



After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti

Edwidge Danticat

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In **After the Dance**, one of Haiti's most renowned daughters returns to her homeland, taking readers on a stunning, exquisitely rendered journey beyond the hedonistic surface of Carnival and into its deep heart.

Edwidge Danticat had long been scared off from Carnival by a loved one, who spun tales of people dislocating hips from gyrating with too much abandon, losing their voices from singing too loudly, going deaf from the clamor of immense speakers, and being punched, stabbed, pummeled, or fondled by other lustful revelers. Now an adult, she resolves to return and exorcise her Carnival demons. She spends the week before Carnival in the area around Jacmel, exploring the rolling hills and lush forests and meeting the people who live and die in them. During her journeys she traces the heroic and tragic history of the island, from French colonists and Haitian revolutionaries to American invaders and home-grown dictators. Danticat also introduces us to many of the performers, artists, and organizers who re-create the myths and legends that bring the Carnival festivities to life. When Carnival arrives, we watch as she goes from observer to participant and finally loses herself in the overwhelming embrace of the crowd.

Part travelogue, part memoir, this is a lyrical narrative of a writer rediscovering her country along with a part of herself. It's also a wonderful introduction to Haiti's southern coast and to the true beauty of Carnival.

After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti Details

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Author : Edwidge Danticat

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Laurie says

Carnival is one of the defining events of the Haitian year, and nowhere is it celebrated with more verve than in the seaside town of Jacmel. The Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat never had the opportunity to attend carnival. Thus, as an adult, she returns to Haiti, to Jacmel, to experience what she missed in childhood. This book is an account of Danticat's trip back. This is a travel essay, but at the same time, it's so much more. After the dance is a travel narrative, a memoir, and a history, of Haiti and of the carnival. A beautifully-written homage to the carnival, the book spins out in multiple directions, telling stories, and full of descriptive imagery. This is quite a short book, and given all of the things the book tries to do, it doesn't do any of them completely. Instead, we get snatches and tidbits of histories and memories, and the book is a pleasure to read. Danticat uses Carnival and its activities as metaphors to discuss larger events and issues in her own and Haiti's past and present. This is a book one should read to get a taste of Haiti. It's not necessarily comprehensive, but it paints a brilliant picture.

Liralen says

Edwidge Danticat takes us back to Haiti, to Jacmel, for Carnival. But it's a new experience not just for the reader (well, this reader, anyway) but also for Danticat -- as a child in Haiti, she was kept away; Carnival has ever loomed in her imagination as tantalising, dangerous, forbidden. Now, as an adult, she's back to celebrate Carnival herself.

First, though, Danticat takes us through Jacmel. It's an eccentric tour of sorts; she relays a fair amount of history but consistently returns to the things that hold particular interest for her -- graveyards and trees and the relationship of Carnival to life and death.

Though both a recurring theme and the climax of the book, Carnival is not really the focus -- but it does represent a triumph for Danticat, and a new perspective.

Annie says

This short book introduced me to Edwidge Danticat. I must say I must read more of this author's work.

It is a short book about seeing carnival through the eyes of the same adult who was enthralled with it as a child. The excitement is still there. And, we are caught up in it.

Bing says

I learned a lot about carnival and Haitian history by reading this. I'd anticipated something a little more fiery and sweaty, as this is how carnival represents. Danticat expresses more interest in graveyards and the history

of the carnival masks than in the experience of flinging herself into carnival at the height of the festivities. As she says, she still has the fears of her childhood about the dangers of the carnival crowd.

Kelly Lynn Thomas says

Although Danticat is Haitian, she didn't live there for a long time before she returned for Carnival. Her perspective is unique, because she's both a native and a foreigner. Plus, the writing is beautiful and makes you feel as if you're actually experiencing Carnival right along with her.

Amanda says

This book spoke to so many parts of my brain and I loved it very much.

Linguist- Of course I want to know 4 uses of the word lamayot. There should be an accent mark over that o.

Spirit- There were many references to artists and literary voices. Painters who fill in the gaps of history to create what's missing. The spirit of the peasants. The quote about F. Scott Fitzgerald saying there is a peasant in every novelist.

Political History- I got the sense that Carnival is so right and healing for telling the long painful story. For trying to include all of the parts. Danticat talks about the Arawak people, the enslaved people, the colonizing people all being present. She talked about children combating the Carnival spooks by saying I am not afraid of you, you are only human.

At the end, she relaxes for a moment and goes in. I want that.

Myriam says

Another travelogue for a series by authors on lands they visit; this is the only one I know of written by an author visiting her own country; for this, it is an interesting read. However, its focus on carnival in Jacmel begs the question "why not Carnival in the capital, Port-au-Prince?" This a question the text refuses to answer. If readers are compelled to find out the answer beyond the text, than the exercise (both reading this book and seeking the answer to the question beyond the text) will have been worth the effort...

Lucy says

Someone else may like this book, but it was not for me. I did not finish the book because I thought it was boring. I read another book by the same author and I really enjoyed it so i thought that I would like this book also, but I couldn't really relate to the book or what the author talks about. It might be a good book for people who have Haitian heritage and like carnivals.

Mary Newcomb says

While this is Danticat's tale of attending Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti, it is so much more. A lovely, lyrical, interesting and deep tale begin to describe this book and yet it is so much more.

Doreen says

I read this book in one day. True to form, Danticat presents the wonder of Carnival in a most delightful and mesmerizing way. Through her words, I see Haiti. I see its grandeur as well as its flaws. I experience the island as both a child and as an adult. I just love that she writes so beautifully, like a painter standing before a blank canvas; the reader.

Andrea Blythe says

Edwidge Danticat takes us to the streets of Jacmel and through the wild, brightly colored, irreverent ceremony of carnival. Mixed folk lore, history, and historical analysis with personal memoir, Danticat's journey through Jacmel, before and after carnival, is delightful, and makes me long for a trip to Haiti.

Topher says

After reading *The Dew Breaker*, I wanted to know more about Haiti's culture and political history. The is a calmly thoughtful account of a trip back to visit Carnival. Although the book culminates with Carnival (and what fun it must be), the pleasure was in the travels and reminisces leading up to the actual party. It worked as a cultural and political primer, and makes me want to read more.

Lori says

An interesting read about Carnival in Jacmel Haiti

David Dacosta says

2010's stellar historical memoir, *Create Dangerously*, reinvigorated my interest in Haitian born author Edwidge Danticat. Her debut novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* set the pace for what seemed to be a promising career, and then Danticat's trajectory suddenly took a sharp dip thanks to a few uninspiring releases. Somehow *After the Dance* slipped through the cracks for me. It only recently appeared on my radar, despite

its 2002 release.

This non-fiction work has been categorized as a travelogue, as it focuses on an annual Haitian carnival held in the Jacmel region of the island. Danticat migrated to New York City at the age of twelve to live with her parents, leaving behind an uncle she'd lived with up until that point. That said uncle forbid her from attending Carnival, frightening her with tales of the harm that would come to her if she foolishly ventured into what he perceived as nefarious festivities. Now in her thirties, Danticat returns to Haiti on vacation, eager to experience what she'd been denied as a child.

As a prelude to what would come in 2010, *After the Dance* can also be viewed as a historical memoir in ways, due to its meticulous examination of the political, cultural and artistic past of Haiti. After now reading two fictional and two non-fiction works by Danticat, I can confidently say that non-fiction writing is her strong suit.

Dimity says

I know the Edwidge Danticat is more known as a fiction writer, but I love her non-fiction so much. The prose in this book is like poetry and really takes you to Carnival. It is a very enjoyable short read.
