The Farming of Bones Study Guide

The Farming of Bones by Edwidge Danticat

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Contents

Introduction

The Farming of Bones, Danticat told Megan Rooney in *The Brown Daily Herald,* is a survivor's story, based on the true story of a woman who was killed in the massacre. "But I wanted her to live," Danticat says, and in the book, she does. The book, which has received almost universally favorable reviews, is based on historical facts, filtered through Haitian tales and oral history, "a collage of various characters and experiences from my upbringing in Haiti," she told Rooney.

Although Danticat was still in her twenties when her first book, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, was published, it received critical acclaim and was selected for Oprah Winfrey's book club, rocketing it to the top of the bestseller lists and commercial success. This success eventually led Penguin to pay $200,000 for the paperback rights to *The Farming of Bones*.

Danticat spent several years researching the events in *The Farming of Bones*, traveling to Haiti as many as four times a year. After visiting the Massacre River there in 1995, she realized that she wanted to write a book about the 1937 massacre of Haitians by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. When she visited, there was no sign of the mass killings that occurred so many decades ago: a woman was washing clothes in the water, a man was letting a mule drink, and two boys were bathing. The river itself was small and slow, nowhere near the high-water mark that once swallowed hundreds of bodies. "I had come looking for deaths," she wrote in *Kreyol,* "but I found habitualness, routine, life."

Despite this peace, or perhaps because of it□ because the event and the people who suffered in it seemed to have been lost and forgotten□she decided to memorialize them by writing the book. "I felt like I was standing on top of a huge mass grave, and just couldn't see the bodies," she told Mallay Charters in *Publishers Weekly,* and reflected, "It's part of our history as Haitians, but it's also a part of the history of the world. Writing about it is an act of remembrance."

Danticat does not merely write about Haiti, but is still active in the Haitian community. With writer Junot Diaz, she runs Haitian-Dominican youth groups in New York, and also works with the National Coalition for Human Rights as part of a grant from the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Foundation.

Author Biography

Edwidge Danticat (pronounced "Edweedj Danticah") was born January 19, 1969, in Port-au- Prince, Haiti, and was separated from her father when she was two and he emigrated to the United States to find work. When she was four, her mother also went to the United States. For the next eight years, Danticat and her younger brother Eliab were raised by their father's brother, a minister, who lived with his wife and grandson in a poor section of Port-au-Prince known as Bel Air.

When Danticat was twelve, she moved to Brooklyn and joined her parents and two new younger brothers. Adjustment to this new family was diffi- cult, and she also had difficulty adjusting at school, because she spoke only Creole and did not know any English. Other students taunted her as a Haitian "boat person," or refugee. She told Mallay Charters in *Publishers Weekly,* "My primary feeling the whole first year was one of loss. Loss of my childhood, and of the people I'd left behind□and also of being lost. It was like being a baby□ learning everything for the first time."

Danticat learned to tell stories from her aunt's grandmother in Bel Air, an old woman whose long hair, with coins braided into it, fascinated the neighborhood children, who fought each other to comb it. When people gathered, she told folktales and family stories. "It was call-and-response," Danticat told Charters. "If the audience seemed bored, the story would speed up, and if they were participating, a song would go in. The whole interaction was exciting to me. These cross-generational exchanges didn't happen often, because children were supposed to respect their elders. But when you were telling stories, it was more equal, and fun."

Danticat's cousin, Marie Micheline, taught her to read. She told Renee H. Shea in *Belles Lettres,* "I started school when I was three, and she would read to me when I came home. In 1987. . .there was a shooting outside her house□where her children were. She had a seizure and died. Since I was away from her, my parents didn't tell me right away. . .But around that same time, I was having nightmares; somehow I knew."

When Danticat was seven, she wrote stories with a Haitian heroine. For her, writing was not a casual undertaking. "At the time that I started thinking about writing," she told Calvin Wilson in the *Kansas City Star,* "a lot of people who were in jail were writers. They were journalists, they were novelists, and many of them were killed or 'disappeared.' It was a very scary thing to think about." Nevertheless, she kept writing. After she moved to Brooklyn and learned English, she wrote stories for her high school newspaper. One of these articles, about her reunion with her mother at age twelve, eventually expanded to become the book *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

Danticat graduated from Barnard College with a degree in French literature in 1990, and worked as a secretary, doing her writing after work in the office. She applied to business schools and creative writing programs. She was accepted by both, but chose Brown University's creative writing program, which offered her a full scholarship. For her master's thesis, she wrote what would later become

Breath, Eyes, Memory . *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and her two other books *The Farming of Bones* and *Krik? Krak!* , a collection of stories have been hailed for their lyrical intensity, vivid descriptions of Haitian places and people, and honest depictions of fear and pain.

Danticat has won a Granta Regional Award as one of the Twenty Best Young American Novelists, a Pushcart Prize, and fiction awards from *Seventeen* and *Essence* magazines. She is also the recipient of an ongoing grant from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation.

Plot Summary

After her parents drown in the flooded Massacre River that marks the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, young Haitian Amabelle Desir becomes a housemaid to Dominican landowner Don Ignacio, and a companion to his daughter, Valencia. As the book opens, Valencia and Amabelle are grown women, and Amabelle attends the birth of Valencia's twins. Valencia is now married to a Dominican army officer seeking to rise in the ranks, and he is soon assigned to assist in the brutal slaughter of Haitians in the Dominican Republic.

Amabelle's lover, Sebastien, works in Ignacio's sugar cane field, a brutal job known to workers as "farming the bones" because of its killing, exhausting harshness.

Amabelle has a pleasant but distant relationship with the family she serves, and the novel juxtaposes her moments in their home with her conversations with other Haitian workers in the cane fields, as they slowly realize that Dominican dictator Trujillo is against them, and that their lives are worthless to those who hire them. This tension increases when a cane worker is accidentally killed by Duarte's poor driving, and he is not brought to account for the murder; no one, other than the Haitians, seems to care.

When the roundup and killing of Haitians begins, Sebastien disappears, presumably killed. Amabelle manages to escape, fleeing toward Haiti over mountain trails. Many others, also escaped, are pursued, forced to jump off cliffs, beheaded, or beaten to death before they ever cross the border into Haiti. The Dominicans identify Haitians by language, since despite the fact that Dominican propaganda states that Dominican origins are in Spain and the Haitians' are "in darkest Africa," there are no color differences between the two groups□the only difference is that the Haitians cannot pronounce the r in *perejil,* the Spanish word for "parsley." Some of the refugees in the book, in fact, are Dominicans who were attacked or killed because at first sight they appeared to be Haitian, and even Valencia's twins show this racial mix□ one is dark, the other light, though they both grew in the same womb.

The most perilous part of Amabelle's journey back to Haiti occurs in Dajabon, the Dominican town closest to the Massacre River, which marks the border between the two countries. She and other refugees are herded together, attacked, and choked with parsley, while the Dominican attackers demand that they say "perejil." Because their language is Creole, not Spanish, they are unable to pronounce it correctly, and some are choked to death on handfuls of the herb; people throw stones at them, attack them with machetes, and brutally punch and kick them. She and some others escape only because the crowd is distracted by the arrival of the Dominican dictator, Trujillo, and they flee toward the river.

The river is filled with the corpses of slaughtered Haitians, and soldiers are throwing more bodies off a nearby bridge. As they swim across, one of the other refugees is shot, and his wife panics. Amabelle, in an attempt to keep her quiet and thus prevent the

soldiers from noticing them and killing them too, covers the woman's nose and mouth with her hands. Although Amabelle does not intend to kill her, the woman dies.

Amabelle goes home with Yves, another refugee, and lives with him as if they are married, but is never intimate with him: she is still grieving for Sebastien. She finds Sebastien's mother's house and talks to her, but his mother soon moves to a distant city, because she can no longer bear talking to people who tell her that her son is dead.

In the wake of the massacre, the government sends officials to pay off surviving family members and to hear the stories of survivors. Amabelle and Yves go to the city to tell their stories, and after they wait for several days, they are turned away. They later find out that they will not receive any compensation after all. Danticat describes the scene: "The group charged the station looking for someone to write their names in a book, and take their story they wanted a civilian face to concede that what they had witnessed and lived through did truly happen."

