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Wounded History: A Reading of Edwidge Danticat's Fiction

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The contemporary Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat appropriates in her fiction representational models observable also in so-called minority, post- or neo-colonial writing, which bears comparison to the dynamics of trauma as laid out in contemporary cultural theory based on the revision and rereading of Freud's texts (especially by Laplanche, Caruth, Felman). Drawing on Danticat's fictional texts, such as the novels *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), and a short story collection *Krik? Krak!* (1995), the article suggests indispensable links between the project of articulating traumatic events underlying collective, but unrecognized and so-far unrecorded, history, and the projects of bearing witness and carrying on the memory of an event. This conjunction is crucial for the articulation of collective, group history, and finds its embodiment in the hybrid form of historiographic metafiction and testimonial writing, while observing the temporal structure of traumatic belatedness and deferral, and the ultimate impossibility of transposing the traumatic into the narrative (*The Farming of Bones*; *Krik? Krak!*). The other line of argument tries to foreground the impact of structuring or base trauma as it interferes with the working-through and the transposition of a personal trauma into a coherent narrative of one's *Bildung* (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*). Still, these impasses mark a significant cultural intervention launched by Danticat and other similarly positioned authors in order to account for and bear witness to a history that articulates itself as an impossible, because traumatic, narrative.

1 Captives of History

It is almost an understatement to qualify most of Edwidge Danticat's characters as perilously but inescapably obsessed and haunted by history

and yet, with an ever renewed force, drawn to it.¹ Given this startling qualification let me point out that I can fully sympathize with her writing project seen as a constant revisiting of salient moments in the historical repository of her native Haiti, pertaining to its immediate or more distant past. Coming from the part of the world that has enriched the vocabulary of English by a sanitized expression, emptied of its ominous portent (and in that sense de-historicized; namely, balkanization, to balkanize), I would like to believe myself capable of detecting the note of urgency in the language Danticat uses to lend voice to the suppressed, cleansed, domesticated, or simply forgotten layers of history. If my place of origin has made me through various discourses, and incomparably more so due to the recent war, especially heedful of "history" as a construct, but such a one endowed with powerful ideological pull, it is all the more necessary for me to give expression to this deep-seated need that obviously assails not only the people of these latitudes but also somebody coming from a geographically almost antipodal position, the history-laden Caribbean island. Let me add at this point that some regions are figured as uncannily and systematically, as it were, laid out to history and bound to suffer its recurrence and re-enactment. The scenario seems to be very similar, whether acted out in Croatia and Bosnia, and subsequently Kosovo and Macedonia ("the Balkans") or in Haiti, at least the scenario that favours the already seen and warily stresses the predictability of socio-political upheavals; the mythic narrative that posits the impersonal forces summoned by history (as if history were not of human creation), which in cycles revisits some places on earth rather than others.

Nowadays in the Florida coastal region droves of poverty stricken and politically persecuted Haitians in regular cycles enact in front of unwittingly summoned witnesses such as passing motorists or other bewildered, sympathetic but uncomprehending observers what might be called "the return of history" of a sort (Elliott and Lebowitz A6). These prospective immigrants, referred to as the "boat people," in their

¹ An earlier version of this text appears as a part of the fifth chapter of my doctoral thesis *E Pluribus Unum: Identity Politics and the Construction of Ethnicity in Contemporary US Fiction*, University of Zagreb, 2005.

desperate surge towards the United States, with their own lives and bodies re-enact histories of political disenfranchisement and continuous economic underdevelopment (before them the “boat people” have been and still are the Cubans). Simultaneously, however, they are involved in decrying that same history, in their immigrant trail reversing the one-way US interventionism in the region.² Still even as they are writing a counter-script in the wake of their puny boats, they are marked by the same history that propelled their movements in the first place and will continue to haunt them even when they have seemingly extricated themselves from it upon arrival to the US soil. One of the markers will eventuate that they be treated differently from other refugees / immigrants in similar circumstances, such as the Cuban boat people. Another will prompt putting them down as “pos[ing] a threat to national security,” in the recent reading of their odyssey offered by the INS officials (Elliott and Lebowitz A6). It seems that theirs is a history not so much resistant to the telling—as Danticat, among others, convincingly denies by her works—but unwilling to be heard, as testified by the lack of the interpreters at their bond hearings but also by a refusal of the government officials to incorporate their stories into contemporary Haitian history and recognize the indelible traces that link it with 20th century US policies in the region.

In that sense, my primary interest in subsequent paragraphs will be to outline the workings of Danticat's narrative encounter with the inescapability of history, which can be grasped through concepts and procedures outlined in trauma studies here used primarily as hermeneutical tools rather than as potential therapeutic strategies. It can be argued that Danticat's works partake of the rising tide in non-metropolitan fiction in English which takes as its focus the deep and troubling intersections among colonial histories, imperialist encroachments and new national and social formations, as it tries to grapple with appropriate forms to

² Historically, the ties between the two countries—the first two republics in the Western hemisphere—were marred by the United States' occupation of Haiti (1915-34), marked by subsequent US overt and covert interventionism, most recently in September 1994 in the US invasion of Haiti as a part of peace restoring effort (Chancy 1997: 48; Dash 1997: 22-44; Nicholls 1979: 142-64). The most recent coup, deposing President Aristide, who was backed by the USA, occurred at the outset of 2004.

articulate these concerns. More often than not, the psychoanalytically inflected models of traumatic responses observed especially in groups and collectivities as they react to or try to absorb the impact of an event or a process have been found to resonate with the concerns raised by these writers.³

Another aspect of trauma theory as espoused nowadays in cultural studies context which makes it additionally compatible with Danticat's narrative vision is a recognition that even though trauma primarily assails an individual, it also has to be rethought as a group or collectively experienced phenomenon thus requiring a constant shuttling between the psychic and the social, with attendant dangers of flattening the two. Danticat thus needs to attend both to individual and national or collective history, and do it in a way that will eschew petrifying analogies.

Thus, in her texts addressed here it is not primarily the grand, political history that gets represented but instead a plurality of histories, especially those of families and communities. So even in her most decidedly historical novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998), which engages the 1937 massacre of Haitians living in the borderlands of the Dominican Republic, Danticat's narrative scope is restricted through the first person narration and so explicitly undermines any pretense to speak for a people, or a nation. April Shemak asserts that such a choice of narrative voice is dictated by the desire to "mimick[...] *testimonio*, a genre that arose out of Caribbean and Central American social and political movements as a way to foreground the voices of the oppressed" (2002: 83). What sets *testimonio* against the official historical representation is, continues Shemak, "a narrator who serves as an eyewitness to acts of brutal oppression," who gives a direct, first person account of the acts and thus challenges the impersonal, seemingly objective and disinterested discourse of history writing (83).

