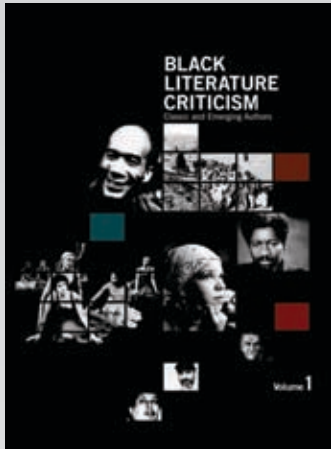


# Black Literature Criticism: Classic and Emerging Authors since 1950



Meeting the continuous demand for insight on the lives and writings of black writers, Gale's *Black Literature Criticism: Classic and Emerging Authors since 1950* offers a new look at one of the most dynamic fields of literary study today.

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and representing many nations, including Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Algiers, Haiti, the United States and more.

Shaped by an advisory board of scholars led by chief advisor Howard Dodson, Director, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, this publication was designed to meet the needs of university students, upper high school students, general readers and teachers. Featuring a broad selection of the best literary criticism from the last several decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this set also includes biographical sketches, critical and historical reception of each author's work, comprehensive notes and expansive lists of additional materials for further study.

Approximately one third of the set updates classic black authors originally covered in *Black Literature Criticism*; the other two thirds of the set treat new and emerging authors not covered before. For those authors who were covered in earlier publications, all new criticism has been provided and all biographical sketches have been completely updated.


*Black Literature Criticism: Classic and Emerging Authors since 1950*, a three-volume set, presents a foreword by chief advisor Howard Dodson, putting this reference work in the context of black studies today. In addition, it features cumulative author, title and nationality indexes, and more than 50 photographs and illustrations to complement the content.

The publication includes entries on authors such as:

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- *Edwidge Danticat*
- *Ben Okri*

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## Edwidge Danticat 1969-

Haitian-born American novelist, essayist, editor, short story writer, and children's book author.

### INTRODUCTION

Danticat has emerged as one of the most important Caribbean-American authors in contemporary literature. Her novels and short fiction explore Haiti's violent and troubled past as well as her own ambivalent experience as a Haitian exile living in Brooklyn. Critics have praised her lyrical language, skillful storytelling, and sharp insights into the issues faced by Haitians in their homeland and in the United States.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Danticat was born on January 19, 1969, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. As a young girl, her parents left Haiti and immigrated to New York City. At that time, Haiti was ruled by President "Baby Doc" Duvalier and the ruthless Tonton Macoute, who tortured and killed many Haitians. Danticat joined her parents in Brooklyn in 1981, but had a very difficult time adjusting to her new home. Lonely and feeling alienated, she began to write fiction and drama set in her homeland of Haiti. As a young woman, she attended Harvard College, earning a degree in French. After graduation from Harvard, she went to graduate school at Brown University, eventually earning a M.F.A. degree. During her years at Brown, she also wrote two plays that were produced at the Brown University New Plays Festival. Her master's thesis later evolved into her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which was published in 1994. A year later, her first collection of short stories, *Krik? Krik!* was a finalist for the 1995 National Book Award. In 1998 her second novel, *The Farming of Bones*, received the American Book Award and the Pushcart Prize for short fiction. She was awarded a Story Prize for her short story collection *The Dew Breaker* (2004). That same year she received a Lannan Literary Fellowship. Her stories have been published in the *New Yorker*, *Callaloo*, and other periodicals. Danticat lives in Miami.

### MAJOR WORKS OF SHORT FICTION

*Breath, Eyes, Memory* chronicles the story of Sophie Caco, who travels from Haiti to New York to be reunited with her mother, Martine. Alienated from the

only home she has ever known, Sophie struggles to deal with her mother's abusive behavior and her own sense of identity. She eventually marries, has a child, and returns to Haiti to confront her family's past. Danticat's next novel, *The Farming of Bones*, takes an historical event as its basis: the 1937 slaughter of thousands of Haitian sugar cane cutters ordered by Dominican Republic dictator Rafael Trujillo. Danticat tells the story through the character of Amabelle Dent, who as a young girl witnesses her parents' drowning while trying to cross the river back into Haiti. She is rescued by Don Ignacio, who takes her into his home, where she lives as the companion and servant to Ignacio's daughter, Valencia. Years later, the Dominican government began a campaign to massacre any Haitians or citizens of mixed blood. No longer safe in Valencia's home, Amabelle is forced to undertake a dangerous journey back to Haiti, along with thousands of other Haitians. *Is After the Dance? A Walk through the Carnival of Jacmel, Haiti* (2002). Danticat describes the various cultural and historic influences on Carnival and offers insight into the deep and diverse roots of Haitian culture represented in the colorful celebration. Danticat has also written two novels for young adults, *Behold the Mountains* (2002) and *Ammons, Golden Flower* (2005).