Much later, Amabelle, still seeking answers to her questions about why this all happened and what happened to Sebastien, crossed the river again and returns to Alegria, the Dominican region where she used to live. But the familiar landmarks are gone, she is disoriented and confused, and even Valencia has moved to a new house and does not recognize her at first. Eventually, she finds the cave she used to meet Sebastien in, but there are no answers there. At the end of the book she returns to the river, still seeking answers; as the book ends, she is lying in the current, giving herself up to fate and the forward flow, with faith for a new life.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The Farming of Bones begins with the narrator describing her lover Sebastien Onius. Sebastien is a cane cutter. He is one of many Haitians who came across the border to find work in the Dominican sugar cane mill settlements. Sebastien's body and face are scarred from the cane, but he is handsome to Amabelle, the servant companion to a wealthy Dominican army wife. Amabelle admires Sebastien's size and the strength of his body after four seasons in the cane fields.

In Amabelle's little square room, by the light of her oil lantern, Sebastien tells her to take off her clothes and be just herself, without the uniform "they" make her wear in the house of Senora Valencia and Senor Pico. He sits in the shadow outside of the lantern light so that Amabelle will learn to sense his presence even when she cannot see him. Amabelle is afraid to be without Sebastien and believes that she does not exist when she is not with him. She is convinced that only Sebastien knows her and without him she might disappear into the world of nightmares that haunt her.

When Amabelle awakes in the morning Sebastien has gone to the fields. Amabelle can still feel his presence, his smell of cane syrup, the feel of his rough hands on her skin, the silky smoothness of his coffee bean bracelet as it rolls across her back. Amabelle remembers how as a child, to relieve the loneliness of being without brothers and sisters, she made a playmate of her own shadow. She came to prefer her shadow to real playmates even though her father warned her that nightmares could come from lingering with shadows.

Chapter 1 Analysis

In the year 1937, the Dominican Republic is in the infancy of the Trujillo dictatorship. Having seized power from President Vasquez, Trujillo epitomizes the brutality and self-worship of a dictator through the repression of human rights and ruling with an iron fist. Amabelle and Sebastien are among the large population of black Haitian workers living in squalor among the Dominican landowners. The Haitians have virtually no rights in the Dominican Republic and are looked upon as second class citizens. There is no interaction between the two groups that are separated by language, race, and status beyond the master and worker relationship. Both Amabelle and Sebastien live in the cane village of Alegria and look to each other for the only comfort in their lives of hardship and servitude.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Amabelle is sewing a shirt for Sebastien when she hears the screams of Senora Valencia. Amabelle runs through the house to the Senora's bedroom to find her in labor. Don Ignacio, Valencia's father, affectionately referred to as "Papi," rushes to fetch the doctor and Amabelle is left alone to assist the Senora with the birth. Being alone in the bedroom with the Senora reminds Amabelle of their girlhood together when they would share the bed of Valencia even though Amabelle had a small cot of her own in the corner. The two would play with their shadows, pretending to be four happy girls together.

Amabelle comforts the anxious Senora, who asks for her husband and fears dying. She remembers her parents preparing herbal concoctions to take to the births they attended. Amabelle would like to go find some rum to offer for the pain but knows it would not be fitting for the Senora to give birth alone like a lowly field hand. Amabelle stays by her side calming the Senora until she gives birth to a small boy and then a twin girl. The Senora cries before the boy at his birth. The tiny girl is less than half the size of her brother and struggles for breath with the umbilical cord wrapped tightly around her neck and a caul covering her face. The Senora sees the girl's condition as a curse and notes how dark skinned the baby is compared to the milky boy. She fears the girl being mistaken for a Haitian.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Amabelle shows her strength in the face of the responsibility of attending the Senora's childbirth alone. She calls on the memories of her parents to help Valencia. The baby boy's silence while his mother cries at his birth is a glimpse of events to come. He only begins to cry as his little sister is emerging into the world. The baby girl is darker, smaller, and struggling to breathe. The twins are like the island of Hispaniola itself, and Senora Valencia's comment about mistaken identity shows her ability to accept the status of the Haitian people while considering Amabelle a friend.

Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary

Sebastien and Amabelle are alone in her room at night. Sebastien abhors silence and considers it too close to the death-like quality of sleep. He is too tired from the fields to make love with Amabelle so he insists they talk to fill the silence. Sebastien asks Amabelle about her mother, what she was like, her name. Amabelle remembers her mother as someone stern and unsmiling. She tells Sebastien that when she dreams of her mother now, her mother is smiling. Amabelle tells Sebastien that she dreams of her parents drowning.

Doctor Javier arrives and bathes the babies while Papi records their birth times and date. The Senora gives credit for the successful birth of her children to Amabelle, to whom the doctor shows his gratitude. She notices that Doctor Javier wears an amulet of wood-carved cane leaves, similar to those worn by cane cutters to ward off evil spirits. The doctor lightheartedly comments on the dark skin of the girl baby. Papi takes offense and says it must be from Senor Pico's side of the family because his daughter's pure Spanish bloodline can be traced to Cristobal Colon himself.

While Amabelle gives Doctor Javier "un cafecito," the doctor asks her where she learned to birth babies. Amabelle tells the doctor that her parents were herb healers in Haiti who attended births when necessary. The doctor comments that it is as if the boy baby had tried to strangle the girl, so tightly wound was the cord around her neck. He tells Amabelle stories of twins killing each other and sacrificing their lives for the other in the womb. Doctor Javier goes on to ask Amabelle to make sure the girl baby, Rosalinda, is fed often because he fears for her health. He also tells Amabelle that her skill as a midwife is sorely needed at a clinic he attends on the Haitian side of the river. Amabelle is flattered but says she has not crossed the river since she was a child of eight.

The servant Juana enters the house bringing Amabelle a mango. Amabelle tells her of the birth and Juana rushes to Senora Valencia's room to see the babies. She cries with joy as she meets them. Juana and her husband Luis have worked for the family since before Valencia was born and Juana is delighted that the Senora has decided to name the baby girl after Valencia's dead mother. Papi and Luis rush off to bring Senor Pico home from the barracks.

Chapters 3-4 Analysis

Sebastien and Amabelle live in a world where death is commonplace and imminent. Darkness and quiet are loathsome and sleep is a place of nightmares. The plight of the Haitians is a lack of a safe haven. Doctor Javier is a Dominican who understands the plight of the Haitians and sees their value as individuals. He says that military men tend not to like him and one can suppose their dislike stems from his empathy toward what

many Dominicans consider a human plague. The influx of Haitians into the Dominican Republic is a concern and many fear being swallowed up by the lesser people until their Spanish blood is completely diluted.

Chapters 5-7

Chapters 5-7 Summary

Amabelle tells of how Sebastien came to be in Alegria. He is from the same region of the country as her but only met Amabelle in the cane settlement. His father was killed in the great hurricane of 1930 and his family lost everything. Sebastien came to work the cane with many others who had lost everything in their home villages. The cooing of pigeons at night haunts him and sounds to him like the moans of long dead ghosts. When he hears them he is reminded of his mother, still alive in Haiti.

The Senora has Amabelle light a candle in honor of Valencia's dead mother. Amabelle and Juana sit together in the kitchen and Juana remembers the birth of Valencia and mourns the passing of time now that the Senora has given birth to two babies. Juana grew up in a convent where her two sisters became nuns. Juana left the convent to marry Luis and considers her inability to have children as her punishment for abandoning God. Amabelle says she never considered having babies because she never believed she would live to grow old enough to have them. Juana weeps for Valencia not having her mother with her on this joyous day.

In the dark of Amabelle's room Sebastien asks to hear about her father. Amabelle answers reluctantly because she knows he is filling the silence again and will not let her be quiet. She tells him her father was a good healer who wanted to cure illness and worked hard to help people in many different ways. Amabelle admits she was jealous of the time her father spent helping others, but loved his happy nature. Amabelle knows Sebastien is ready to talk about his own father's death and so asks Sebastien how the hurricane took his father. Sebastien tells of being a boy carrying his dead father through the storm trying not to spill his blood into the dirt.

Chapters 5-7 Analysis

Sebastien, like Amabelle, is haunted by the death of a parent. It is disaster that has brought Sebastien to be with Amabelle, just as it is disaster that brought Amabelle across the border. Their bond is made strong by their shared trauma, and their common fears. Juana is a good Catholic who believes in punishment for her sins. Amabelle is more of a fatalist who thinks her life is tied somehow to the death of her parents. She does not look to the future with the exception of her relationship with Sebastien. Amabelle, like her father, is a healer. She listens to Sebastien's sad story of his father's death with the same calm as when she helped Valencia birth the babies. She knows it is good for him to talk and that sharing their pain brings them closer together.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Senor Pico rushes in the house to see his wife and new babies. He is a short man of darker skin than Valencia and has always hoped to rise in the ranks of the military to one day become President of the Republic. Pico is enthralled with his new son, and announces that he shall be named Raphael after the great Generalissimo Trujillo. Juana and Amabelle retreat out to the yard by the fire to eat with Luis who is visibly shaken.

