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Reading/Response: “Everything Is Far From Here” by Cristina Henríquez

“Everything Is Far From Here” is a short story by Cristina Henriquez, an American author best known for her novel *The Book of Unknown Americans*, in which she speaks about identity and the immigrant experience. In this short story published in *The New Yorker*, Henriquez takes the reader through a vivid and devastating account of a single mother on her journey from Mexico to the United States through border immigration. As outlined in Jerome Stern’s *Making Shapley Fiction*, a book offering writers insightful tools for crafting well-structured stories, this story has many elements fitting both the Trauma and Onion shapes. Still, there are also other ways of describing the frame of this narrative.

The story first begins when the mother finally arrives at the border customs facility after a grueling three-week passage. However, during the passage, she and her son Gabriel were split up. When she arrived, he was nowhere to be found. She now had to endure the harsh prison-like conditions of the facility while desperately waiting and holding out hope for her son to arrive. The story takes the reader through the incredible hardships of not only the mother but also many of the passing immigrants she interacts with. Touching on many specific aspects of being a woman in that facility in the process. Throughout her time in the facility, going weeks and weeks without seeing her son, the

possibility of seeing her son again grew slimmer and slimmer. Yet she would always sit by the front and look out for her son. That is until the moment she embraces another young boy she mistaken for Gabriel.

The most apparent shape this story fits would be 'trauma.' The trauma shape is described as a story that starts with a traumatic event. (Stern 18) This can be examined when the story opens up, painting a picture of some of the things that the mother had to deal with resulting from her grueling journey. Shortly after, the story recalls some of the traumatic events of the journey, including the moment she and her son were forcibly split apart.

The second shape would be 'the onion.' The onion is described as a story that has many layers to it. With situations taking place within larger situations, characters often find themselves in layers. (Stern 30) Although the wider focus of the story is on the Mother's search for her son within the border customs facility, throughout the story, numerous interactions between the mother and other immigrants offer brief glimpses into the lives and circumstances of various characters at specific moments. Ones such as the woman from El Salvador and her six-year-old trying to get to Minnesota where the father lives. There's also her interaction with the lawyer. It offers some insight into her own situation in regard to the actual immigration process, which is on shaky ground, even if she were able to find her son. Another big one would include the woman who had taken advantage of the mother in her desperate state and took her wedding ring.

The story overall, expresses a common experience for many immigrants crossing into the United States through the southern border, through the lens of one person's journey. Told through the third person point of view, the story allows the reader to see

the mother's thoughts and emotions while also getting to experience it from a distance wide enough to fully understand the conditions they are in.