³ Danticat's other publications, besides the ones listed in the bibliography, include: *Behind the Mountain* (2002), aimed at younger readers; *A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel* (2002); and most recently a short story collection *The Dew Breaker* (2004). As a sign of her stature and reputation in national letters, let me just note that her recent works have received attention in major US literary magazines (a review of her latest short-story collection appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, March 21, 2004), while her most recent collection has been shortlisted for a prestigious US literary award.

Linda Hutcheon (1988) has identified a strong impulse in contemporary fiction writing to engage historical discourse in a dialogue with mutually enriching possibilities. Hutcheon terms this new-born discursive hybridity "historiographic metafiction." Although we can recognize in Danticat and other writers from the region the self-same impulse, namely to wed history and fiction, their project nevertheless considerably diverges from a mere epistemological exercise. For Danticat it is not enough to unravel the textuality of history, or to point out the untenable claim to truth held out by the official history; the stakes in her project of writing history are neither, to paraphrase Brian McHale on the modernist and the postmodernist agendas, respectively, "how we can know the world" and "what we can know in general", her desire is at once to rehabilitate and to repossess history through witnessing, or to borrow from Cathy Caruth, to give voice to the wound caused by history. This is the crucial point of difference between Danticat's testimonials and historiographic metafiction.

The grounds for such novel engagement with history, novel in a sense that it departs from poststructuralist mistrust of its epistemological status, can be traced back as suggested by Cathy Caruth in her tellingly titled book *Unclaimed Experience* to "the peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma" (1996: 11). Caruth attempts to chart a circuitous route by which a traumatic experience, "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events" (11), may yet lead not only to the reconceptualization of history and its writing, but also with a renewed vigour enable one to repossess the territories of "political and ethical judgments" (10). The bent of Caruth's argument seems to be that, paradoxically, it is precisely in the confrontation with an event that defies immediate understanding and evades incorporation into the table of experiences that one can begin to acknowledge the true moment of history (11). This intervention comes close to the Lacanian intrusion of the real, as a regime which escapes the restrictions of both the symbolic and the imaginary, and is as such both prelinguistic and beyond language.

This turn that has been identified recently in so-called ethnic, minority, subaltern, post-, or neo-colonial writing, and could be pertinently described as the move from the metafiction to the testimonial, still leaves a lot to be desired. Namely, one may ask, what benefits does this new

program of confronting an epistemology of (traumatic) history bring us if it remains enveloped in the betrayal of language and the inadequacy of our mental apparatus to deal with it? Is there, then, so great a difference between this, "traumatic," and the poststructuralist, anti-referential theory of history, when, in spite of the readiness of the former to face up to the consequences of history, they both painfully resign to the deficiency of language? In trauma, what is happening to us is so real that it defies expression, whereas in a poststructuralist program, we can never ascertain the historicity of the sign-referent nexus.

Still when we are faced with events that engage our neural and psychological systems in quite unprecedented ways, such as war, genocide, massacre, various forms of oppression, continuous exposure to violence, and the like, neither of the models seem to work satisfactorily. In the interstice between the two, an attempt to engage the trauma is taking place, notably in the form of narrative, in forms of inchoate drawings, paintings and in oral tales. On the unconscious level, dreams and hallucination take over in a language of their own, but a language nevertheless.

It would seem pertinent, therefore, to follow Danticat's descent into the limbo of Haitian personal and communal history through the lenses of trauma theory as it touches upon the representations of history and the figurations of memory. My focus will be on her two novels, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *The Farming of Bones*, and on the short-story collection *Krik? Krak!* (1995). At this point it is worth mentioning that the first novel and the collection are in setting asymmetrically divided between Haiti and the United States, whereas the second novel is exclusively set in Hispaniola, a common name for the island in the Caribbean politically divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

2 The Caribbean as the "Repeating Island"

If in the previous section I have tried to monumentalize the fact of some locations as the privileged sites of the reenactment of history, in

this section I would like to elaborate the metaphor further by trying to read Benítez-Rojo's cultural history of the Caribbean on the backdrop of Cathy Caruth's articulations of traumatic repetition. For Benítez-Rojo the Caribbean space displays

the features of an island that 'repeats' itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and the lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs. I have emphasized the word *repeats* because I want to give the term the almost paradoxical sense with which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness... (1992: 3)

If possible, I want to hold up the concept of the "repetition" in the discourse on the Caribbean and give it a "traumatic" twist by referring to the usage Caruth finds for the term in her reading of Freud's articulation of trauma. Caruth reads specific passages in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that foreground repetitions and returns of the nightmares and dreams as salient facts of traumatic neuroses, and that may amount to "repetition compulsion" in the patient (1996: 62-63). Insofar as the patient is driven or forced to re-experience "a violent event" that has already taken place, Caruth concludes that it "suggest[s] that the shape of individual lives, the history of the traumatized individual, is nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction" (63). Her reading of Freud does not stop at the threshold of the individual history but rather, borne by the tenor of Freud's text, takes her to reconsider a wider cultural framework, that of "historical trauma," such as was expounded in particular in two of Freud's texts that Caruth constantly refers to, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939).

She demonstrates how the texts identify a peculiar temporal scheme marked by a deferred and belated reaction to an event rendered as compulsive, intrusive and non-voluntary repetition of that same event; very importantly, thus, she underscores latency as a symptom of trauma, both as an individual moment and a cultural formation (70). Now, a general observation could be made to the effect that most historical cogitation is to some extent marked by a period of latency, or to use another Freudian

term the “incubation period” (Caruth 1996: 70), after which it becomes possible for a historian to read the signs of transformations, upheavals and violent changes.

Indeed, one cannot escape the feeling that the history of the Caribbean archipelago, as told here by Benítez-Rojo, and as will be shown later on by Danticat—in other words, as encompassed by historical and literary discourses—is a series of repetitions and reenactments of singularly violent events that assailed the region ever since its ravaging inception into the transatlantic, Western history (Benítez-Rojo 5). Caroline Rody in her study on African American and Caribbean women's fictions contends that our global and postcolonial moment is ripe for the emergence of such a compelling form of engagement with the troubled history (2001). In that sense, Benítez-Rojo's words that deliver us the Caribbean as the child of “repetition” perhaps embody the deepest, and most disturbing, truth about those islands, which the narratives try both to encompass and transcend. Here I am aware of the repetitive seductions of my own argument that reenact their own returns to the spaces / sites marked by history as a wound. In the course of the argument, however, there might appear alternative soundings of the culturally traumatic moments as restorative and reconciling strategies. For now, we need to see how latency works as a strategy of producing history, both individual and collective, even if initially mired and stuck in the logic of traumatic repetition resistant to narrative unfolding and normalization.