Luis tells of how afraid he was in the speeding car with the Senor, driving home so fast to see his babies. Three men were walking in the road and although Senor Pico blew the horn and two men ran the third was hit and flew into the ravine. Luis claimed they stopped to look for him, but saw nothing. He believes it was a worker from Don Carlos's cane fields.

Amabelle fears it is Sebastien who was hit by the car. Senor Pico calls to Amabelle that his wife wishes to see her and Amabelle goes into the Senora's bedchamber. Valencia again thanks Amabelle for her help in the birth. Amabelle then goes out to chat with Papi about the war progress in Spain. Above the old man's head is a painting of President Trujillo painted by Valencia at her husband's request. Papi is disturbed and he admits to Amabelle that he believes they killed a man tonight with the car. He is guilty that he did not force Senor Pico to try and save the man's life and asks Amabelle to tell him if she hears news of the incident from the other workers. Meanwhile Senor Pico and Senora Valencia are discussing the Senor's return to the border where a visit from the Generalissimo will be taking place and a new "operation" is underway.

Amabelle returns to her room to wait for Sebastien. She reminisces about the giant citadel that loomed over her parents' house in Haiti where she used to play. Slaves who rebelled against the French and took control of their own new nation built the citadel. It is a fond memory in a life of few fond memories, "When you have so few remembrances, you cling to them tightly and repeat them over and over in your mind so time will not erase them." Sebastien appears at Amabelle's door covered in mud and grass, with a blackened eye. He tells Amabelle he cannot stay because old Kongo is waiting for him. Kongo's son and Sebastien's friend, Joel, is dead. Sebastien tells Amabelle that a car speeding down the road struck Joel and that Joel's father, Kongo, needs wood to bury his son. Amabelle leads Sebastien to a stack of Papi's hobby wood and Sebastien carries it away saying he will come back to be with her.

Chapter 8 Analysis

It becomes clear that Senor Pico is a man of little compassion and a false sense of superiority over the Haitians who are invisible to him. Papi and Valencia, although without empathy for the situation in which the Haitians live in Alegria, do have a sense

of parental responsibility and fondness for the people in their employ. Sebastien and Amabelle are not strangers to death and recognize in Joel's murder as the beginning of something bigger to come between the two social castes.

Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary

Amabelle remembers the day of her parents' death. She was eight-years-old and she has traveled across the river into the Dominican Republic with her parents to buy her mother a new cooking pot from the finest pot maker around. It is late afternoon and the family is returning home as a great rain begins in the mountains. Her father insists it is still safe to cross the river back into Haiti but her mother hesitates. Amabelle's father tells her he will take her mother across and then come back for her and the pots. As her parents wade into the river it becomes a raging current and Amabelle watches as her parents are separated and then swept away and under the water.

When Sebastien returns to Amabelle's room he is angry. He has determined that it is Senor Pico's car that has killed Joel. Amabelle warns him to be careful, that the Senor has guns in the house. Sebastien tells how he and their friend Yves carried Joel to the river and cleaned his body for burial. He reaches for Amabelle and finds her wet with sweat. She tells Sebastien that she has had the dream of her parents drowning again. Sebastien blows out the light and decides to create a different story of Amabelle's family in order to stop the bad dreams.

Sebastien tells Amabelle how her parents grew old and died a natural death, how she came to the Dominican Republic to meet him. Sebastien then tells her this will be his last cane harvest. He has arranged to work in coffee, rice, or tobacco next season. He claims some people believe the Haitians are an orphaned people who don't belong anywhere. He believes they are wayfarers and that is how Amabelle came to meet him in the cane village. The next morning is the first day of the new cane harvest season and all the workers are bathing in the stream before work. The women are separated from the men by a barrier of thin trees. Everyone is quiet and whispering about Joel and the night before. Sebastien's younger sister, Mimi, tells Amabelle that she would rather die young like Joel than grow into one of the crones sharing the stream with them. The old women are too battered by the cane life to work or cook or travel back to Haiti. Joel's "woman" Felice is nearby, as is Kongo. Kongo is the most respected elder in the settlement and no one will question what he has done with Joel's body.

Kongo is scrubbing himself with parsley. Parsley, or "perejil," as the Dominicans call it, is used by the Haitians to brush teeth, scrub skin and hair, in teas as a muscle healing herb, as a flavor to food. Eventually Kongo climbs the hill with Sebastien and Yves following respectfully. Felice tells Amabelle that she has learned how to hate and that it should be an eye for an eye. She regrets that Kongo will not allow anyone to react to the murder. Felice believes they should do something to show the killers that Haitian lives are precious, too. Amabelle insists they leave it to Kongo who will know what is right.

Chapters 9-12 Analysis

The death of Joel reminds all the Haitians of the powerlessness of their situation. The name of the man who killed Joel is known and there is no talk of revenge or justice except among the very young and napve. Kongo must lead any action to bring justice to his people and yet he is silent with the knowledge that there is no revenge to be had. He is the noble savage; the man of ethics who must live oppressed by unethical men. Sebastien's determination to leave the cane fields is the determination of all young enslaved men to rise out of their shackled lives and find peace.

Chapters 13-16

Chapters 13-16 Summary

Caught between the social classes are a population of Haitians who have carved out a place for themselves as stonemasons, dressmakers, schoolteachers, shoemakers, and others who had been in Alegria for generations and had established themselves as more than the lowest labor. They make up a middle class that keeps trying to find a secure place within the social status of the nation in which they live. Amabelle meets up with some of these people as they are walking their children to the tiny, overburdened school started by two priests. They are complaining that although their children were born in the Dominican Republic, the government will not give them "papers" to attend a decent school.

The discussion turns to human rights and the lack of any rights for the Haitians regardless of their status in the community or the length of their residency. One woman mentions the rumors that are beginning to circulate that all but the cane cutters are going to be forced back to Haiti. As Amabelle listens to the women telling of having no papers to prove their worth, she realizes that without papers she is without identity or any power to prove who she is. Without papers one could be taken to the fields, to become a servant, or whatever is at the whim of those who decide.

The group approaches the villa of Don Gilbert and Dona Sabine who have walled in their compound and hired ten armed Dominican guards to protect them. Amabelle notices the anxious looks of the large crowd gathered in the garden. On her way back to Senora Valencia's house Amabelle stops to greet Father Romain at the parish school. He is flying a kite with the children while giving a lesson. He greets Amabelle and tells the children she is, like him, from Cap Haitien. All the Haitians make much of being from the same town as someone and see it as a way to connect to their homeland. News of families and loved ones is carried home by word of others. The children become impatient and Father Romain leaves Amabelle with a message for Sebastien that he is saddened by Joel's death.

Approaching her work place Amabelle meets Beatriz, the sister of Doctor Javier. She is a beautiful Senorita whom Senor Pico courted before marrying Valencia. She comes to visit Papi while he takes tea for his cough. Papi is writing his memoirs for his grandchildren. He tells Beatriz that he was a soldier in the Spanish army during battles with the Los Estados Unidos over the possession of colonies. Beatriz asks Papi if he likes it in the Dominican Republic. Papi gets angry at the question, how could anyone like the way things are now in this country?

Doctor Javier arrives to check on the babies and asks Amabelle if she has decided to work at the clinic across the river. He offers her a small wage and a place to sleep at the clinic. Amabelle thinks maybe she will go if Sebastien will go with her. It might be time to leave this place and go home again. The Doctor and Senor Pico settle on the veranda

to drink rum, smoke cigars, and laugh about babies that keep one up all night long. Amabelle brings a drink of water to Papi in his orchid garden. Papi confesses to having heard of the death of a man who worked for Don Carlos. Don Carlos did not know the man's name as he has many men that work his cane. Amabelle tells Papi that she gave away some of his wood to a cane cutter who wanted to make a coffin. Papi asks to be taken to Kongo for a visit. Amabelle says she should first request Kongo's permission to bring Papi to visit. The cane harvest begins with the burning of the fields and Papi and Senor Pico rush to watch the white smoke rise. Amabelle goes inside to offer her help with the babies and finds Valencia in bed with the babies sleeping beside her.

