

Jana Evans Braziel, Nadege T. Clitandre, eds. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Edwidge Danticat*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 464 pp. \$157.50, cloth, ISBN 978-1-350-12352-6.

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I imagine that putting together a volume of criticism on Edwidge Danticat and her works must be a fraught endeavor (and that the ongoing pandemic made it even more difficult to wrangle contributions). Since the publication of her first book in 1994 (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*), numerous articles, book chapters, theses, and interviews have attempted to further our understanding of the author and her impressive production. Such is Danticat's appeal—as an author and as a person—that readers and scholars are always eager for more content, either by or about her. Yet, the challenge for any author or editor who chooses to publish a book about Danticat and her oeuvre is to offer something new as opposed to a rehashing of the abundant scholarship already available. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Edwidge Danticat* responds unevenly to this challenge.

The 454-page volume is organized into nine parts with 24 chapters. Part 1, “Literary Beginnings,” includes the expected editors’ introduction as well as an essay by Danticat herself and an interview with the author conducted by Nadège Clitandre. Danticat’s beautiful essay announces many of the themes tackled in the subsequent chapters: family, discrimination, food, and immigration. The next few parts are organized around themes. Part

2, for example, is entitled “Violence and Violated Bodies: Biopolitics in Danticat’s Texts,” and part 3, “On Death and Dying: Necropolitics in Danticat’s Texts.” Part 4 is on girls and women, whereas part 5 focuses on Danticat as a public intellectual and part 6, on “Food and Culinary/Literary Inheritances.” Part 7, called “Theoretical Approaches,” departs from the thematic organization which might explain why it seems to hold together less tightly than the others. Part 8 returns to the thematic organization with “Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Transnational Hispaniola.” Finally, part 9, “Critical Sources,” includes a bibliography of Danticat’s works as well as a bibliography of criticism on the author’s production.

As reflected in the overview of the book’s different parts, the editors of the volume chose not to focus on one particular aspect of Danticat’s work, but rather to engage with as much of it as possible. The format is similar to other collected volumes of this type. Of particular note with regard to this handbook as opposed to other works on Danticat is the fact that the author’s writings for children and young adults are integrated into the general discussion and not treated separately in their own section. However, the three books by Danticat that are not engaged with at all in the volume are all

for younger readers: *Behind the Mountains* (2004), *Anacaona, Golden Flower, Haiti, 1490* (2005), and *Célimène: Conte de Fée pour fille d'immigrante* (2009). Of particular interest for readers in search of new perspectives on Danticat's oeuvre is part 5, on Danticat's political writings as a public intellectual. Anja Bandau's chapter on *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010) is especially rich, making connections between Danticat's essays and writings by other contemporary Haitian writers, Caribbean writers more generally, and the Latin American tradition of testimonial literature. Bandau's chapter could have easily been included in the section on theoretical approaches for its analysis of the ways in which Danticat deploys the essay as genre. Megan Feifer and Maia Butler turn their attention to Danticat's contributions to the *New Yorker*, a corpus that is not analyzed nearly as much as her fiction, yet which offers much insight into Danticat's thinking and creative process, as the chapter demonstrates. An essay on Danticat's practice as a translator or as a volume editor herself would have been a welcome addition to this insightful section.

The volume's contributors hail from a wide range of countries and academic backgrounds. Two are based in the Caribbean (Jamaica and Trinidad), three in Europe (France and Germany), one in Canada, and the rest in the United States. The editors do not address the lack of Haiti-based contributors.[1] Most of the contributors are professors of English or French. Alongside eminent scholars of Haitian studies such as Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo and Myriam Chancy are scholars better known for their work in other fields. As for the editors, Nadège Clitandre has established herself as an expert on Danticat, publishing the first monograph on the author, *Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary* (2018). Jana Brazier is mostly known for her research on diaspora, visual art, and broader Caribbean studies; her previous work on Danticat is not as extensive. Despite such a diverse pool of contributors, the volume re-

mains very Anglophone and US-centric. For example, few French-language works on Danticat are cited, either in the chapters themselves or in the general bibliography at the end of the book. Danticat's own *Célimène: Conte de Fée pour fille d'immigrante* is not even listed in the bibliography.[2] Besides a few notable exceptions (the essays by Bandau and John D. Ribó, for example), there is little consideration of Danticat within the broader regional context of the Caribbean.

Indeed, I could not help but notice when reading the volume that in spite of the variety of sources used to contextualize and understand Danticat's work, very few of those sources were published outside of the United States. In addition, most of the chapters suggest that the implied readership for Danticat's books is distinctly non-Haitian. Indeed, it seems that certain contributors do not imagine a Haitian readership for Danticat's works at all. For example, in his chapter on Danticat's use of the short story, W. Todd Martin identifies only two possible types of readers: "diaspora" and other readers (non-Haitian) (p. 386). He also refers to the "ethnic short story cycle" (p. 378) as a concept, which seems especially problematic in a volume dedicated to Danticat and her oeuvre. Surely all writing is some sort of ethnic?

