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Forum: The Limitless Vision of Edwidge Danticat's Work for Young People

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At fourteen years old, Edwidge Danticat began writing creatively through a workshop for urban teenagers, "Youth Connection," and discovered great emotional satisfaction in telling her own stories of migration from Haiti to the United States. In reflecting on her success within the group, Danticat emphasized role of reading: "For many, it's the first time that they recognize themselves and their experiences in the written word. Once that light has been lit, it can never be put out" (Desetta 32). When Danticat as a child could see herself in literature, she began to create in earnest. A MacArthur "genius" winner best known for her books for adults, including *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), Danticat has always cared deeply about Black childhood, especially in terms of describing the experience of migration, both within and away from Haiti. She is an unacknowledged visionary in African American children's literature, offering picture books, children's novels, and young adult texts in the same luminous, subtle prose that has been valued within her work for adults. In all of her writing, Danticat employs an evocative style that reveals the intense psychic depths of Black childhood. Her quiet, graceful prose invites consideration of what has been withheld as much as what has been offered up; her body of work also permits us to reconsider any totalizing assessment of African American children's and young adult literature, attesting to the field's variety and vitality.

Our forum began as the Edwidge Danticat Society's dedicated panel at the May 2019 American Literature Association's annual meeting. This conference is organized through authors' societies, largely, and literature for young people has never been central, though Dorothy Clark and Linda Salem have stalwartly organized two panels each year through the Children's Literature Society. To focus on a major author's children's work was an audacious move, and we are grateful to the Edwidge Danticat Society for its encouragement and support. The papers that emerged from the session appear here in expanded form. Amy Fish explores

Danticat's powerful picture book, *Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation* (2015), and Anastasia M. Collins analyzes the unsteady and biased reviewer response to two of Danticat's young adult novels, *Behind the Mountains* (2002) and the recent *Untwine* (2015). The work of Paula Weinman and Alicia E. Ellis fits beautifully together in our Forum, as each essayist considers the intersection of fine arts—music and painting—to the depiction of grief as ongoing process in *Untwine*. We hope that through this Forum you will be encouraged to read, teach, and share Danticat's transformative body of children's literature. All of us are thankful to *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* for welcoming work on this Black woman writer, a true visionary who writes exquisitely about the dislocation of migration and embraces unequivocally the profound beauty of Haitian American identity.

Works Cited

Desetta, Al. "Lighting the Lamp for Young Readers and Writers." *VOYA*, April 2009, pp. 30-32.