Rosalinda is awake and crying but upon closer inspection Valencia sees no sign of breath from Raphael. In terror she squeezes and shakes the baby to no avail. She wails at him to not leave her as Senor Pico rushes in and tries to breathe life back into the tiny body. The doctor is sent for and also tries to revive the boy. In the end little Rafi is dead and it is time to send for the priest. Over the next few days the men build a coffin which Valencia paints with red orchids. People come to mourn with the family and Valencia is desolate. She reminds Amabelle of the day they found Amabelle at the river. Papi had paid a boy to translate for them and when Papi found out that Amabelle was completely alone in the world, he brought her home with them.

Chapters 13-16 Analysis

The cane working community is beginning to sense the oncoming troubles as rumors start to circulate about the treatment of Haitians elsewhere in the country. The Haitians become aware of their vulnerability in the face of change and Joel's death has sparked a realization that the Dominicans see no value in the lives of the workers. Even Papi knows that although he feels bad about the accident and would like to meet Joel's father he is powerless to create any justice over the matter. Papi is a just man who fought in a just war and loathes the military posturing of the Dominican army, including his son in law who will stop at nothing to reach a position of power in the government. Papi and Kongo are similar characters, morally right men caught in a position of powerlessness.

The death of the infant Raphael seems to cement the hardness of Senor Pico's heart. At the same time the Generalissimo is organizing the death of the "plague" of Haitians that threaten to overtake the agrarian culture of the Spanish Dominicans. Tension is high in Alegria and Amabelle accepts the deaths of Joel and the baby with the stony composure of someone grown accustomed to loss and pain. Amabelle's strength is drawn from the memories of her parents and a happier time.

Chapters 17-20

Chapters 17-20 Summary

Amabelle lies in her room sweating in the heat of the tropics, wishing to let all the water flow from her body so she can shed no more tears. During the days following the death of Raphael Senor Pico is a lost soul, yet still conscious of the character he cuts in the room of important mourners. The old man Papi only craves to sit by the radio and hear the news of the battles taking place back in his beloved Spain. The war in Europe is escalating yet the radio is broadcasting the Generalissimo speaking of the responsibility of all to "carry out justice." Trujillo states that, "Under the protection of rivers, the enemies of peace, who are also the enemies of work and prosperity, found an ambush in which they might do their work, keeping the nation in fear and menacing stability." After the radio speech, Senor Pico announces that he will have to leave soon for the border to fulfill the "operation" he has been assigned to complete.

Amabelle remembers the place where she and Sebastien first made love. It is a hidden cave behind a waterfall that feeds the river in which the cane workers bathe. It is at first a forbidding place, with dark stone and shadows, wet moss and coral, and a filtered sun that follows all that enter. Once inside, the cave is like a womb, protective and unchanging.

In the main house Senora Valencia lies tortured on her bed while her son is being buried along with the unworn clothes sewn for him by Amabelle. Juana tries to comfort the Senora who only asks to be told stories about her mother. Juana tells the Senora how shy and happy her mother was, and how sad they all were at her death in childbirth.

Amabelle walks through the cane cutter settlement noticing the men drinking at the shack of Mercedes, the shopkeeper. She greets the children playing in the streets and the elders playing dominoes under the sapodilla tree. She approaches Kongo's room with its palm front door. Felice is sitting on the step and tells Amabelle to go on inside. She greets Kongo and tells him of the request of Don Ignacio for a meeting. She says Papi would like to pay for Joel's funeral. Kongo says there will be no funeral and that he has already buried his son in a field of lemongrass in the ravine where he fell, with no coffin, like the day he was born.

Amabelle returns to her room to find Sebastien covered in sores from the cane field fires. Amabelle tells him of the death of Senor Pico's son. She becomes angry when he smiles at the news. Sebastien asks Amabelle if she thinks of "these people" as her family. Amabelle says they are the closest to family she has. The next morning Amabelle and Juana watch as Senor Pico lines his son's coffin with lace and pillows, Valencia drapes fine linen over the painted coffin, and the Senor carries it out to his waiting Packard. After the procession has left, Valencia ignores the command to stay in bed and takes a seat in one of the chairs on the front veranda overlooking the road.

Amabelle is on the veranda with Valencia when a group of the cane cutters led by Kongo walk past on their way to the fields. Senora Valencia asks Amabelle if she knows these cane people. When Amabelle says yes Valencia tells her to run down and invite them up for un cafecito. She says to invite as many as will come. The cane cutters are astonished and confused by the Senora's invitation. They suspect her of plotting to poison them and begin trading rumors of terrible murders being carried out across the land. One man claims the Generalissimo has ordered the death of all Haitians. Another says a group of Haitians was killed in the night for not being able to trill their "r" and correctly pronounce "perejil" to ask for parsley.

Kongo asks Amabelle to tell him about her mistress and she reveals that Valencia's son is being buried this morning and that the Senora may not be completely well. Kongo heads for the house followed by the others and they crowd onto the porch and in the garden. Valencia orders coffee poured into her finest china and served carefully rationed, to the crowd, so that everyone gets some. After drinking his coffee, Kongo steps up to the Senora and reaches out as if to touch the baby Rosalinda in her arms. She blocks his touch and he takes her hand and kisses it. He tells her he is saddened by the death of her other baby. After the workers leave Senor Pico returns home and finds out what Valencia has done. He takes the fine china and smashes it piece by piece against the latrine wall.

Chapters 17-20 Analysis

The differences between the Dominicans and the Haitians are magnified in the chapters describing the days after the deaths of Joel and Raphael. Both of the deceased are only sons of fathers important in their respective communities. Joel is buried naked, without a coffin and with no funeral. Raphael is buried in finest lace, in a painted coffin, with days of mourning and funeral procession. Yet it is Kongo who comes at the Senora's invitation and offers words of comfort after her husband ruthlessly killed his Joel without even a thought or word of guilt or regret.

Throughout the story the themes of death and powerlessness prevail. All the characters are pawns in the game of the Generalissimo as he begins what is to be one of the most brutal massacres in human history. Unfortunately, the little island of Hispaniola is far removed from the world war that is taking place in Europe and the South Pacific and little attention is given to the plight of the Haitians on a global scale. Papi remembers the noble battles of his time and is disgusted by the posturing of the Dominican army as it prepares to take down a powerless and civilian enemy.

Chapters 21-26

Chapters 21-26 Summary

Amabelle remembers the handmade Christmas lanterns of her childhood and how the hills were full of paper lanterns, "shaped to the desires of their hearts." Her father says a lantern is like a kite that can't fly and Amabelle asks him to create for her a lantern of his face, so she can always carry it with her. Amabelle clings to the memories left to her of her parents and happy childhood, as the present becomes almost unbearable to her.

The baptism of Rosalinda takes place in the chapel of Father Vargas alongside other babies, some of which have been named Raphael in honor of the Generalissimo. After the ceremony Juana presents a great feast to the neighbors and hungry peasants who gather in the yard. After the feast Kongo shows up quietly at Amabelle's little room. He brings her a paper mache mask he has made in the likeness of Joel. He tells Amabelle he knows she will take care of the gift. He goes on to tell his story of a lifetime of making masks for carnival until his wife died and he left everything to come work the cane.

Kongo comes also to bring a request from Sebastien that Amabelle will keep herself only to him, become his wife. He says that because both their parents are dead, he will give blessing to the marriage. Amabelle says she is honored that Kongo has brought this message from Sebastien and that she will keep the mask of Joel safe. He asks if Don Ignacio has asked again about meeting him but Papi has forgotten because of the death of Rafi, and Kongo is not surprised that Joel has slipped from the mind of Don Ignacio.

After Kongo leaves Amabelle rushes off to find Sebastien. She is walking along the trail in the dark and hears footsteps behind her so she jumps into the stream looking for a rock with which to defend herself. Three men with machetes are patrolling the trails and they tell Amabelle it is no longer safe to walk alone at night. They want to protect their people now that news is spreading of Haitians being killed. They have formed a night-watchman brigade since the death of Joel. One man says he is going home to Haiti before things go, "from talk to bloodshed," and is leaving this very Saturday. Another man, Unel, says he has worked hard and will stay to fight and help others. He says the times have changed and the Haitians must look after themselves. The men walk Amabelle to Sebastien's room to find him agitated and speaking of the order from the Generalissimo.

Sebastien tells Amabelle they cannot live together as man and woman until after the cane harvest. Yves, Sebastien's roommate, is talking in his sleep again about the death of his father. The man was imprisoned in a "bread and water" prison by the Yankis and once let out, he died over a plate of the richest food his wife could cook for him. Yves talks in his sleep about the death just as Amabelle and Sebastien dream about the deaths of their parents. In the morning, Amabelle and Sebastien sit over a fire cooking

coffee and smiling to themselves about their future life together. Sebastien leaves for work in the cane fields, with torn fingers, sore muscles, and a fear of the future.