3 Trauma, Text and Referents

It would be fair to say, based on some recent developments in the by now burgeoning field of trauma theory,⁴ that even as far back as the texts by founding fathers of the field at the turn of the century such as

⁴ Its growth and diversification no doubt was prompted by the overwhelming feeling that the 20th century was, in Shoshana Felman's words, “a post-traumatic century” (qtd. in Ramadanovic 2001, n. p.).

Sigmund Freud and Pierre Janet, whose work was carried on by such names as Jacques Lacan and Jean Laplanche to mention but a few, theories of trauma engage both hermeneutical and clinical procedures. In his assessment of the applicability of the models of trauma to some junctures in Western history, Petar Ramadanovic enacts precisely the same move, "in the belief that access to the former (history as it unfolds between the texts) will provide a path to the latter (social and political events)" (2001, n. p.). Herman Rapaport in his review of Derrida's remarks on Freud's "traumatic archive" in a footnote revisits this doubly "articulated" history of trauma studies, a duality that even today apparently besets its practitioners. Rapaport roughly distinguishes between "applied scientists, psychiatrists, and social workers who look upon trauma largely within a behavioral model of psychology" and "trauma specialists...who are strongly allied to theories of representation, narration, and memory" (1998: 76 n). Thus we witness the trend that the anti-representational trauma theories nevertheless generate an excessive textual trace in trying to account for the "unspeakable." This potentially ominous privileging of textuality in the sense of a well-developed discursive field and archive of knowledge, that will then provide the matrix of accounting for the "social and political events" seems to detract from the impulses of the early clinicians, whose work proceeded from the encounters with patients embroiled in the visceral experience of death, the threat of psychic annihilation and suffering. Also, we should bear in mind that the clinical definition of trauma is inescapably tied to the instances in which it is precisely the unbearable clash with an overwhelming reality in various forms that occasions a range of traumatic symptoms recognized as PTSD (Lerner and Micale 2001: 1-2).

Karyn Ball, in a recent issue of *Cultural Critique* dedicated to trauma studies, reminds us that the birth pangs of the field were located in the referentiality of historical formations such as World War I and the Vietnam War; subsequently encompassed the traditional realm of the private through the focus on domestic abuse and incest (2000: 4-5). The other venue that acted as a powerful purveyor of the theory of trauma and the way it inflects collective memory and history has been Holocaust studies (Ball 8-10). What interests me in Ball's overview is her negotiation between the poststructuralist quandaries of the shaken integrity of experience and the questioned epistemological status of history, on the one hand,

and the necessity to articulate a viable identity politics and the validity of either collective or individual engagement with traumatic realities, on the other:

when members of historically oppressed groups represent and act upon their experiences, they are necessarily struggling to counter and, if possible, depose oppressive and demeaning constructions of themselves. ...Traumatic memory provides one answer to the question how to talk about the affective aftermath of oppression without recourse to idealist notions of coherent identity and 'authentic' experience. (Ball 7)

My intention here is not to defame the alleged abduction of historical and experiential trauma and decry its, perhaps unavoidable, incorporation into the contemporary discourse on trauma. Simultaneously, one has to notice the gap between, on one hand, the practitioners, who, to put it simply, daily find themselves summoned as witnesses of trauma (in the treatment of their patients, as analysts, social workers, etc.) and as such themselves open to what might be termed "vicarious traumatization" (Ball takes over Judith Herman's term [19]), and, on the other, a revival of interest in the humanities in general to extricate, retroactively if needs be, from the rich tradition of texts and other representations a viable theory of trauma that pertains also to our cultural moment. In other words, artistic and other representational "symptoms" of the engagement with trauma, surely would merit careful differentiation from the first order symptoms (amnesia, hallucination, traumatic dreams, hysterical symptoms, etc.) (Ramadanovic on Ragland, 2001, n.p.). In Ellie Ragland's words, "The enigmatic meaning of suffering or passion in a story, play, poem, or case study is not an allegory or a myth that is disassociated from memory or affective life"; in other words, there has to be a trauma discourse that will account for the "reality" of trauma as it is symbolically and enigmatically relayed to us in what she borrowing from Lacan calls symptoms (2001 n. p.).

There are perhaps textual / representational junctures at which the meeting between trauma as Caruth's "unclaimed experience" (unclaimed because the language has yet to be found to account for the traumatic incursion of the real) and the necessity of bearing witness could take place.

Following ethnographic, anthropological and theoretical contributions made by US Latino and Latin American scholars, it would appear that aforementioned testimonial (*testimonio*) might be such a mode of engaging a traumatic reality. The fact that first interrogations into the "content of the form" were undertaken under the auspices of border studies (Calderón and Saldívar 1991) gives credence to an attempt to see the form as occupying that slippery, interstitial position between reality / representation, public / private, traumatic / narrativized, form / content, literature / politics, written / oral.⁵ Sonia Saldívar Hull highlights these contradictory markers of the *testimonio* but nevertheless embraces it as a form for the articulation of, in her agenda primarily, female identity (2000). Among the salient features of the *testimonio* Saldívar Hull includes the first person address and the position of the authority of the speaker / writer who has not only participated in the events presented but also marked them by her activism (170-72). However, this could be seen as a point of divergence between the subject who is constructed as an active and (politically) conscious agent through her testimony and the subject who is summoned to bear witness, but more often than not finds herself incapable, muted, silenced, or repudiated.⁶ Still it might be possible to see in the departures from these varied forms of interaction with (visceral or potential) trauma a more comprehensive form of relearning the lessons of history or engaging with the traumas of today.

It is in that sense that the bodies and trajectories of Haitian immigrants have become veritable sites of enacting "a history of traumatic departures"

⁵ Exemplary *testimonios*, as pointed out by Shemak, are Rigoberta Menchu's autobiographical narrative (1983) and Miguel Barnet's "testimonio of Cuban runaway slave" (1966) (84). To this should be added a landmark anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983) edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Saldívar Hull 2000). The latter will publish on her own a highly influential and generically hybrid first-person narrative *Borderlands / La Frontera* (1987). For Anzaldúa see Saldívar Hull 59-80.

