

biBlio-file

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Edwidge Danticat
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When U.S. troops pull out of Haiti in March, will the world's first black republic fade from the American imagination? Not if readers discover the works of Edwidge Danticat, whose remarkable debut novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, told a Haitian girl's coming-of-age story.

Danticat, who was born in François "Papa Doc" Duvalier's Haiti and emigrated to New York when she was 12, sets this collection's 10 short stories in both worlds. The stories quietly evoke the terror of living under military rule, the courage of the



people who resist and try to survive with spirit intact, and the memory and longing of Haitian-Americans.

In Danticat's Haiti, soldiers demand that mothers and sons sleep together, they rape with impunity and they arrest women as witches. Abuses like these have long been documented by human-rights groups. Even in the face of such brutality, Danticat's stories show the resilience of ordinary Haitians, especially the "kitchen poets," women who have survived political and sexual oppression at enormous costs.

In an epilogue, Danticat describes these women: "Are there women who both cook and write? Kitchen Poets, they call them. They slip phrases into their stew and wrap meaning around their pork before frying it. They make narrative dumplings and stuff their daughters' mouths so they say no more."

Writing with restraint and elegant simplicity, Danticat allows us to hear the voices of the Kitchen Poets and the other nameless Haitian faces we may have seen on the evening news.

—Nadine Pinède