The Dominicans are guarding their houses more now as the rumors begin to fly. Amabelle is almost hit by a bullet of Senor Pico's as he practices his aim in full regalia. He is teaching Valencia how to shoot because times are different now. Papi recognizes what is to come and says he came to this valley to escape these evils and now he will take a walk. Doctor Javier arrives at the house purportedly to inspect Rosalinda. He warns Amabelle that she must leave at once, that the rumors are true. Soldiers and civilians are killing Haitians and it will be only days before the valley is attacked. The doctor tells Amabelle that a large group will be leaving with him tonight to cross the border in two trucks. They are meeting at the chapel. Amabelle, unconvinced, goes to her room to sew a skirt into a satchel just in case, where she will carry the mask from Kongo, a change of clothing and an unfinished shirt for Sebastien.

Meanwhile Valencia is concerned about the return of Papi. Amabelle says she will look for Papi but instead searches for Sebastien. She finds him soaked with sweat and tells him of the three places she has secured for him, herself, and Mimi in a truck crossing the border tonight. She tells Sebastien of the job in a clinic that Doctor Javier offered her and how they should go across the border. Sebastien wants them to speak with Kongo who has had a visit from Papi. Papi has offered the field guards money to let Kongo go with him. Papi told Kongo of the killing he did in the war and tried to find common ground about the deaths they had faced.

Amabelle, Sebastien, Mimi, and others decide to leave that night but Kongo says he is too old to take such a journey, so Amabelle and Sebastien say their good-byes and arrange to meet at the chapel. Sebastien kisses Amabelle and says he is tired of the harvest and looks forward to seeing his mother back in Haiti. Amabelle returns to the house of Valencia and finds the Senora and Beatriz discussing why Senor Pico should be gone on this "operation." Trucks of army soldiers begin arriving in the valley. Valencia and Beatriz see the trucks on the road and walk down to find chaos as the army races by in the direction of the border. Amabelle sees bright spots of blood on the Senora's dress and helps her back up to the main house to rest.

Valencia asks Amabelle to stay with her as Papi arrives with a cross of freshly cut cedar with the name Senor Joel Raymond Lorier carved on it. He asks how Valencia is and Amabelle tells him of the bleeding and how the Senora was waiting for him to come home. Suddenly there are many trucks in the road and there is a standoff between Unel and the others with machetes and the soldiers with their rifles. Men and women are already being loaded into the back of the trucks and Senor Pico is in the throng yelling, "Kneel or sit!" as workers are forced into trucks with the promise that they would be taken to the border. Unel motions for his cohorts to stand their ground and the soldiers erupt into violence, cutting and dragging the Haitians into the backs of the trucks.

Dona Eva, the mother of Doctor Javier, runs to Senor Pico, who is overseeing the operation, and begs him to find Javier and Father Vargas. Senor Pico is unmoved by her terror and continues the operation to load Haitians and any sympathizers into the

trucks. Violence escalates as the workers stand behind Unel and refuse to be forced into the trucks and Senor Pico orders them grabbed and stuffed in. He shouts to Amabelle to get out of the road and she watches as the soldiers use whips, tree branches and sticks to flog the people protesting the invasion. Amabelle feels the sting of a whip and grabs her bundle as she sees Unel hurl his machete at a soldier. Senor Pico jumps down to watch the boy get tied with a cattle rope and raised into the truck.

Amabelle runs to the cane village to hear how the Haitians had begged to be taken to a church. Soldiers who have come to the shop of Mercedes say, "You should have been there to see it. They cried like new widows, those priests." Amabelle goes to the church and finds no one there. She runs through the cane field, getting covered in cuts and biting ants, to Kongo's shack. He tells her that Sebastien and Mimi went to the church but were picked up and taken away by army trucks. Kongo says that they would have been taken to the border prison at Dajabon if they were not killed immediately.

Amabelle insists she is going to Dajabon and Kongo tells her the route through the mountains to the border. He tells her to cross the river at its shallowest point near the bridge. Kongo shows Amabelle a secret trail back to the main road and Amabelle runs to Dona Sabine's house where Felice works. Dona Sabine and Don Gilbert are hiding and protecting Haitians who have fled the road and villages. Amabelle finds Sebastien's friend Yves and tells him she is going to the border to find Sebastien and he agrees to come with her. Felice cannot be convinced to leave Kongo and the safety of Dona Sabine's house. She gives Amabelle a sharp knife for protection and they say their good-byes hoping to meet again someday. Amabelle and Yves set out into the night along the trail to the mountains.

Chapters 21-26 Analysis

As the story begins to climax Amabelle finds herself making a plan to leave Alegria. She agrees to keep herself only to Sebastien, who is ready to give up the cane cutter's life. She considers accepting Doctor Javier's offer of a job at his clinic in Haiti. Amabelle sews a satchel to carry her few possessions away. Finally, she agrees to meet Sebastien and Mimi at the church to cross the border with the priests, Dr. Javier and others who have decided to leave before things get worse for them. Lingering to comfort her old friend Valencia, Amabelle is delayed from reaching the church. The Senora asks Amabelle to stay with her until Papi returns and by doing so, possibly saves Amabelle's life just as she did years earlier by the river. When Amabelle eventually leaves and rushes down to the road, the church has already been raided and everyone inside loaded onto trucks.

As Amabelle creeps silently through the cane field, she describes it as, " ... pitch black inside, as dark as it might be in a coffin under the ground with six feet of dirt piled over your face." The cane is like a coffin for the lives of the Haitian poor who flocked into the valley to find the cane both a means for survival, and the instrument of their sorrow. Now they have been set upon by the Generalissimo who has ordered army and Dominican civilians to rise up and kill the Haitians in their midst. The theme of

oppression runs throughout the story as the society is oppressive, so is the silence to Sebastien, the nightmares to Amabelle, the cane to the cutters, and the hateful prejudice to them all.

Amabelle, despite her miserable dreams and circumstances, has quiet strength and determination. Her decision to head through the mountains to the border represents her desire to return to the safety and happiness of her childhood home. Amabelle lost one family to join another. Now she has lost the second family and knows her future lies with Sebastien. The ageless story of love broken by circumstance is told through the dreams and memories of Amabelle throughout the story.

Kongo and Papi, both good souls who have a common sadness, acknowledge the death of Joel together. Kongo passes the mask he has created of his son to Amabelle, and Papi creates a wooden cross marker for Joel. The two have reached an understanding less obvious to the generation of oppressor and oppressed. They make a quiet peace in a time of chaos. The chapters end with the trading of coffin wood for a machete, symbolic of how the Dominicans have chosen war over peace. Yves and Amabelle are no match for the guns, trucks, and hate of the army. They methodically push forward towards the only goal they can have, the border.

Chapters 27-29

Chapters 27-29 Summary

After walking the mountain trail all night Yves and Amabelle reach a crossroads where one trail leads further into the mountains and another winds back down into the valley. On the lower trail an oxen cart is stuck in the mud. The wagon is loaded with bodies, one of which falls out and rolls down the hill. The armed men beat a moving body until it is still and carry on pulling the cart down the trail. Yves and Amabelle gather their wits and trudge on past mountain villages and vistas of the cane fields below. They come upon a group of travelers following the same trail.

Wilner and Odette had walked all the way from the other side of the country from a far cane mill and had met up with the others along the way. Two Dominican sisters are on their way to find the Haitian husband of the younger of them. A final man alone, Tibon, escaped a mass slaughter of Haitians being forced off a cliff into the sea. Yves and Amabelle decide to join them and the seven look forward to reaching the border by the next night. All are quiet but Tibon, who having witnessed the most horror of any, is indulged in spats of anger and philosophizing. He knows their own government has forsaken them by selling them to the cane fields. He says, "The poor man, no matter who he is, is always despised by his neighbors. When you stay too long at a neighbors house, it's only natural that he become weary of you and hate you."

Amabelle and the others stop to sleep in the night and take turns keeping watch. As morning approaches they begin to see the smoke of a fire a few villages below. As the fire grows the unmistakable smell of burning bodies wafts up the mountain to the group and Tibon blurts out a story of his childhood. In his rage and frustration Tibon tormented a Dominican boy with daily beatings, trying to force the boy to admit that " ... we're the same, me and him, flesh like flesh, blood like blood." Wilner and Yves decide the trail down through the forest is safer than the mountains and that the Dominican sisters must make their own way. The sisters can walk into any village and be helped but will only burden the refugee Haitians as they reach the border.