Some of the volume's strongest chapters point to the ways in which Danticat's oeuvre continues to speak to the present moment. Myriam Chancy's compelling essay seeks to "utilize Danticat's memoir as a means to unpack current immigration policies from a distinctly African Diasporic lens" (p. 65) and in so doing highlights the continued relevance of *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007) while situating the Haitian migrant experience within broader black migrant realities, both historical and contemporary. Similarly, Ribó's essay on Haiti-Dominican Republic relations and *The Farming of Bones* (1998) considers how Danticat's work might help us understand current discussions about Afro-Latinidad, including the work undertaken by scholars involved in Transnational Hispaniola and

social media debates about whether Haitians are included in Latinidad. Other essays offer new insights into Danticat's work, exploring it from perspectives not usually privileged, such as black girlhood and religion in essays by Régine Jean-Charles and Kyràh Daniels, respectively. Daniel's long and thorough article makes the compelling argument that the voices of religious scholars are necessary to properly appreciate the portrayals of Vodou in literary works.

I had trouble understanding certain editorial choices, such as the order of chapters in the section on Danticat as a public intellectual. While Danticat's *New Yorker* piece on the ten-year anniversary of the 2010 earthquake is certainly compelling, it would have been stronger within the volume if immediately followed by the chapter on Danticat's writing for the magazine. The handbook also contains quite a bit of reprinted material: the aforementioned earthquake anniversary piece, Clitandre's interview with Danticat, Danticat's opening essay, and a chapter contribution by Valérie Loichot. Loichot adds a four-and-a-half-page epilogue to her 2004 essay "Edwidge Danticat's Kitchen History," though it would have been more interesting to see her apply the theme to Danticat's more recent works as suggested in the epilogue. The original piece references the "inherent violence" of Haiti (p. 244) and I'd be curious to know if the scholar would maintain that language.

The entire volume could have benefited from tighter editing. Misspellings of Haitian Creole abound, including in the section titles, which is unfortunate. However, there are numerous French misspellings throughout as well, which leads me to believe less-than-rigorous copyediting is to blame rather than any disregard for the Creole language in particular. Still, the copyediting errors in all languages were numerous enough to be distracting. (For example, in Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw's essay, Danticat's 2017 book on death is referred to as both *The Art of Dying* and *The Art of Death*.) The book also contains linguistic inconsis-

encies. For example, Haiti's national language is referred to as both Creole and Haitian Kreyòl in the introduction without any explanation. The special issue of the *Journal of Haitian Studies* on Edwidge Danticat (Fall 2001) is not included in the volume's bibliography. This is a curious oversight as Clitandre herself has an article in that particular issue.

Reading through *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Edwidge Danticat*, I longed to see the author's oeuvre contextualized in ways that go beyond the borders of the US imagination. (Kyràh Daniels refers to Danticat as Haiti's Toni Morrison, for example [p. 342]). Many critical volumes on Danticat and her works have the same issue. Answering questions such as who Danticat is in conversation with as a writer, or whose conceptual tools we can use to understand and explain her work very much depend on where we are situated and whom we presume Danticat's audience to be. Further, we might ask, who has the means to publish comprehensive volumes on Danticat's works? And how does that orient the issues raised? How is Danticat read in the Caribbean, for example? What would such a handbook look like if published by a Caribbean or African press? However, the fact that these questions come to mind can perhaps be seen as one of the volume's strengths. It incites the desire to go further, to follow the threads of the discussion presented within the essays.

In the end, *The Bloomsbury Handbook to Edwidge Danticat* will probably be most useful to readers just coming to Danticat's work. However, gems such as the essays by Chancy and Ribó make it an enjoyable read for anyone, reminding us of the continued relevance of Danticat's oeuvre. The cover, featuring a photograph by Mark Dellas, is gorgeous. The book highlights various points of entry into Danticat's impressive oeuvre and would be a fantastic component of a course on the author. It should definitely be owned by every academic library. At over four hundred pages, the

hefty volume nevertheless leaves the reader wanting more. Fortunately, many collective volumes on Danticat have recently been released, are forthcoming, or are currently in production.[3] Readers and scholars of Danticat thus have plenty to choose from, depending on their particular interests.

Notes

[1]. The editors did invite me to contribute to the volume. Unfortunately, I was unable to due to prior commitments.

[2]. Critics who have published on Danticat and her work in French include Odile Gannier, Kathleen Gyssels, Yolaine Parisot, and Marie-Denise Shelton, among others.

[3]. Routledge published *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Edwidge Danticat* in 2019; *Edwidge Danticat: A Companion to the Young Adult Literature* is expected from McFarland in 2022; and *Narrating History, Home, and Diaspora: Critical Essays on Edwidge Danticat* is expected from University Press of Mississippi this summer.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-haiti>

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