
Beyond Binaries in Edwidge Danticat's Dew Breaker

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Abstract

In 2011, Edwidge Danticat coined the term AHA (African-Haitian-American) owning publicly her place in the Black diaspora. In doing so, she identified with her African roots while claiming both her Haitian past and her American life, presenting the Caribbean as a key element to understanding American identity. As my paper will show, Danticat's 2004 novel, *The Dew Breaker*, demonstrates how productive transborder exploration can be. Formally and thematically, *The Dew Breaker* challenges assumptions about the categories that organize literary scholarship and personal identity in the contemporary US. Formally *The Dew Breaker* subverts the boundaries between multiple genres. Weaving short stories into a coherent novel, Danticat's experimentation destabilizes the borders between what we as readers expect and what we know. This poetics of fragmentation (Gallagher) encourages the reader to create links between the stories, in the process reenacting the complexity of the American immigrant's perspective. At the same time, the content of *The Dew Breaker* also transgresses boundaries and borders. At the micro level (rooms, streets, neighborhoods) and at the macro level (countries, time), Danticat insistently blurs borders in order to represent how traumatized immigrants cope with displacement. Although my main example is *The Dew Breaker*, my paper will likewise consider the larger implications of the various border-crossings explored in the text. Are characters condemned to cross and re-cross without ever finding answers, as Dash suggests, or does such multi-crossing define instead what Mardorossian calls a "relational identity that accounts for the contingent workings of difference across gender, race, class and national boundaries"? I will conclude instead that although we usually understand our hyphenated identities along binary lines, Danticat importantly complicates these oppositions and thus creates a global space for the contemporary American narrative.

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