Descending the trail, Amabelle drifts into her own thoughts of past happy Saturdays spent sewing with Valencia, marketing with Juana and helping Papi in the flower garden. Amabelle does not dwell on these thoughts however, and begins planning what she will do when she reaches the border. She will look for a little house to rent or go to Cap Haitian and see if she can reclaim her parents' land. Soon the group reaches an abandoned settlement of huts. Although there are no people, there are buckets of water and fresh food. Wilner and the others help themselves to the water and imagine the residents returning from the fields to offer them a meal and shelter for the night. Yves, separate from the group, doesn't show the others the bodies hanging from bullwhips above them in the trees.

Amabelle, Yves, Odette, Wilner, and Tibon reach the border city of Dajabon at dusk to find a raucous crowd in the streets beginning to gather at the town square. People are carrying pictures of the Generalissimo and cheering, "Viva Trujillo!" The group of bedraggled travelers inch through the unexpected crowd in terror, trying to go unnoticed. Odette and Wilner go to find someone to pay for help crossing the river. Amabelle listens to the conversations as she passes, and learns that the Generalissimo is inside the cathedral and has just given a speech claiming that the Dominican Republic's problems with the Haitians will soon be solved.

As the orchestra begins to herald the arrival of the Generalissimo, Yves pulls Amabelle to a dark spot he thought would be safer and they are faced with five young men who quickly become menacing. Yves whispers to Amabelle to go immediately but it is too late and the men start waving parsley bundles and yelling, "perejil," the Spanish name for the herb. Yves is easily subdued despite his machete and the young men indulge in a frenzy of beating. Tibon strangles one man nearly to death before being killed from behind by the machete. Amabelle and Yves are forced to their knees while handfuls of parsley are being waved in their faces. "Tell us what this is? Que diga perejil?" The men leer. Amabelle opens her mouth to say the word she has learned to pronounce from the old Dominican ladies at the markets but one of the men stuffs the parsley into her mouth. She and Yves, and others that are made to kneel are force fed parsley until they fall over coughing and spitting.

Suddenly the Generalissimo is leaving the church and the crowd surges toward him. Yves and Amabelle are discovered by Odette and Wilner and are helped to their feet and taken to an empty house across the square. Amabelle worries over having left Tibon behind, dead. Odette worries over Amabelle, whose broken body is becoming feverish. Amabelle's teeth are broken and chipped and her lips and face are cut and swollen. Wilner explains that he paid for the room from someone he believes they can trust.

Before long a knock at the door warns them of approaching guards and the four hobble out into the night and away from the town, towards the shadows of the forest.

Amabelle is delirious and can think only of how to get to the prison where they are holding Sebastien and Mimi. How will she find him if they go away from Dajabon? Soon they arrive at the river's edge. Wilner picks a spot with chin high grass to hide them from the army men on the bridge upstream. Amabelle hears splashes as the armed men push corpses into the river. Wilner agrees to go last and Odette and Amabelle wade into the black water with Yves following. Odette is struggling to cross so Amabelle swims to her and drags her along. There is a yell and a shot, and Wilner, still on the riverbank, falls dead. Odette opens her mouth to shriek and Amabelle clamps her hand over Odette's face while frantically pulling the two of them out of the water.

Amabelle and Yves carry Odette away from the river, down the track to a spot under a canopy of trees. Odette spits out the river water and utters one final word with her last breath, "pesi," the Kreyol word for parsley. Amabelle, in her grief, wonders over the significance of that one word when there are such things as love and hate and the deep

mysteries of life. She believes that had the Generalissimo himself heard Odette's final word he would be startled at the tenacity of the Haitians.

Chapters 27-29 Analysis

Amabelle continues to prove herself to be level headed and strong. She quickly seems to become the glue for the group of desolate travelers. As Amabelle ministers to the others she remains calm in spite of the horrors of the continuing violence from which they hide. Letting her mind wander to happier days, Amabelle lets go of her past and looks to the future with or without Sebastien. Tibon's angry eruptions and terrible story of mass killing sets him apart from the others and Amabelle feels particularly sorry for him.

The terrible coincidence of arriving in Dajabon just as the Generalissimo is holding forth, sets the stage for the brutal attack on Yves, Amabelle, and Tibon. The frenzied crowd has a bloodlust of devotion to the Generalissimo and those who pity the Haitians won't come forward to stop the brutality. Parsley, such a potent healing herb to the Haitians is turned against them. The very word has become a symbol for the differences between the Dominicans and the Haitians in their midst. That a fact so insignificant as the mispronunciation of a word can be used to motivate the masses to rise up against their neighbors is a frightening commentary on the human condition.

Amabelle plunges into the river without a thought about the death of her parents. The river has haunted her dreams for a decade and yet when faced with her own mortality she conjures the presence of mind, not only to survive crossing, but also to help Odette, who is floundering and witnesses the murder of Wilner. Amabelle's will to live enables her to stop the screams of Odette, which would have given them all away and meant the certain death of herself and Yves. Odette dies the moment her man Wilner dies, so connected in spirit are they, yet Amabelle is distraught for having covered Odette's mouth to stifle the scream.

Chapters 30-32

Chapters 30-32 Summary

Amabelle, Yves, and Odette's body are found by a young priest and a doctor looking for survivors and brought to a makeshift hospital set up in tents just inside the Haitian border. Odette is taken away and the exhausted priest marks her name in a notebook. Corpses are laid out in rows and as Amabelle stands over Odette's body she feels as if she will always carry the moment with her. Yves guides Amabelle into the tent clinic where nuns are caring for the many wounded and near dead who have managed to cross the border back into Haiti. Two doctors work furiously to save those who linger on the edge of life. Amabelle and Yves try to respect the many naked, wounded, and weeping people around them.

There are people of all ages who are burned to char, with limbs dangling, with infections raging, and everywhere the flies and mosquitoes hover. Amabelle witnesses the amputation of a woman's leg while she pleads to be whole entering the next world. A drop of the woman's blood lands on Amabelle's eyelid as the doctor proclaims, "She's not going to live." Amabelle closes her eyes against the blood and sorrow and sleeps for several days. When she awakens she is in a more permanent clinic with a tin roof. She is bandaged and wearing a different dress. Amabelle hears the scream of a man, pictures Odette's face, and falls back into a trance-like sleep.

Amabelle dreams of her mother wearing a dress of glass fashioned out of the river water. Her mother indicates with a smile that she is protecting Amabelle, who was never in danger, and that Amabelle will be well again soon. The dreams subside and Amabelle becomes part of the community of wounded in the clinic on the border. People gather in groups to talk and tell their stories of the slaughter. Women tell of how their husbands, sons and fathers are systematically killed by the army. Another man tells of how he was hiding on a horse farm only to witness the army so angry they shot all of the horses. The room was filled with people telling their tales, impatiently waiting a turn to reveal the horror they, personally, had witnessed.

One man had a particularly terrible story. He was awakened in the night to his woman screaming only to find that he was buried alive among dozens of corpses of his fellow villagers. Lying in a pit of the dead and dying, he remembered the first night shared with his woman because she had screamed out of forgetting where she was. The man had asked her if he was so ugly as to start her screaming? Amabelle slips in and out of consciousness for several days before hearing that a man had inquired after her. Amabelle thinks, "Sebastien," but the nun says, "Yves." Yves comes to visit Amabelle and tells her that he has looked everywhere for Sebastien and Mimi, leaving their names at every post. After weeks of visits from Yves, where the talk seems to run into one long conversation, Amabelle manages to tell him that she will go with him.

Yves comes to Amabelle in the dark and tells her he will take her to Sebastien's house where she and Mimi can talk about all this like a bad dream. He says the killing has stopped and Amabelle begins to hope that Sebastien and Mimi have made it across the river. Yves tells Amabelle he is going home to his mother tomorrow and Amabelle gathers the strength to go with him. They travel on a loaded truck grateful for the sights of their homeland where they are safe. The two arrive in Cap Haitian, and walk through the streets where merchants and residents begin to recognize them as refugees from the slaughter. A woman comes to Amabelle and gives her an orange with instructions on how to bathe with the fruit to remove her pain. Yves is greeted by men who knew his father and the two walk towards the house of his mother.