⁶ As examples of precarious forms of testimony of individual or collective traumatization, one could summon the cases in the novels such as *Kindred* (Butler), *Stigmata* (Perry) and *Beloved* (Morrison), respectively. The characters regularly lack words to account for what has happened to them, what they are going through, or what they have observed; rather they recourse to silence, evasion, shutting out of painful memories, repression; in other words they pose as "unwilling witnesses" to their own and the others' pain.

(Ramadanovic 1998: 57), even when they do not have a language in the legal sense to account for it or their testimonies in court are not validated. This deafness of the official institutionalized order and its impermeability to trauma in the present or the past signals yet another breach between historiography and history of / as trauma, especially as it figures for writers such as Danticat, who intentionally pry into recesses of Western history in order to reach for its often submerged counterpart.

I want to linger for the moment on the observed contradiction entailed in the project of self-enunciation as encoded in the *testimonio* and the retroactive thrust ascribed to traumatic witnessing. A form which in its complex cultural and ideological positioning contained both the obsessive turning back and also dramatized a sense of being stuck in the violence-drenched present even as it outlined as its principal premise a proleptic vision of emancipation, is known to us as the slave-narrative, formulaic autobiographical accounts of the annihilating effects of slavery. In these texts we find the performative potential of language to bring subjects into being interwoven with the limited reach of the subject's witnessing (of the birth of self and of the attendant conditions that this emergence entails). Where if not here can we detect a double-voiced address of the "unclaimed experience"? If, as suggested succinctly by Max Hernandez, the trauma assails the psyche prior to any language being formed to adequately register its shattering impact, then this emergent discourse in its inchoate nature is indeed a kind of testimony that addresses the unspeakable (1998: 139).

In this argument I will deal primarily with the testimonials that exist on two levels, at least in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (subsequently *FB*). One is the extratextual, in which the writer-in-history (Danticat) bears testimony to the originating events of a trauma through a specific temporal structure of traumatic "belatedness," "deferral," or, in the term suggested by Laplanche, "afterwardsness." The attendant burden of witnessing is laid on the reader, too, for whom a testimonial inscribes a place of a listener / reader-turned-witness in its structure of enunciation.

In the Introduction to *Trauma and Experience*, Caruth quotes from Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, in which he marks down the peculiar temporal nature of a traumatic experience using the words such as

the “incubation period” to account for the belated appearance of the symptoms of a “traumatic neurosis” in a person who “has suffered a shocking accident” (qtd. in Caruth 1995: 7). Freud then widens the scope of his investigation by observing similar symptoms in the shell-shocked veterans and thus outlining a theory of collective traumatic responses. In her *Unclaimed Experience* Caruth takes up in greater detail this aspect of trauma by pointing out the strategy behind Freud’s seemingly far-fetched application of the temporal dynamics of the traumatic neurosis on a belated and deferred appearance of the complex of Jewish monotheism:

As an afterthought it must strike us that—in spite of the fundamental difference in the two cases...—there is a correspondence in one point. It is the feature which one might term *latency*. There are the best grounds for thinking that in the history of the Jewish religion there is a long period, after the breaking away ... from the Moses religion, during which no trace is to be found of the monotheistic idea. (Freud qtd. in Caruth 1996: 22)

Furthermore, when we come across this technical term (deferred impact) as used by Laplanche, we notice that he ascribes two “direction[s]” to the word, which he proposes to be rendered in English as “afterwardsness” (Laplanche 2001 n. p.). The first is “the direction of deferred action” and the second is “an after-the-event-understanding” (Laplanche 2001 n. p.). It is most dramatically in this second sense that trauma informs and engenders history, by recasting it as a drama of the intrusive return of the forgotten or repressed in its literality, as a first step, and as a second, requiring the processing of the message that it sends (Laplanche 2001).

I would argue that obsessive returns to the sites of violence, afterwards, and a repetitive structure of Danticat’s texts, as well as insistent retracing of the routes to freedom as enacted repeatedly by Haitian (and other) immigrants, all these could be seen as specific forms of engagement with “the history of a trauma” (Ramadanovic 1998: 57). Ramadanovic sums up Caruth’s articulation of the historicity of trauma as follows: “The first [referential model of history] gives rise to a unified, integrated identity, while the second [notion of history] is an ongoing process that has no predictable point of termination, but repeats an undeniable, inerasable, even if unknowable, truth” (1998: 57-58).

The form of *testimonio* as deferred and belated but insistent witnessing brings us to the point where we have to consider that what is at stake for the witness and by implication the survivor of an overwhelming event which contains "an undeniable ... even if unknowable truth" (Ramadanovic 1998: 57-58), is not so much the encounter with death as the fact of survival itself. As Lacan reads Freud's account of the "dream of the burning child," as glossed by Caruth, to dream (i. e., to die) is the most economic thing available to our psychic constitution, but at the moment of awakening the trauma calls upon our psychic organization demanding that we face up to the as yet incalculable risks (1996: 104). This double bind besets both the characters and the author (by extension also the reader), who indeed become "vicariously traumatized," as noted by Morrison during her emotionally taxing work on *Beloved* (1989: 40-1). Next I will try to disentangle the conjoined but still distinct responsibilities for the participants in the revisiting of traumatic history.

Danticat's writing process is informed by a constant revisiting of the traumatic scene of both identity formation and identity obliteration; the reference is to the 1937 massacre of the ethnic Haitians living in the Dominican Republic borderlands with Haiti, ordered by the dictatorial president Trujillo and executed by his military and paramilitary forces. Historical commentators stress the irony entailed in the wiping out of the Haitian communities in the ethnically blended borderlands as a tragic moment of emergence of primarily Dominican national consciousness and, by force, the recognition by Haitians of their own fatal difference (Turits 2002). This is also demonstrable in *The Farming of Bones* as the first indication of violence against Haitians because they were (or were perceived as) Haitians serves to underscore the irreducible quality of linguistic, cultural, class, and status differences among the characters, which were prior to the massacre seen merely as a colourful backdrop. These, in other words, become inassimilable symptoms, much like today's Haitian immigrants are seen as symptoms of various "Third World" imbalances and are as such upon their emergence in the States repudiated, interned or banished. As suggested earlier, it was in the recognition of the difference that the massacre can be taken to signify a "primal scene" of Haitian national formation in the first half of the 20th century.

