However, readers learn through her lover’s letters that her life in Haiti is not easier, as she can be tortured, raped, or killed by the Tonton Macoutes. Him thinking that women generally have an easier life than men because they do not interfere in politics (which is also due to the patriarchal structure of

society) demonstrates that he is not able to see what kind of sufferings women go through even if they are not politicking, even if they are just sitting home doing nothing.

As a means to oppose his point of view, Danticat presents, through his letters, the story of Célianne. Célianne is a pregnant girl who "... looks like she might be our age. Nineteen or twenty. Her face is covered with scars that look like razors marks. She is short and speaks in a singsong that reminds me of the villagers in the north" (Danticat, *Krik* 8-9). She gives birth to a stillborn baby girl while the boat becomes increasingly destroyed: "Now we have three cracks covered with tar" (Danticat, *Krik* 19). At first, nobody knows "... how Célianne became pregnant", so rumors of her having "... an affair with a married man ... [which make] her parents threw her out" start running (Danticat, *Krik* 21). They think this because they are not capable of imagining the actual torture she suffered: after a group of ten to twelve soldiers entered into her house one night and forced her brother Lionel at gunpoint to lie with his mother, they raped Célianne. Afterwards, "they arrested Lionel, accusing him of moral crimes" (Danticat, *Krik* 23) and she and her mother never saw him again. The raping made her so ashamed that she "... cut her face with a razor so that no one would know who she was" and, once she realized she was pregnant, "[s]he found out about the boat and got on. She is fifteen" (Danticat, *Krik* 21).

By writing this, Danticat wants to expose the harsh realities Haitian women experienced, even teenagers and children. She also wants to expose that Célianne's experience was not incidental and that it happened all over the country, as confirmed by the young woman's letters. She openly shows the cruelty of a system, of an illegal paramilitary army which, by any means possible, would terrorize the population to keep them silent and to maintain the status quo they had had for almost three decades. Célianne is the maximum exponent and symbol of what this kind of cruelty causes: the destruction of a life which had barely started. Célianne, who is at first resilient to throw her dead baby overboard, finally does it and eventually kills herself.

5.2.2. Letters written by her

The young woman's letters are very important to fully comprehend what had happened, not only in "Children of the Sea", but also in some of the other stories which appear in *Krik? Krak!* While the young man talks about his experiences at sea, the young woman provides a background which helps situate the readers in the story. By choosing her as the chronologist, Danticat is putting women in the center of history, as they are—not only in *Krik? Krak!*, but also in other Danticat's works—the (hi)story tellers and the maintainers of culture and tradition. In fact, women in *Krik? Krak!* and all their stories are connected by the political situation which have affected Haiti since its colonization until today, but especially the events from the twentieth century (the Parsley massacre¹², the Duvaliers etc.). All these women are interconnected through a "... communal memory that is passed on from mothers to daughters ..." (Loichot 110). This communal memory can be seen in some of *Krik? Krak!*'s short stories, for example, the game that Caroline and her sister play in "Caroline's Wedding", which was a way in which their women ancestors could recognize each other in a difficult situation. This also demonstrates the multilayered identity, which is reflected in Danticat's way of writing.

In her first letter, she is already setting the story in a specific period of Haitian history, which helps to understand the opening letter written by the young man. Haiti is now, again, in a harsh political situation in which there are "bullets day and night, same everything" (Danticat, *Krik* 8). While at sea the situation is also difficult and dangerous, in Haiti

they've [the people from the new regime] closed the schools since the army took over, no one is mentioning the old president's name, papa burnt all his campaign posters and old buttons, manman buried her buttons in a hole behind the house, she thinks he might

¹² The Parsley massacre took place in the Dominican Republic in October 1937. Thousands of Haitians who lived in the borders of the Dominican Republic were killed by the government of the dictator Rafael Trujillo (Clitandre, Pulitano).

come back, she says she will unearth them when he does, no one comes out of their house, not a single person, papa want me to throw out those tapes of your radio show.
(Danticat, *Krik* 8)

Haiti is now under an illegal military government which is terrorizing the population in order to reduce any kind of opposition. This, and the fact that the young man is escaping by boat, helps situate the story between 1980s and 1990s. Taking also into account that Haiti was under a dictatorship for 29 years (1957-1986) and that Haiti's first democratically elected president was Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1990, the story is most probably set in the aftermath of the 1991 coup d'état which overthrew Aristide just after almost eight months in office. This period was a recall of the Duvaliers dictatorship. Every person who was known to support "the old president" or who was vocal against the regime was being tortured or killed. That is why her parents are getting rid of all the things which connected them to the old president, to avoid any type of retaliation. This is also the reason why her father is asking her to throw away all the tapes from the radio she has of her lover, as they may incriminate her and get her killed due to the content of the tapes: in the radio show the young man was part of, he expressed his political opinion and "... what we [he and the other radio show members] wanted from government, what we wanted for the future of our country" (Danticat, *Krik* 9).

