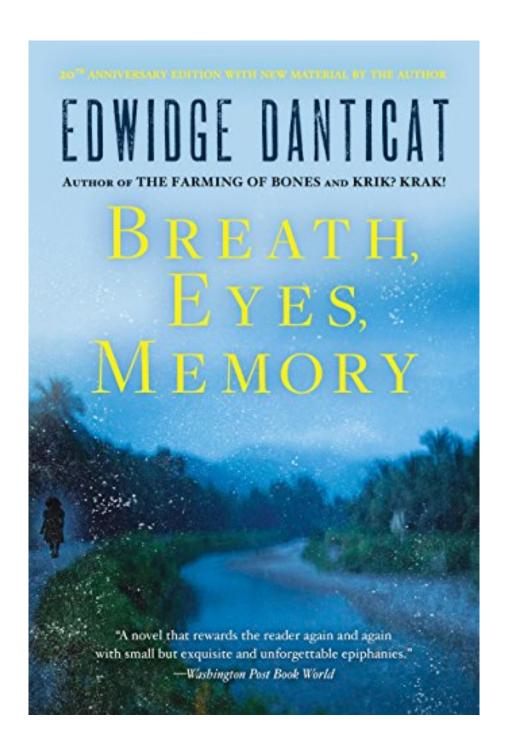


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At the age of twelve, Sophie Caco is sent from her impoverished village of Croix-des-Rosets to New York, to be reunited with a mother she barely remembers. There she discovers secrets that no child should ever know, and a legacy of shame that can be healed only when she returns to Haiti--to the women who first reared her. What ensues is a passionate journey through a landscape charged with the supernatural and scarred by political violence, in a novel that bears witness to the traditions, suffering, and wisdom of an entire people.

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58 of 62 people found the following review helpful.

Haunting look into another culture

By Dianna Setterfield

Wow. A pause while I catch my breath...

Edwidge Danticat has written an exceptional and beautifully crafted novel about a young Haitian girl and the family of women that surround her. A somber, spiritual story told with a feverish tenacity that will bewitch you and leave you aching for more from this talented and gifted writer.

After twelve years of being raised in Haiti by her aunt Atie, young Sophie Caco has been summoned by her mother to join her in New York. Sophie is terrified and does not want to go, especially since she does not remember her mother, who left Haiti when Sophie was just a baby. What follows is a painful rendering of horrifying secrets and Haitian tradition that deeply affects Sophie and the way she lives her life. Finally, frantic for justification and healing, Sophie turns to her homeland for the answers and refuge she so desperately needs.

The flow of the writing is smooth and lyrical, like music that rolls off the tongue. There is just enough description to make vivid pictures, but not too much to overwhelm. I do find it lacking in the development of the relationship between Sophie and her mother, although not enough to interrupt the beauty and quality of the story. Readers will be awed at the strong determination of the Caco women and the unbreakable bonds that hold them together. A very poetic and powerful novel that mixes a family, their culture, and a country in the midst of political upheaval. Breath, Eyes, Memory is extraordinary.

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

you lost me

By Orrin C. Judd

This is less a novel than a string of episodes from a young Haitian woman's life and I enjoyed the first two sections, but was really disappointed as the writer lost control of her text in the later stages. The story starts in Haiti where twelve year old Sophie has been raised by her aunt, Tante Atie, while her mother supports the family with a job in New York. But now her mother wants Sophie to come and join her. There's a beautifully detailed portrait of country life in Haiti here and the separation of Sophie and Atie is genuinely heart rending.

The next section details the tentative first steps of Sophie and her mother as they feel out the parameters of a mother-daughter relationship. This is complicated by the fact that Sophie was the product of her mother being raped as a teenager by a Tonton Macout.

This transition from Haiti to New York is fine and would be a solid basis for a novel, but Danticat now starts skipping forward in large chunks of time. Suddenly, Sophie is 18 and enamored of an older neighbor who is a musician. Her scandalized mother begins to probe her nightly to establish that she has maintained her virginity. Tempers explode and we skip ahead again. Sophie has married the musician and had a child, but she's estranged from her mother, has developed sexual phobias and has fled to Haiti with her child. From here the novel descends into all the worst topicality of the 90's and we see how it made Oprah's Book Club. We're immersed in bulimia, sexual dysfunction, female genital mutilation, therapy, suicide, etc.

Ultimately, after a strong and promising beginning, I have to say that the author lost me. I appreciated the opportunity to be exposed to a side of Haitian life that we rarely see, but then we're buried in a blizzard of psychoblither. I expect to see better from this author in the future.

GRADE: C-

41 of 47 people found the following review helpful.

Promising start leads to disappointment.

By mirope

I truly enjoyed the first third of this book. Edwidge Danticat is a talented writer whose lyrical prose effectively transports the reader into the rhythms Haitian life. The imagery is powerful and can be profoundly moving. Unfortunately, I found that this promising start was irrevocably marred by the overblown ending. Issues that Danticat addresses in the last half of the book include rape, sexual abuse, bulimia, abortion and breast cancer. Any one or even two of these issues would have given the story the dramatic punch the author was looking for. Two very marginal characters - one with genital mutilation and one with a history of incest - read like they were added to the story just to cover all the bases of female degredation. There are so many ingredients in this stew of suffering that the reader is unable feel completely sympathetic to the victim of any one. My predominant response to this book was disappointment that it didn't live up to its promising beginning.

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