This traumatic birth of self is observable also in the narrative dynamics. The "historical plot" of the novel begins not with Amabelle's story, as noted by Shemak (97) but with the "master's plot"; that is, her story as a house maid for the landowning Dominican family is decentred by her mistress's. Amabelle's story line takes over only at the moment of fleeing the Dominican Republic and barely escaping being massacred, so that the sense of (individual and group) self as the exiled, marked, persecuted body emerges by degrees. This exile mediated by the rivers of blood and marked by the traversal of a river, a physical border between the two countries, marks also a return to an earlier exile that cannot be known unless through a traumatic enactment, namely, the Middle Passage. The river, later designated as the Massacre River, is also the site of another exile and crossing—the drowning of Amabelle's parents in her plain sight, which she revisits regularly in her dreams and nightmares, leaves her an orphan later on adopted by her Dominican family. Thus her whole conscious and unconscious life is an incessant project of being summoned to witness, be it in the form of a "historical" narrative or in the form of unintegrated nightmares.

Dori Laub, talking about three levels of testimony tied to his personal experiences during the Holocaust and his later work as a psychotherapist and Holocaust survivor, specifically enlists those of "being a witness to oneself within the experience" and "the level of being witness to the testimonies of others" (1995: 61). He furthermore claims that the monstrous frame of reference imposed by the events too obscene for understanding (in Claude Lanzmann's words) created "a collapse of witnessing": "The historical imperative to bear witness could essentially *not be met during the actual occurrence*" (68). Similarly, Amabelle and other survivors stand as faulty witnesses to their own and others' horrors, while their very survival sets them apart from everybody else when they finally reach safety on the Haitian side of the border.

Convalescing from the bodily wounds in the hospital near the border Amabelle finds herself witness to the others' suffering through listening to their accounts of torture and massacre. However, she merely registers the stories, unable to ponder the true horror of their content. Among the tellers there is a man, a sole survivor from a pit full of cadavers, who almost

automatically, with a shrug of shoulders, dismisses the fact of the killing of his woman (FB 210-212). During the night, however, awoken from the nightmare he rises in an attempt to revisit the pit in order to find her (216). The immediate weight of witnessing, before the psychic engagement can take place, is borne by Amabelle's body, which she designates significantly as "beyond healing" (199); the disfigurement and pain will be her constant companions and the visible signifiers of the invisible trauma: "my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament" (227). It is significant that Danticat seems to imply the body as a site of witnessing thus in effect dismantling the primacy accorded to the psychic trauma (229, 245), and bridging a gap in trauma theory from the original meaning of "trauma" as a wound to the present-day prevailing sense of psychic trauma.

Amabelle's mental and physical torments are the singular and most poignant aspects of witnessing in the novel (along with those of other survivors), no less for their failed impact. All the other attempts, including the third level as described by Laub, "of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself" (61), are tragically inadequate and misguided. Thus, the overwhelmed government officials and the sympathetic priests assign to the desperate attempts of the people to tell their stories only the purposes of claiming retribution or asking for help (FB 235, 254). The institutions, it would seem, have only a limited ability to incorporate trauma before they relegate it to the realm of the written archive. It is thus up to a culture to take up and carry on the memories of trauma, a problem that I will discuss in the context of the novel in the next section.

The true witness is constantly aware of her absolute responsibility to bear testimony and held back by her presumed inability to effect it adequately; for Amabelle it takes place in her nightmarish recurrence of failed attempts to produce her testimony: "I dream all the time of returning to give my testimony to the river, the waterfall, the justice of the peace, even to Generalissimo himself" (264). Sadly, her nightmare does not bring her to the performative awakening, the testimony remains locked inside her and the survivors, like Yves, who know her story, while she fails, in Shoshana Felman's words, "to tell the story and *be heard*, to in fact *address* the significance of [her] biography – to *address* ... the suffering, the truth,

and the necessity of this impossible narration—to a hearing ‘you,’ and to a listening community” (45). Thus we are brought to an understanding of the heroic and self-annihilating nature of Amabelle’s burden and summoned but belatedly to become her listening community. Shemak diagnoses this refusal of the text to submit to the healing potential of the *testimonio* and instead sees Danticat’s project as recasting the very ambiguity of the border’s history and the impossibility to subdue it through narration (106).

The strategy that potentially arises from this paradox of the engagement with traumatic history is reflected in the consistently unsettling duality of the novel’s body; typographically, the text is split into two parts, one is in bold type and the other is in ordinary typeface. The reader quite readily perceives that the latter is the narrator’s / Amabelle’s voice, cast in the conventional narrative past tense, presumably a record of the events that took place in the borderlands between Haiti and the Dominican Republic in the 1930s. In fact, the whole sequence is told from the enunciative position of a participant and a witness who survived life-shattering events and now looks back and revisits in language the sites of suffering. Potentially, these passages could be construed as pointing to the process of reworking, bespeaking a long, tortuous and never totally accomplished transformation of traumatic into narrative memory. Bold sequences, also presumably Amabelle’s, cast the act of witnessing, which is simultaneously, “a crisis of witnessing.” In those dream-like sections Danticat brings to the fore a paradox which besets Amabelle and other survivors as a belated, and thus haunting, lingering realization of the improbability of their survival (as witnesses) and the betrayal entailed in that very fact, which remains unresolved to the end. Felman has pointed out that testimony does not tolerate closure, rather institutes “language ... in process and in trial” (1995: 16). This repetitive speech-act (Felman 17), this doubling of the voice, I would argue, engages the tenuousness of the novel as an appropriate form to encase the testimony of the history of trauma because it shows that such history necessarily entails a breakdown of novelistic narration and a dissociation of the narrative voice. Ultimately, Amabelle and the reader come to realization that trauma extends beyond the imperatives of witnessing, either with your body and

mind (as for Amabelle) or in narration, but can claim both as its sites of re-enactment.

