

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)

“I’ m i n f i d e l f o r g o t t e n”

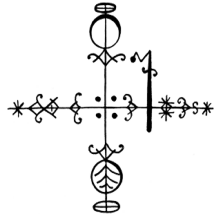
Danticat references Haitian values:

- **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-ensavement)**
- **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



Zami 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)

Edwidge Danticat





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