The fact that the mother is not destroying her buttons show a reminiscence of hope in the mother's character: she, as many other Haitians, hopes the old president will come back. Hope, which is usually a symbol of optimism, can represent something negative in "Children of the Sea". The young man and the people who are with him on the boat die escaping a country which has treated them badly hoping for a better future. The people who went to the airport to meet the old president—after a rumor saying that he was coming back—also die or get arrested, but this time hoping for a brighter future for their country. It seems like the only way of

surviving during this time is to not have hope, to be silent and to live quietly. This way of surviving quietly is represented by the father of the young woman.

Her father knows that being a good citizen implies living afraid, as the end of the Duvaliers dictatorship did not suppose a brighter future: the institution created by the Tonton Macoutes wanted to undermine Aristide's supporters. People were so scared of them that they would rather let a woman they have known for years and who was probably a friend of the family die in front of their eyes. The figure of the father represents this fear: "oh yes, you *can* let them kill somebody because you are afraid, they are the law. it is their right, we are just being good citizens, following the law of the land, it has happened before all over this country and tonight it will happen again and there is nothing we can do" (Danticat, *Krik* 18).

This is the reason why, when he finds out that she did not throw away the radio tapes, he gets really angry, which leads to a big fight: he calls her a "man-crazy whore" and she wishes that the Tonton Macoute would kill him and calls him a "pig peasant", to which her father reacts by slapping her. This fight damages their relationship, as she wishes "... one of those bullets would hit me" (Danticat, *Krik* 13) and they stopped talking to each other. She thinks that her father just cares about being able to leave the city and that "he is always pestering me these days because he cannot go out driving his van" (Danticat, *Krik* 13), when in reality his father is just scared that they will kill her if they find those tapes. He wants to protect his family, but is unable to do so because "the soldiers can come and do with us what they want, that makes papa weak ... he gets angry when he feels weak" (Danticat, *Krik* 15). This makes her wonder "why should he be angry with me? i am not one of the pigs with the machine guns" (Danticat, *Krik* 15).

By writing about these experiences, Danticat wants to demonstrate how this political situation can deeply affect families, not only because they might get killed or tortured at any

moment without previous warning, but because this situation makes them react in a way that may damage the familiar relationship and make them not communicate openly.

As previously explained, Danticat's works contribute to the feminist diasporic literature. In "Children of the Sea" and especially through the young woman's letters, Danticat presents the sufferings women had to endure. That is why the young woman writes about Madame Roger, a mourning mother who is not afraid to speak up even if it leads to her then fatal outcome.

Madame Roger is a neighbor whose son was a member of the same youth federation as the young woman's lover. Her son was brutally killed by the soldiers and the only remains she has of him are "... her son's head and not much else ..." (Danticat, *Krik* 10). The young woman writes that "... she had been carrying the head all over port-au-prince. just to show what's been done to her son" (Danticat, *Krik* 10). Taking into account that "... it was a crime to pick up a bloodied body on the street" (Danticat, *Create* 23), Madame Roger's walk with her dead son's head can be seen as an act of rebellion, as she is not showing what has been done to her son so that people would be careful about their actions. On the contrary, she is doing that with a glimpse of hope so that people would take action, the same way her son had done in the radio show: "wasn't he on the radio talking about the police? did he say, down with the tonton macoutes? did he say, down with the army? he said that the military had to go; didn't he write slogans? he had meetings, didn't he? he demonstrated on the streets" (Danticat, *Krik* 17). However, this scene does not provoke an open reaction, instead "the macoutes by the house were laughing at her" (Danticat, *Krik* 10) and later they will come back to get more names of the youth federation members. Instead of being silent to survive, she decides to speak up against them, which leads to them beating her up.

The young woman says about this that "you can hear the guns coming down on her head, it sounds like they are cracking all those bones in her body, manman whispers to papa,

you can't just let them kill her. go and give them some money like you gave them for your daughter" (Danticat, *Krik* 17). It is at this moment that the readers know that her father saved her from being killed or tortured by the army by bribing them. Once they are in Ville Rose, her mother tells her the whole story and readers learn that the army "... were going to peg me as a member of the youth federation and then take me away" (Danticat, *Krik* 24). When her father found out, he gave them "all the money he had. our house in port-au-prince and all the lands his father had left him, he gave it all to save my life" (Danticat, *Krik* 24). This is the reason why her father is so sharp with her: from the beginning of this new regime, he was trying to keep his family safe by being and living quietly, which seemed to be the only means of surviving.