4 How a Culture Remembers

Caruth has drawn consequences from Freud's varied examples (such as combat trauma, accident trauma, child's play *fort-da* and so on) to the extent "that the theory of trauma, as a historical experience of a survival exceeding the grasp of the one who survives, engages a notion of history exceeding individual bounds" (1996: 66). In *The Farming of Bones* Danticat has shown the necessity and perhaps the entailed impossibility of giving a true record of a historical trauma. Elsewhere, however, she will indicate other nodal points around which the cultural and narrative representations should and indeed do rally. Danticat has identified the two of them as the Haitian revolution and Haitian diaspora (2001: x, xiv-xvi). In one of the short stories from her collection *Krik? Krak!* (subsequently *Krik*), a Haitian school boy diligently rehearses the lines of his role in the school enactment of the Haitian Revolution. His role, as he informs his proud parents, is that of Boukman, one of the great slave revolutionary leaders.⁷ When he recites his lines it brings into play the force of cultural representations that often distort and re-figure history in such a way to obliterate the unacceptable elements and promote the condoned aspects of a national culture. The function of words put in Boukman's mouth is such that they absolutely belie his rootedness in African traditions: "It was obvious that this was a speech written by a European man, who gave to the slave revolutionary Boukman the kind of European phrasing that might have sent the real Boukman turning in his grave" (*Krik* 56). Even

⁷ For his paramount role in instigating the Revolution see Benítez-Rojo 159-62; Dayan 1995: 29, 46, 70; Nicholls 1979: 31-32. His heroic-tragic stature as a vodou priest, cast almost as a cultural and political anachronism, lies in the fact that vodou practices would be promptly discouraged in the post-revolutionary Haiti mostly for political reasons (see Benítez-Rojo 162).

so, such doubly coded take-on on the powerful national icon suffices to stir the whole layer of suppressed affects that the boy's family shares with other citizens as a part and parcel of their national symbolic repository (*Krik* 56). This episode points to the several uses that the recasting of national history performs in the culture: through education national values and appropriate sentiments are inculcated and disseminated to an unprecedented degree, at the same time consolidating their claim to historical veracity and gaining new strength by the sheer force of their dispersal. The play among various representations and their staging of national, collective and communal identity is at the heart of the concerns of the theories of cultural trauma, as espoused among others by Ron Eyerman in his study *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (2001). There he distinguishes between a historical consciousness and a collective memory of a group, which approximates the access to the mythic dimensions of collective historical experience (7-8), such as enables this Haitian family to regain their past through a representational form.⁸ Central to Eyerman's consideration is the latency effect we have also seen operative elsewhere in trauma, which, as it were, assails African American subjects at the historical moment of the post-Civil War emancipating efforts at "forg[ing] a collective identity out of its [slavery's] remembrance" (1). This double movement, so to speak, the historical pull of the after-the-event understanding of its immense (unutterable) implications and the projective nature of the whole enterprise of creating a space in the public sphere for themselves as emerging national subjects, this duality of engaging simultaneously the past and the future while struggling in the present, seems to link the project of cultural trauma with the temporal sequence of the base (structuring) trauma as outlined by Freud and later refined by Laplanche.

⁸ What I find especially intriguing and potentially enabling in Eyerman's discourse on cultural trauma and the role of collective memory is his reliance on the cognitive models ("supra-individual") of data processing and framing and also on "the impact of material culture" in the process of memory-building (6, 8). This may offer a panacea against the tenuousness of individual memory which is in Ball's words riddled with contradictory scripts of selectivity, repression, desire, displacement and condensation (2000: 12).

This urgency in addressing the deferred, belated truth in history is precisely what is at stake in Danticat's writing. It is hardly an accident that the first two stories in *Krik? Krak!* deal with two salient moments in the modern Haitian history – immigration and the Massacre, both hinging on what was perceived by Dominican ideologues as a threatening incursion of Haitian immigrants (Lundahl 120-33). The first one, "Children of the Sea" engages an episode of civil unrest during several but mutually interchangeable periods of dictatorship in Haiti. There are two voices and perspectives in the story, one is by a young man who is on the boat full of people sailing to the States to claim asylum as a member of the opposition. The other is by his girlfriend who remains in Haiti and witnesses the uprising there. His movement, however, is repeatedly likened to other distinct movements, that perhaps cannot be considered together on the level of referential history but are interwoven on the level of traumatic history. What I have in mind are primarily the historical uprooting of the Middle Passage, that is evoked in the story as a symbolic heritage (of the African diaspora), but also twentieth-century displacements as occasioned by the political turmoil in Haiti.

Elsewhere in the collection, the references to the traumatic truth of the Middle Passage in particular are claimed as an ultimately "unknowable" experience, but all the truer for that since it violates the linear and causal plot of historiography and institutes the demands of witnessing. For one of the sisters in the story "Caroline's Wedding" (*Krik*) that witnessing takes place on the site of her body; she was born crippled as a somatic testimony to the brutality of the treatment her mother suffered during the advanced stages of pregnancy at the hands of American law.

Parallel to this runs another theme, that of her parents (and innumerable other Haitians) crossing the sea in boats, which in an episode in the New York church during a service for the most recent victims of drowning (those very same from the opening story) hurls us back to the "primal scene" of the African identity formation in the New World, that of the violent transposition from Africa to the Americas. A priest consciously amplifies the comparison between the seaward passage of the African ancestors and the present-day "[t]ransients" and "[n]omads" (*Krik* 167). That we are indeed meant to see the Haitian (and African diasporic) history as grappling with the traumas of the Middle Passage and slavery

is reinforced further in the story as religion and folk beliefs retrace this same connection: "There are people ... 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 have died at sea [such as the most recent immigrants] have been chosen to make that journey in order to be reunited with their long-lost relations" (*Krik* 167-68). However, if the drowned have rejoined the ancestral ghosts and even if the ghosts of the unutterable history (such as *Beloved* in Morrison's novel) come back to taunt the living, it is up to the survivors to commemorate, witness and live on, a task as paramount as it is unfeasible. Or is it? Ramadanovic fully develops this theme in his reading of Caruth's traumatic history based on Freud's account of the Jewish diaspora alongside the historically distinct and separate, but structurally *similar* African American diaspora (1998: 57; emphasis mine). Ramadanovic suggests that the underlying "history of trauma, enslavement, and persecution" which materializes itself in the form of "traumatic departures" (whether once as captured Africans or recently as immigrants) testifies to the emergence of "another, diasporic, entangled 'we'" (1998: 57, 58). Danticat's texts engage these points of emergence, already existing in the cultural imaginary, and reinforce their traumatic and powerful role in "solidify[ing] individual / collective identity" (Eyerman 15).

