
Intelligent writers demand and deserve intelligent readers. Edwidge Danticat: A Reader’s Guide offers a series of astute perspectives on the work of one of the most compelling contemporary writers and is bound to become a useful companion for those who are already familiar with her oeuvre as well as for those who are approaching it for the first time.

The collection is divided into four sections—“Contexts,” “Texts and Analyses,” “Danticat and her Peers,” and “Interview & Bibliography”—which are preceded by a foreword by Dany Laferrière and an introduction by Martin Munro.

Laferrière introduces us to Danticat-the-person and to Danticat-the-writer at the same time. While the charisma, serenity, and composure of the “Princess of Brooklyn”—as Laferrière affectionately calls her—are very powerfully evoked, we are also reminded of her unfaltering commitment to Haiti and of the fact that what characterizes Danticat’s work “are human preoccupations fed by a myriad of everyday truths and presented in a style so natural that it may appear simple” (p. viii).

Munro’s introduction paves the way to the rest of the collection by highlighting some of the issues debated by other contributors: where and how do we situate Danticat’s work? What kind of dialogue does she establish with her Haitian literary precursors? How does her work relate to women’s writing from Haiti, from the rest of the Caribbean, or in the African American tradition? How does she negotiate between the needs of a disenfranchised community and those of her individual self?

In the first section, J. Michael Dash, Carine Mardorossian, and Régine Michelle Jean-Charles discuss Danticat’s opus in relation to the Haitian, Caribbean, and African American literary contexts respectively. Rather than situating Danticat firmly in one or the other tradition, all three critics agree that her work calls into question pre-existing categories of writers, and that it proposes a broadening and diversification of these traditions and of conceptualizations of identity as well as a more fluid relationship with those precursors that Danticat invites us to read anew.

It is a shame that the “Contexts” section does not include an island-based context dealing with the literary landscape and the diasporas of Haiti and the Dominican Republic; after all, Julia Alvarez or Junot Díaz, as Munro
himself notes, deal with “similar issues of state violence and relationships between the island state and the United States” (p. 6). Such contextualization would have given more poignancy to Myriam J.A. Chancy’s insistence on “transnational healing” (p. 144) in her insightful essay on *The Farming of Bones* (1998), where Danticat takes her readers back to the 1937 massacre of Haitians and Dominican-Haitians in the Dominican Republic.

Chancy’s essay is part of the “Texts and Analyses” section, which offers Mireille Rosello’s sensitive close reading of Danticat’s disturbing novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994)—focused on the representation of rape—and Mary Gallagher’s stimulating intervention on *The Dew Breaker* (2004), where a daughter discovers that, instead of being a victim of the Duvaliers, her beloved father was in fact a torturer. “Texts and Analyses” also includes Nick Nesbitt’s compelling essay on Danticat’s short stories in which he insists on her ability “to crystallize in pregnant image latent experiences of frustrated justice that draw us as individuals beyond the parochialism of our immediate, subjective demands” (p. 84). Kiera Vaclavik’s successful attempt to bring to the fore Danticat’s unfairly neglected young adult fiction is followed by Charles Forsdick’s brilliant investigation of her travel writing. Among other things, Forsdick puts *After the Dance* (2002) in dialogue with the rest of Danticat’s oeuvre by pointing out how it “continues a series of collective projects, in which its author has been involved, of recovering personal testimonies, many of which relate to travel and migration” (p. 112).

In the third section of this volume four contemporary writers—Maryse Condé, Évelyne Trouillot, Madison Smartt Bell, and Lyonel Trouillot—share with readers their views on and appreciation of Danticat’s oeuvre, highlighting its linguistic and thematic novelty, praising her style for being radical in its simplicity, commending her concern for historical truth and social justice, and celebrating her ability to give voice, simultaneously, to the new Caribbean exile and to her individual self. The collection ends with Renee H. Shea’s interview with Danticat which focuses on *Brother, I’m Dying* (2007), thereby giving the last word to Danticat herself.

The volume also contains Munro’s brief biography of Danticat and Nadève Ménard’s selected bibliography which includes fictional and non-fictional works authored by Danticat, projects she has been involved in (for example, Jonathan Demme’s film *The Agronomist* [2003] on the life and death of the Haitian journalist Jean Dominique for which she was
associate producer), critical texts (including theses and dissertations), and interviews. The inclusion in the bibliography of a long list of contemporary Haitian works might seem to unfairly privilege the Haitian context over the Caribbean or African American ones but, since Anglophone readers might not be very familiar with Haitian writing, this is an important and informative addition to the collection.

At the end of his introduction, Munro explains that “this volume is meant to invite readers to read Danticat in her various contexts and to explore those contexts further, in particular the neglected but substantial Haitian tradition” (p. 9). But *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader’s Guide* does a lot more than simply offering stimulating readings of Danticat’s work and introducing readers to possible contexts in which to situate it—it provides readers with the necessary tools to approach Danticat’s oeuvre in an informed and inspired manner. In other words, thanks to this volume, more intelligent readers of Danticat are on their way. This can only be a good thing.

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