Haitian Narrative
The Personal becomes National
The National Becomes Personal

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HAITI – AYITI

Florida, 600 miles
Cuba, 70 miles
Jamaica, 130 miles

“Aviti” -- mountains
L’UNION FAIT LA FORCE!
This is also the national motto of the Republic of Benin, in West Africa, the homeland of most Haitians.

Jarre Trouée
Roi Ghézo 1818
Wisdom Tales

- Anancy, Bouki & Malice, Ti-Jean, and Br’er Rabbit
- How to maintain morality yet survive life’s threats.
- As Haitian stories/histories become national meta-myth, they encompass references to:
  - the revolutionary founding of the nation (1791-1804)  
    “L’union fait la force!”
  - rural community identity (the spirit of konbit)
  - service to the African lwas (spirits or energies)
  - US military & corporate imperialism
  - The Duvalier dictatorship’s state terrorism
  - deforestation, soil erosion, hurricanes, and flooding
  - mass exodus of farmers to city, Port-au-Prince
  - Le Tremblement, 2010 earthquake, Goudou-Goudou
Danticat references Haitian values:

- Konbit: Importance of family, group, community, not individuals
- Importance of reputation and respect
- Mountains beyond mountains (pa pi mal)
- Thriving farm market economy (carrots, plantains, pigeon peas, calabash, cocoa, coffee
- The importance of family stories, wisdom tales
- Building sturdy, beautiful cement block houses
- Local foods: snapper, sweet potatoes, salt cod, plantains, cassava bread
- Natural herbal medications
- Ingenuity to “out-fox” oppression (Trickster)
Danticat references Haitian history:

- Jean-Bertrand Aristide
- Invasion/control by U.S. Marines 1915-1934, forced labor (re-enslavement)
- Resistance by Cacos
- Stories, murals, songs recall Petion, Dessalines, Toussaint, Charlemagne, etc.
- Laborers & Peasants Party (and similar)
- Awareness of government corruption
- US “dumping” cheap goods, e.g. used clothing “Kennedys”
- Duvalier executions (Ton-Ton Macoutes)
Story Seeds: Kochon Nwa
Kreyol pigs:
lean, black, low maintenance
KREYOL PIG:

-- ate weeds, fallen mangoes, food waste
-- didn't need clean drinking water
-- 85% of rural families had one
-- reproduced itself
-- fertilized the soil
-- bank: sell when money needed: school fees, baptism, marriage, funeral, illness
-- ultimately edible, with great flavor
Kochon Kréyòl
sa se
Zam i Mwen
In late 1970s & early 1980s, amid a swine flu hysteria, the U.S. Pork Producers Association pressured Congress, who pressured USAID, who pressured Haitian dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier to slaughter all the Kreyol pigs. Farmers were not repaid.

Kreyol pigs were replaced by 1/10th as many U.S. pigs. They were unsuited to tropical climate, most soon died. Haitians called them “princes on four legs” (princes a quatre pieds)
Huge pink Iowa pigs

- cost $50 to buy—not free
- Need clean water (only 20% have)
- need regular vaccinations
- Need concrete-floored houses with roofs (not all people have)
- Need imported feed ($90 year vs. average income $130)
Results

- 30% less rural school enrollment
- Loss of mango trees, now cut for charcoal
- Deforestation, soil erosion, floods (still 40% forested)
- Land mortgaged, lost ($600 million lost rural economy)
- Severe reduction in protein consumption in rural areas
January 2010
Kreyol pig in national founding story:
Bwa Kayiman August 20/21, 1791
Castera Bazile: Ceremony for Bwa Kayiman
Kochon Nwa: Link to God and the ancestors
Hounsi Zetwal Leve: Ezili Danto
Cholera (first time in 100 years) by Nepalese UN troops, Artibonite River, 2010: 700,000 ill, 10,000 killed

Admitted by UN two months ago, August 2016, although Haitians immediately knew the exact source of the disease.

Demonstration, 2010
2010: Monsanto gives hybrid corn coated with toxic fungicides to Haitian government to sell to farmers. French protestors dump toxic Monsanto corn
12,000 Haitians protest-march against Monsanto
Nap defan tet kale
Danticat Books

- *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (bildungsroman)
- *Krik! Krak!* (short stories)
- *The Farming of Bones* (Massacre River)
- *Behind the Mountains* (young adult)
- *The Dew Breaker* (macoutes)
- *Anacoana* (historical fiction)
- *Brother, I’m Dying* (family memoir)
- *Create Dangerously* (on art/artist)
- *Haiti Noir* (anthology of 18 short stories)
- *Claire of the Sea Light* (novel)
Selected Readings on Haiti


· James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, 1938.

· *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 22 volumes, 1995—


• ______. *Canape-Vert*, 1944. Classic novel of a rural farm village.


Film/Video Sources


  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcYNTomaZps, USAID programs and disaster capitalism, 23 min..

  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOGVgQYX6SU

• *I Love You Anne*, 2003. 115 min. Probably the most popular of hundreds of video-cam Haitian feature films. On YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AL2MGzXGZzI

• *Iron in the Soul: The Haiti Documentary Films of Leah Gordon*. (*A Pig’s Tale*, 52 m., *The Sculptors of Grand Rue*, 32 m., *A Drag Zaka*, 20 m.)


• *When the Drum is Beating*, 2011. 87 min. On the 60-year history of Haitian band Septettrional.