Amabelle and Yves are greeted with great enthusiasm by Yves's mother Man Rapadou upon arrival to his tin and lumber home. The house shares a courtyard with the houses of Yves's relatives. In the courtyard a great welcome feast is prepared of goat meat and eggplants, watercress in codfish sauce, corn mush, and black beans. Amabelle hears the story of Yves's father dying on his dinner plate after being released from the "bread and water prison." Amabelle is startled that Man Rapadou can laugh over sad stories and remembers her father telling her how sadness leaves a thumbprint on a person. Sometimes others can see the print and sometimes nobody else knows. Noticing that Amabelle cannot manage the solid food with such broken teeth and torn lips, Man Rapadou fetches a bowl of pumpkin soup and feeds it to Amabelle spoonful by spoonful.

Yves and Amabelle are given a bed in Yves's old bedroom and while Yves and his mother talk into the night Amabelle takes her orange to the courtyard and bathes as instructed. She thinks about how scarred and old her body seems and envisions Sebastien and Mimi drowning in the river as her parents and Odette had. To chase away the thoughts Amabelle daydreams about the citadel near her parents' house. In the morning Yves has gone to reclaim his father's fields and Man Rapadou tells Amabelle that everything she knew before the slaughter is lost. That evening she encourages Amabelle to go and visit Man Denise, the mother of Sebastien and Mimi.

Amabelle goes the next day. As she approaches the house a boy tells her that the woman inside will not come out of her house. Amabelle knows her worry must be too great to share. As the days pass and Amabelle's body heals, she still walks past Man Denise's house everyday waiting and hoping to witness the return of Sebastien. Other homecomings occur throughout the town, people returning from "the other side," and setting up house again in Haiti. Amabelle lies in bed at night wishing her face and body were not so damaged by the beating and worrying if Sebastien will recognize her.

Chapters 30-32 Analysis

The clinic provides a place for the refugees to share their heartbreaking stories of betrayal and terror by the Dominicans and the army. After a time the stories become angry debates about the government and other prominent Haitians who had stood by and done nothing to avenge the blood of their countrymen. The debates mellowed to

the hopeful plans of the welcoming families, the delicious meals, and the new life that was out there waiting for them. Amabelle and Yves are bonded by the experience they have shared and he feels a sense of responsibility for her. The decision to go with Yves to his home is Amabelle's first step into her future.

Immediately upon arriving in Cap Haitien, Amabelle looks to the citadel in the clouds as she has over the years to chase away bad thoughts, and finds the strength to keep walking in spite of the broken bones she suffers. The reactions of the townspeople make her realize that she is again different. She is one of the walking wounded from "over there," consistent with the theme throughout the story of Amabelle's aloneness wherever she finds herself. Amabelle's reluctance to visit Sebastien's mother is in part survivor guilt. As a child she survived watching her parents drown. She escaped whatever fate met Sebastien and Mimi, and she survived the deaths of Tibon, Wilner, and Odette. Amabelle doesn't want to add to the suffering of Man Denise.

Chapters 33-36

Chapters 33-36 Summary

Some weeks have passed and Yves and Amabelle have settled into a quiet companionship. Yves spends all his days in his father's fields and Amabelle only sees him at night. One night he tells her that some officials of the state are listening to the stories of survivors from the other side and are giving out money from the Generalissimo. The Dominican leader has not admitted guilt in the killings but has agreed to compensate the wounded and families of the dead with money. When Amabelle and Yves arrive the next morning more than a thousand people are waiting in the square to be heard. Many in the crowd have walked long distances from other towns. Armed soldiers are keeping control as the most mangled and the pregnant are ushered in first.

At sundown the justice of the peace comes out to tell them he will see no more people that day. Amabelle and Yves go each of the next sixteen days waiting for a turn to get in. Amabelle doesn't want the money; she is looking for information about Sebastien and Mimi. While waiting, Yves recognizes Man Denise and jumps up to greet her. Man Denise says she wanted to come and stand with the refugees and families. She is a slender, elegant woman too young looking to be the mother of Sebastien and Mimi, Amabelle thinks. When at sundown the lead guard comes out to tell the crowd that all the money has been dispersed and there will be no more testimonials taken, the people become angry.

The mob surges toward the building, shoving the few soldiers out of their way, and when they find the prime minister gone they release the prisoners being held and steal what few things are in the building, some chairs, whips, canteens, and a photograph of President Vincent. In the photograph, President Stenio Vincent, looking sophisticated and well dressed, is wearing the medal of the Grand Cross of the Juan Pablo Duarte Order of Merit around his neck. The medal was given to him by the Generalissimo to symbolize the ongoing friendship between the Haitians and the Dominicans. The people in the crowd, upon seeing this, bring forth kerosene and ignite the photograph and the police station on fire. Amabelle, Yves, and Man Denise flee to the house of Man Denise. Amabelle stays the night at the foot of Man Denise's bed and in the morning tells her that she knew Sebastien and Mimi "over there."

Amabelle learns that after the hurricane that killed her husband, Man Denise's house was taken by the Yankis to build a road. The house was eventually given back to her but only after her children had left to make homes in Alegria. Man Denise wonders if Sebastien ever knew that she got their land back. She carries painted coffee beans and fingers them while telling Amabelle that her son is named after Saint Sebastien, who was given two deaths. She thought an extra death in reserve would be a wise thing for a man. Then Man Denise tells Amabelle that a young man came to her house a few days

earlier and told her that he had seen her children murdered with a group in a courtyard in Santiago. They had been forced to lie down and were shot in the back with rifles.

Amabelle says she doesn't believe the story but knows it could be true given what she has witnessed and heard. Man Denise admits that many people have come to tell her the children are dead and she suspects that Sebastien and Mimi told strangers to tell their mother of their fates. She tells Amabelle how cruel it is that young people have to face death before they are old enough to feel the pull of their bones to the homeland. She asks Amabelle to leave so she can "dream up" her children. Yves's mother Man Rapadou welcomes Amabelle back and intimates that she has learned why love doesn't grow between her and Yves. She knows that Amabelle was promised to Sebastien. Man Rapadou shows Amabelle kindness and suggests that Amabelle can use her sewing skills to make Man Rapadou a dress. Amabelle goes to bed and tries to accept that she may never see Sebastien again. She knows that the images of him will fade and the memories tarnish, just as they have with her parents.

Yves tells Amabelle that the priests at the cathedral are taking testimony from people and that their books held no information on Sebastien or Mimi. He says his beans have begun to sprout and there will be good days ahead with the money he will make. Amabelle can buy materials and sew dresses and make money of her own. Amabelle thinks of the people from the clinic at the river. Were they managing to lead normal lives and forget, even for a moment, what had happened? Yves recounts the night he witnessed the trucks loading and taking Sebastien, Mimi, the priests, and Doctor Javier, along with others while he hid in the woods watching. Joel died saving Yves the night of the car accident and Yves so wanted to save Sebastien's life but was unable to. At this confession Amabelle turns to comfort Yves and the two make love. Afterward Yves collapses in tears and goes to smoke, desolate, in the courtyard.

After discovering that Man Denise has left for Port au Prince never to return, Amabelle heads for the cathedral where she meets a woman who immediately recognizes her as someone returned from "over there." She leads Amabelle to Father Emil who is taking the stories. Amabelle inquires after Father Vargas and Father Romain, the priests who were taken with Sebastien. He is happy to tell her that the Generalissimo liberated them and that Father Romain lives near a border clinic. Amabelle writes a letter for Father Romain to give to Doctor Javier. The letter is a plea for any information about Sebastien or Mimi. The next day Amabelle takes a truck to the border and finds a man much older than the Father Romain she knew in Alegria. His sister warns Amabelle that he might not recognize her and that his mind and senses are becoming dimmer. Father Romain sits making a kite, babbling the words he was forced to repeat in prison, the propaganda of the slaughter.

Chapters 33-36 Analysis

Amabelle begins the letting go of Sebastien by getting to know Man Denise, by admitting the possibility of his death, and by turning to comfort Yves. Exhausting her search for information about Sebastien and seeing the state of Father Romain,

Amabelle resigns to live a life of lonely toil. Yves has, up until now in the story, been a quiet support for Amabelle, revealing little of his own suffering. As he tells Amabelle the tragic accounts of witnessing both of his friends taken while he escaped harm, Yves shows that his powerlessness to save them turned into a commitment to save Amabelle. He works as hard in his father's fields as he did in the cane fields of Alegria because empty fields are too much like death.

