

## EDWIDGE DANTICAT, DOCTOR OF LETTERS



Edwidge Danticat is a distinguished author whose remarkable work captures the history and spirit of Haiti. She is also a spokesperson for Haitian cultural and social justice issues and has done much to educate the world about the richness of her native land.

Ms. Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Her parents emigrated to New York City when she was a toddler, and she and her brother were raised by their aunt and uncle. At the age of twelve, she was reunited with her parents in New York. Ms. Danticat's teenage years as a non-English-speaking immigrant were difficult, and she took refuge in writing about her homeland. Within two years, she was writing stories in English for her school newspaper and a citywide newspaper for teens. She won a scholarship to attend Barnard College, where she earned a degree in French literature in 1990. She went on to pursue an M.F.A. in creative writing at Brown University, and graduated in 1993. Her master's thesis, which built on her writings as an adolescent, eventually evolved into her critically acclaimed first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, published in 1994.

Traveling to Haiti several times a year, Ms. Danticat gives a voice to its people, whom she describes as having "extraordinary dreams but also very extraordinary obstacles." Written simply and elegantly, her vivid stories blur lines between reality and fiction, and readers often mistake them for autobiography. Her intricately drawn characters serve as a window into Haiti's tumultuous society, and their fears and emotions lend a unique intimacy to each story.

Not limiting her creativity to one genre or one audience, Ms. Danticat has written novels, including the American Book Award-winner *The Farming of Bones* (1998), the tale of two Haitians separated by the traumatic 1937 massacre of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic; collections of short stories, including *Krik? Krak!* (1995) and *The Dew Breaker* (2004); three books for young adults, *Behind the Mountains* (2002), *Anacaona: Golden Flower* (2005), and *Eight Days* (2010); and several memoirs and essay collections, including *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010), which won the nonfiction OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature in 2011. She has also been a determined advocate for immigration reform, writing and speaking out about the inhumane treatment of immigration detainees in the United States. Her memoir *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), a fearless account of the difficulties faced by her father and uncle as Haitian immigrants, won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 2007.

Ms. Danticat has been a visiting professor of creative writing at New York University and the University of Miami and is a frequent contributor to periodicals, including *The New Yorker* and *Granta*. She has also edited works like *The Beacon Best of 2000: Great Writing by Women and Men of All Colors and Cultures* (2000), *The Butterfly's Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* (2001), and, most recently, *Haiti Noir* (2011). In 2012, she played a leading role in the feature film *Stones in the Sun*, which was filmed in New York and Haiti.

In addition to individual book awards, Ms. Danticat has received the Woman of Achievement Award from Barnard College in 1995 and the Langston Hughes Medal from the City College of New York in 2011. She received a MacArthur Fellowship in 2009.