5 Structuring Trauma: Unbearable Secrets

If my previous remarks have tried to situate Danticat's writing in the context of collective traumatic experience and the inherent (im)possibility of its truthful account, now I turn to trauma as a decisive marker of the Haitian woman's existence. This is best observable in a novel which blends the conventions of memoir writing and Bildungsroman, as is the case with Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1995; subsequently *BEM*). It weaves a story of a young Haitian girl, Sophie, who after being raised and reared for twelve years by her Tante Atie, leaves for the United States there to

rejoin her mother. The novel is a first person account of her growing up in Haiti and her subsequent struggle with her mother in New York up to a point where she starts her own family. However, this is not where her *Bildung* ends, the neat resolution is not offered by the glimmer of the domestic happiness. Sophie's life after the delivery, we learn, is marred by bulimia and a pathological fear of sex, which leads her to temporarily leave her husband, return to Haiti, there reconcile with her mother, upon their arrival to the States learn that her mother is pregnant again and finally experience a shock of her mother's violent self-inflicted death, which brings her for the third time to Haiti to arrange for the burial ceremony. How to approach a novel that systematically, recurrently, almost obsessively engages the potentially or actually traumatic moments? The insistent nature of my question suggests that trauma theory could be one of the more rewarding ways of dealing with this text.

Even on the level of narrative technique from the earliest passages on, as observed by various critics, there is an almost elusive quality to Danticat's writing, something that at first defies definition until it embodies itself in the reader's initial uneasiness with the text; that is, the tauntingly sparse quality of her writing (which, it may be added here, Danticat retains and refines in her subsequent books) (Chancy 130; Dash 157). It is as if she were giving us clues for the drama that has to be reconstructed by ourselves; we are familiarized with the principal incidents, motivations and drives but the rest hinges on our sleuth-like and imaginative capabilities to delve into the characters' past and grope for a plausible source of their inner torment. This shorthand, I would argue, is a transcript of traumatic experience as it eludes understanding, as it defies description and mocks a coherent, detailed, logical narrative demanded by the conventions of the biographical narration.

One reason for such a departure may be located in the pervasive preoccupation in the novel with individual, family and national past, burdened with the insistently repetitive frameworks for action. It should also be noted how such parallel engagement may bring about a danger of an all too easy allegorization of the woman's body as a stand-in for the nation, ravished by history and marked by violence, a link which occasionally intrudes in the text (*BEM* 230). Rody has pointed out how the collective imaginary of the Caribbean contains and enlarges this

metaphor to the point when it demoniacally engulfs everything else in the antidiialectical circularity of history, and so freezes the image of Caribbean women into a nightmare of incessant return (2002: 112-17). This is not to say that Danticat is not aware of the problem, but it is something to be addressed beyond the confines of a single text.

Sophie grows up in an all-female multi-generational family, with an all-too-common anomaly caused by intensive emigration; namely, the absence of her mother, who moved to the States not long after her birth. Sophie's aunt Atie, primarily, and her grandmother act as mother substitutes for the child. The story of Sophie's conception is simultaneously a moment of the brutal violation of her mother, Martine, who was raped in the cane fields by an unseen / unknown man. Shortly before that, as both Atie and Martine approach the nubile age, their mother begins to "test" them, an innocuous word that hides the horror of the mother's violation of the daughter's body under the guise of preserving her virginity until marriage: "She would put her finger in our very private parts and see if it would go inside" (60). Note that the point here is not strictly speaking "purity" or "chastity," but a socially valued "virginity."⁹

It is hardly coincidental that at the moment in which Sophie's mother reveals this ubiquitous Haitian practice to her own by and large Americanized daughter, she simultaneously unfolds the story of her violation by a man, establishing a running link between various forms of violation either socially condoned and interiorized by women themselves ("testing") or merely tolerated and overlooked (it would be illusory for a rape victim to expect any kind of legal retribution). This reality of random violence is strongly reminiscent of trauma theories that endorse a specific feminist perspective and point out how women's lives are subconsciously shaped by the subdued but imminent threat of the eruptions of violence (Brown 1995).

What does it mean to Sophie that she is a child begotten of violence? The answer to the question is very obvious and not so clear, at the same time. I will

⁹ In "The Taboo of Virginity" (1918) Freud gives an interesting ethno-psychological account of this apparently prevalent feature of human sexual behaviour in many societies (1997 [1963]: 60-76). Dash refers to this practice as "the society's fetichistic [sic] regard of virginity" (1997: 160).

argue that initially, to put it bluntly, it does not, it cannot, mean anything to Sophie. It only gradually, belatedly acquires a meaning which, in its structure of a deferred impact, dramatically recalls the model of trauma.

When she first finds about her mother's rape, she is twelve, still sexually innocent and unknowing: "It took me twelve years [afterwards] to piece together my mother's entire story. By then it was too late" (*BEM* 61). When her mother was raped she was "barely older than [Sophie]" and so in the moment of the violation couldn't fully experience / know the event, which comes to haunt her afterwards (both later and belatedly) in the shape of horrendous and ultimately fatal nightmares (she will presumably kill herself in a bout of such a nightmare). As Laplanche and Pontalis elaborate on Freud's seduction theory in the entry on "Scene of Seduction; Theory of Seduction" (1973), trauma incorporates two stages separated by puberty. The "see-saw effect" between the first "presexual" event "cannot be integrated by the subject" at that stage of development; it requires "the second event by association linked with the first for the first one to be interpreted as traumatic" (405), which occurs later, in puberty. It is arguable that this primal seduction is repressed and only drawn to the surface in the neuroses, but it provides us with a model for the incorporation of sexuality in the subject.

For both women, this onset is to say the least marked by the unclaimed and inassimilable experience. Shortly after Martine's mother (Sophie's grandmother) begins to test her, Martine is raped. Not only has she not had the time to integrate her mother's violation, but also finds herself utterly incapable (and without help) to account for the demand that the horrific event has left on her psyche. She never even gets to a stage where she can begin to include the story of violation into her life story; in other words, the transposition from traumatic into narrative memory never takes place (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 176).

For Sophie the trajectory of trauma is reinforced in two stages. The first stage spans six years, from the point where she learns about the testing and her origins to the point when she falls in love with an African American man, Joseph. One night when her mother catches her off-guard with Joseph, Sophie undergoes the testing (84-5). At that moment she links the previously "floating" account of the various forms of the daughters'

and women's violations with the violation inflicted by her mother and it is only then, I would argue, that her "primal scene" becomes indeed a trauma to plague her henceforth. However, her story evolves into a provisionally speaking second stage—the commencement of her active sexual life with Joseph, now her husband. We learn retroactively, which is a very significant strategy for this aspect of the plot, that she fears sex to the point that she almost identifies her otherwise gentle, understanding, supportive husband as a violator (i. e., a rapist) every time they attempt to make love. This retroactive direction of the plot returns us to the past together with Sophie, to the knot of her personal history, which is by now inextricably tied to her mother's painful story.¹⁰ By association, which is a trajectory that the memory traverses in marking the history of trauma and in that sense "memory has a greater power than the experience that triggered it" (Laplanche and Pontalis 405), Sophie comes to experience her husband as her mother's rapist (whose face the mother couldn't see or wouldn't recognize and in that sense can signify any man and all men) in her belated recognition. In such a traumatic scenario, every time they make love, the "rape" is enacted and her body is being violated.