In her short story collections *Krik? Krik!* and *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat explores the challenges of the immigrant experience as well as the reality of Haitian life, focusing on the courage and fortitude of Haitian women struggling to express themselves within a patriarchal culture. Her first collection, *Krik? Krik!* is comprised of nine stories, many of them written during her college years. The volume's title is taken from a Haitian storytelling ritual when a storyteller asks, "Krik?" the audience enthusiastically responds "Krik!" to signal they are ready for a story. The tales are not only deeply personal but touch Haiti's troubled and violent past. *Ammons* is a more thematically involved of the stories, as Danticat's immigrant characters are haunted by their past and struggle to find a place in their new surroundings. Her next collection, *The Dew Breaker* has been variously described as short fiction or as a novel. The stories center on an enigmatic man known as the Dew Breaker, who was a torturer and jailer in Haiti for the dictator Papa Doc Duvalier many years ago and now

Shamak, April. "Re-Membering Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 48.1 (2002): 83-112.

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. "Reflections on Memory at the Millennium." *Comparative Literature* 51.3 (1999): v-xiii.

Timmerman, Jacob. *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2002.

Warda, Howard J. *Disfranchisement and Development: The Methods of Control in Trujillo's Dominican Republic*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968.

Zelizer, Barbie. *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Danticat, Edwidge, and Sarah Anne Johnson. "You Have to Live Your Characters' Lives with Them." In *The Holy Telling: Conversations with American Writers*, edited by Sarah Anne Johnson, pp. 16-28. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2006.

Danticat discloses her origins as a professional writer, the role of autobiography in her work, and the importance of storytelling in the Haitian culture in an interview with Johnson.

McCormick, Robert H. Review of *After the Dance: A Walk through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti*, by Edwidge Danticat. *World Literature Today* 37, no. 3-4 (October-December 2005): 88-89.

Mixed review of *After the Dance*.

———. Review of *The Dew Breaker*, by Edwidge Danticat. *World Literature Today* 79, no. 1 (January-April 2005): 83-84.

### FURTHER READING

#### Criticism

Coward, David. "Haitian Perspectives: Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*." In *Tracing Chunks: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America*, pp. 126-37. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006.

———. "Contends that Danticat portrays the immigrant characters of Sophie and Martine as 'Haitian Perspectives,' or characters caught between two worlds.

Strehle, Susan. "History and the End of Romance: Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*." In *Doubled Plate: Romance and History*, edited by Susan Strehle and Mary Patricia Cadden, pp. 24-44. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003.

Maintains that *The Farming of Bones* "is neither a romantic history nor a historical romance, but rather a new form created at the intersection of history and romance, calling the ideological assumptions of both genres into question and transforming them both in the process."

Additional coverage of Danticat's life and career is contained in the following sources published by Thomson Gale: *Authors and Artists for Young Adults*, Vol. 29; *Contemporary Authors*, Vols. 152, 151; *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series*, Vols. 78, 129; *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vols. 94, 149; *Contemporary Novelists*, Ed. 7; *Experiencing Short Stories, Literature and Its Time Supplement*, Ed. 12; *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Vol. 1; *Literature Resource Center Major 20th-Century Writers*, Ed. 2; *Major 21st-Century Writers*, Ed. 2005; *Short Stories for Students*, Vol. 1; *Short Story Criticism*, Vol. 100; and *St. James Guide to Young Adult Writers*.


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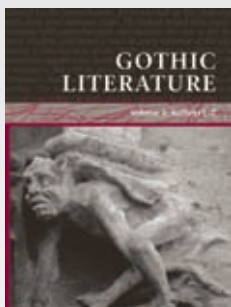
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