The possible murder of Madame Roger and the fact that the paramilitary men were after the young woman for her relationship to a member of the Radio Six illustrates how cruel this new government was. In fact, this cruelty against women is further exposed in her letters. She writes that the soldiers were forcing sons to lie down with their mothers and fathers with their daughters. That is why the "solution" of the young woman's family is that her father sleeps at her uncle's house and vice versa, "just in case they come, that way papa will never be forced to lie down with me. instead, uncle pressoir would be forced to, but that would not be so bad" (Danticat, *Krik* 14). This situation relates to that lived by Célianne, which demonstrates that her rape was not something which just happened to her, but rather that it was something common all throughout the country (according to her accent, Célianne is probably from the north of the country, while the young woman is from the capital, in the south).

The last letter by the young woman, which is also the last letter of the story, is a confirmation of what had happened at sea. She is sitting under the Banyan tree, which "... is [now] my most trusted friend" (Danticat, *Krik* 25), and "now there are always butterflies around me" (Danticat, *Krik* 27). On one hand, the Banyan tree symbolizes holiness, and "... sometimes

if we call the gods from beneath them, they will hear our voices clearer” (Danticat, *Krik* 27). Taking into account that Banyan trees can also live hundreds of years, the fact that she is writing some of the letters under the tree is important, as her message could reach her lover in heaven and also live on: “In other words, to move beyond trauma, the survivor must tell her story to another being who knows how to listen to and how to hear her. She must find a sympathetic ear willing and able to acknowledge the traumatic event and to appreciate ... her suffering” (Glover). In this sense, “... the landscape, containing the stories of individuals and community alike, also functions as a powerful repository of a collective memory, ... at the same time as it sets in motion a healing process and the energy to forge a future of hope and survival” (Pulitano 4).

On the other hand, butterflies are also an important symbol in “Children of the Sea”, as they are thought to be carriers of news: “manman says that butterflies can bring news, the bright ones bring happy news and the black ones warn us of death” (Danticat, *Krik* 8). Until the last letter, the young woman knows her lover is still alive because she has not seen any black butterfly and, even though there are a lot of butterflies in Ville Rose, “so far none has landed on my hand, which means they have no news for me” (Danticat, *Krik* 25). However, this changes in the last letter, in which she writes that she has seen “the black butterfly floating around us” (Danticat, *Krik* 27). She escapes from it so that it does not land on her, so that the young man is still alive in her mind, “but it had already carried its news, i know what must have happened” (Danticat, *Krik* 27). Furthermore, “last night on the radio, i heard that another boat sank off the coast of the bahamas” (Danticat, *Krik* 27), which confirms that her lover has perished at sea, the same way as many African slaves did, as martyrs, thus becoming “children of the sea”.

Even though this last letter is a carrier of negative news, it can also be understood as a glimpse of hope. The young woman is now at a place far away from the killings in the capital.

She is sitting under a Banyan tree, writing to her lover who is already dead. She keeps writing because she keeps hoping for a better outcome for her country, one in which nobody is afraid and can live audibly. This demonstrates that there can be some kind of joy after the pain because “... we do find ways to survive that are creative and that includes joy, and creativity itself, and certainly arts, dance, song, painting, literature” (Moore and Danticat).

6. Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have analyzed how Edwidge Danticat uses the epistolary genre in her short story “Children of the Sea”. Hence, a brief approach to the epistolary genre from literary theory was necessary, from which it was concluded that the epistles have an important role in the construction of history. In this sense, addressing the history of Haiti as well as how Haitian diaspora is perceived—specifically in countries with a large percentage of Haitian immigrants such as the US or the Bahamas—were fundamental. All this has shown how the negative image linked to Haiti created by different historical processes and the media in addition to Haiti’s tumultuous political situation during the twentieth century, has negatively impacted the lives of thousands of Haitians. Lastly, a detailed study of the letters of both the young man and the young woman confirmed that the objective of the epistles in “Children of the Sea” is that of denouncing the obliteration of Haitian’s experiences, especially those of women, both at sea and on land.

In conclusion, Danticat’s usage of the epistolary genre is innovative, as she uses it to give voice to the voiceless. This objective is amplified by her decision of making the protagonists anonymous. Thus, the young lovers’ story becomes the story of many. By including the voices of a young man and a young woman, Danticat is contrasting their experience in order to demonstrate that both situations are equally cruel. In fact, the contraposition of their experiences functions as a remark of the canonical Haitian literature of

the diaspora, which only considers males' narratives. In this way, by making the young woman one of the narrators and by telling the sufferings of different women (the young woman herself, Célianne...), Danticat is creating a feminist discourse that provides a new perspective to that canonical Haitian literature of the diaspora. By setting the story in a certain period (the 1990s) and in a certain place (Haiti and the Caribbean sea) and by referencing main events in the history of Haiti, Danticat reminds her readers of the importance of remembering so that cruelty stops, so that history does not repeat itself.

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