Also, by instituting her daughter's testing at the moment of her attempted physical intimacy (which at that time amounts to occasional kisses and holding of hands) with Joseph, Sophie's mother triggers another chain of experiences which will culminate in Sophie's traumatic rejection of her sexuality. It is because Sophie then might have had sex that Sophie now cannot bear to have it. It is because Joseph's presence and touch occasioned her mother's pain-inflicting response that from then on he will also in that sense come to represent both her mother's and her offender, and sex will come to stand for something painful and shameful.

¹⁰ Ellie Ragland explains "the knot" as "central to any interpretation of trauma, insofar as it ultimately resides in the real, while retaining properties of each of the other orders of meaning [i. e., the symbolic and the imaginary]" (2001 n. p.). She furthermore relies on Jeanne Granon-Lafont's reading of Lacan: "The imaginary, real, and symbolic are placed one on the other such that the fourth exigency which knots them—what Lacan called the order of the symptom—represents the Freudian concept of psychic reality. Insofar as this reality rests on an unconscious fantasy, it remains invisible" (Granon-Lafont 112 qtd. in Ragland 2001, n.p.).

As Sophie's mother warns her after the first testing, "There are secrets you cannot keep" (85), but she might as well be applying the words to herself as her secrets regularly and frighteningly burst forth every night.

I would like to address at this point the psychoanalytic mother / daughter plot. Psychoanalysis, as is known, recognizes the mother as the primary source of identification and thus both upholds her indispensable role in the child's earliest development and also stresses the need to break away from the mother (or the mother figure) if the child is to develop a distinctive personality (Freud [1963] 1997: 184-201). In Freud's account of the subjectification process, the Oedipus complex, the mother-daughter interaction is left open and unended thus signalling possible blind spots in his model but also pointing to the long duration of the mother-daughter interaction, which extends well beyond the daughter's early years (185). It is this uncanny duality of the relationship, its indispensability but also a possibly dangerous impact, that is fully articulated in the contemporary women's writing of the Caribbean. As emphasized by Rody, this comes forth especially in the images of "strong and nurturing mothers coexisting with dead and dying, inhibiting and compromised ones" (120).

The mothering in the novel is complicated by the fact that the child's biological mother is away – absent, but also present as a referential point. In the mother's absence Tante Atie acts as a mother substitute but Sophie doesn't go beyond the "positive," non-confrontational phase with her; the ferocity and rancour of the mother-daughter relationship is reserved for Sophie's years with her mother in New York. Martine, the mother, can thus be seen as Tante Atie's shadow, a negative, a vile stepmother, upon which all the anxieties and hatred of the child, primarily Sophie's permanent fear of abandonment, can be projected without remorse or repression (*BEM* 210). Theirs is not the only fraught relationship in the novel – there is also the one between Tante Atie and her own mother, burdened with the unspeakable secrets of the past and missed opportunities in Atie's life. This doubling on the level of the plot is reinforced at the moment when Martine evokes a magic nexus between mothers and daughters, the marassa (twin spirits, twin deities) of vodou (Chancy 15, 22; Danticat 1996: 385). Despite its potentially empowering effect, the implications of the doubling in the novel are mostly negative. When Martine so to speak

recreates her daughter as her "double" or *marassa*, she simultaneously transfers on her the burden of her history. Thus Sophie knows that she must evade this chain if she is to bequeath a more serene history to her own daughter, Brigitte. Her historical insight is reaffirmed by her grandmother's admonition that echoes mythic, empowering but also debilitating, links between mothers and daughters, which tie the ritualistic sense of identity formation in African based religions to some of the psychoanalytic insights: "the daughter is never fully a woman until her mother has passed on before her" (BEM 234). So it is only in the wake of her mother's burial that Sophie finds strength to revisit the site of her mother's violation, also of her "primal scene," and thus to stand witness for her mother and herself, apparently attaining liberation from her traumatic history.

The novels and short stories in question, approached insofar as they potentially articulate different aspects of trauma theory in contemporary critical discourse, have shown difficulties, lacunae and gaps which aggravate various attempts of narrative renderings of the traumatic history of Haiti and particular individual traumas embedded in it. In the process of addressing these histories, however, Danticat does not resign her historical / authorial responsibility to represent, just as she makes demands on her readers to get involved in traumatic plots or commemorates and bears witness to the heroic dimensions of her characters' engagements with different facets of their personal and communal histories. Even though I am far from claiming this as a sole province or exclusive prerogative of postcolonial writing or even of literature in general, it seems to me that the analogies enabled by concepts proffered by trauma theory do account for a specific cultural moment we find ourselves in and may contribute considerably to its fuller understanding.

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POVRIJEĐENA POVIJEST: INTERPRETACIJA PROZE EDWIDGE DANTICAT

Proza suvremene američko-haićanske autorice Edwidge Danticat promatra se kao dio širega etničkoga, subalternoga i post-kolonijalnoga diskursa, koji ima dodirnih točaka s teorijom traume kako se artikulira u suvremenim čitanjima navlastito tekstova Sigmunda Freuda (Laplanche, Caruth, Felman). Čitanjem njezinih romana *The Farming of Bones* (1998) i *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) te zbirke novela *Krik? Krak!* (1995), upućuje se na ključne veze između nastojanja za prikazivanjem prešućene i potisnute, pa time i traumatične, kolektivne povijesti, koja, stoga, slijedi dinamiku traumatske latencije ili odgode. Hibridni žanrovi, s elementima historiografske metafikcije, ali i književnosti svjedočenja, ukazuju na važnost pojma svjedočanstva kao mogućnosti prikaza alternativne povijesti. U romanu *Breath, Eyes, Memory* proširuje se interpretativni doseg teorije traume korištenjem modela strukturne ili bazne, prvenstveno individualne, traume, koja se pokazuje kao jedan od modela transpozicije traumatičnoga iskustva u narativnu formu, ali i upućuje na ograničenja koja žanrovski oblik Bildungsromana nameće projektu izgradnje identiteta kroz suočavanje s osobnim i povijesnim traumama.

Key words: Edwidge Danticat, history, cultural trauma, structuring trauma

Ključne riječi: Edwidge Danticat, povijest, kulturna trauma, strukturna trauma

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