Mob anger occurs again in the story when the crowd waiting for the justice of the peace is told there will be no more accounts recorded and no more money distributed. The people want to be heard and have their combined story told to the world. The Haitians have been invisible as workers in the fields and their massacre was ignored by most of the world, overshadowed by the events unfolding in the World War. The powerlessness of their president and the poverty in which they live drives them to burn the police station, the only sign of authority around. Ironically, the building is concrete block and only the paint is ruined.

After Amabelle leaves the house of Man Denise she wanders the harbor front and notices the young men struggling under "... more than the weight of their bodies in sugar on their heads." How angry they seem, shouting to be allowed to pass on the streets. These young men are carrying the weight of the cane cutters who provided the very sugar they carry. The sugar, which has always been a symbol of exile and suffering for the Haitians, now represents the senseless loss of thousands and thousands of their countrymen whose names will be forgotten. The sad mumbling of the priest, who insists on staying close to the border in the hopes of one day returning to the other side to minister to those left behind, illuminates the mad logic of the Generalissimo. His theory was that the Haitians were challenging the dominion of the Dominicans, simply by their numbers, and that Spanish blood would be completely tainted by African within three generations if something were not done, and that there are more of "them" than there will ever be cane to cut.

Chapters 37-40

Chapters 37-40 Summary

The years pass and still Amabelle waits for an answer to her letter to Doctor Javier. Amabelle spends her days with Man Rapadou sewing dresses for women who pay her with gourds, a meal, or a smile. She enjoys the simplicity of the work as her body gets old and tired. She thinks often of Father Romain but only sees him in Cap Haitien on the day the streets erupt in joy over the assassination of General Trujillo. The dictator has been shot as he was driving down a highway bearing his name. The celebration is the first time since the reporting to the justice of the peace years before that Amabelle has seen a crowd remembering the slaughter. The people dance and cry and bang pots. Someone refers to Amabelle as "Man Amabelle," and with this sign of respect she realizes how many years have passed. Amabelle greets Father Romain who looks healthier and saner, a grandfather who has found peace. He tells a group who gather around that he is no longer a priest but still plans to go back to Alegria to help his people who may still be there.

Yves has been successful with his father's fields over the years and had doubled the size of the courtyard house, giving two rooms to Amabelle for her own. In the twenty-four years since he returned to Haiti, Yves never found a woman of his own, instead sharing the house with Amabelle and his mother. Yves's land now encompasses two-dozen acres of beans, as well as rice paddies, wheat and sorghum plots, coffee, cacao, and yam lots. He employs workers, built a workhouse for them and grows fruit trees of mango, avocado, and papaya, and invites everyone in the area to pick from them or hunt the wild fowl that lives on his land. He spends his evenings sipping rum in the courtyard.

Man Rapadou is very old now and while resting the night of the celebration she admits to Amabelle that her husband did not die over a plate of food. He had been recruited by the Yankis to betray the Haitian people as a spy. Knowing this Man Rapadou had done her duty to her country and poisoned her own beloved rather than have him be responsible for the many deaths that would follow by helping the Yankis. Amabelle leaves the woman to her sorrow and climbs to the citadel where groups of tourists and guides tour. Amabelle follows a Spanish speaking guide and his group to the top level of the fort, a place she was afraid to go as a child. The guide tells the story of Henry, the slave-born king, who built the citadel. Though no one knows exactly where Henry is buried, the guard says, "Famous men never truly die, it is only those nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air."

Amabelle says Sebastien Onius over and over to keep his name spoken. She wishes some part of him were on this side of the river so she could sense him with her. Sebastien comes to her in her dreams, bringing healing herbs and listening to her questions. Amabelle wonders if he suffered at his death and hopes that there was water to greet his last fall or words uttered to send him to God. Amabelle's body aches in the

places Sebastien used to touch even after all these long years. She tells him she will meet him again and that she is going to the waterfall where they first made love.

Chapters 37-40 Analysis

Amabelle has spent her days exactly as she expected, toiling quietly alone, with the company of Yves and Man Rapadou to sustain her. She has come to terms with the death of Sebastien and although he comes to her in thoughts and dreams she now looks foreword seeing him in death someday and longs to keep his name from being forgotten. Amabelle returns to the playground of her childhood and sees no remnants of the house and home on the hill overlooking the citadel. She has decided that she needs a place to "lay down" the slaughter that has haunted her for so long. Amabelle thinks of heaven as the water that has separated her from everyone she loved who has died. She hears the river all the time now and when she thinks of the graves of those lost, and she visualizes her own grave, with just a simple marker. She will have no descendents and nothing to leave behind but the knowledge that one word, "perejil," may have saved all those lives.

Chapter 41

Chapter 41 Summary

Amabelle arrives at the Massacre River, now cordoned with barbed wire separating the two nations. Women wash laundry at the river's edge as soldiers too young to have taken part in the slaughter patrol both sides of the border. Amabelle approaches a young boy she has been told can help her to cross the border without papers. He tells her it can only happen at night. After dark Amabelle is met by a man wearing a bandana over his face. He helps her to hide under a blanket in the back of the black jeep and tells her they know him at the checkpoints and not to worry. Amabelle sees him give money to both sets of border guards and then sleeps as he drives her through the cane country to Alegria.

Amabelle finds Alegria completely changed from how she remembers the town. All the houses are walled in and guarded by men. The roads and squares all seem different and after searching for hours Amabelle has yet to find the bathing stream and its waterfall that shrouds Sebastien's cave. She makes her way along the stately homes looking for the one the Senora Valencia is said to be living in. After checking gate after gate, Amabelle finally meets some children who will show her the Senora's house. The rambling hacienda is made of four residences joined by a breezeway, with gardens and patios and furniture amidst the orchid beds. A Haitian woman with deep rope scars around her neck shows Amabelle into the house to the parlor where photographs of Senor Pico in uniform and Rosalinda growing up are carefully hung. The largest picture hanging is a painting of a very white skinned baby boy.

Valencia does not recognize Amabelle and says how wicked it is for someone to come using Amabelle's name. She said many had told her that they witnessed Amabelle's killing in La Romana. Amabelle, surprised that she has grown too old and fat to be recognizable to her old companion, recounts the story of the day Valencia gave birth to her two babies and begins asking about Juana and Luis. Shocked, the Senora asks where Amabelle was found and Amabelle tells her how Papi found her on the banks of the Massacre River. Valencia goes on to tell Amabelle that she had to trust her husband at the time of "el Corte," the cutting, as the slaughter was known on this side of the river. She whispered that she had saved and hidden as many of Amabelle's people as she could fit in her house. She hid them in Amabelle's name after Amabelle disappeared. The Senora expresses her sadness over the deaths and further defends her husband. Amabelle is anxious to go to the stream so Valencia drives Amabelle and Sylvie to a beautiful waterfall nearby. It is larger and deeper than Amabelle remembers and she is not sure it is the right one. Valencia confides how she had looked at streams and rivers and lakes all over the country for Amabelle after her disappearance. Sylvie begins to cry and is coaxed to speak her mind. Her only question is "why parsley?"

Valencia tells the story of when the Generalissimo is a young man working as a guard in the cane fields. When it is discovered that the Haitian cane cutters cannot pronounce

the word "perejil" as a Dominican would, the Generalissimo had the realization that the Haitians can never belong in the Spaniards world. The Senora invites Amabelle to stay with her longer but Amabelle knows the young man with the black jeep is waiting for her in the square. She says an awkward goodbye to Valencia and climbs into the back seat to hide across the border again. As she drives away Amabelle remembers the longing to live a life more equal to that of Valencia.

The car approaches the border and Amabelle asks the young driver to let her out before the Haitian guardhouse. She convinces him that her man will be meeting her there soon and that she will just sleep until dawn. The driver is reluctant the leave the old woman alone there in the dark but she insists. After the car drives away Amabelle goes to the riverbank to remember the scene of her parents drowning. All the long years she has wondered what they were trying to signal to her as they washed away. Suddenly she sees a man in the water and recognizes him as the crazy one who was hanging around near the washerwomen earlier. They told Amabelle that he had lost his mind in the slaughter. He looks at Amabelle and then continues down the riverbank. Amabelle removes her dress and slips into the warm river. The water is shallow and Amabelle feels the rock bed rubbing against her back as the current washes over her. The man turns once more to look at Amabelle before walking away.

Chapter 41 Analysis

Man Denise once said to Amabelle that when you feel the end of your days, your bones naturally gravitate to the bones of your people. Amabelle has lived a life of solitary service to others and is not connected to any land or family. Sebastien was to be Amabelle's people before the slaughter, and so she has spent the second half of her life walking a gradual path back to him. Amabelle longs for Sebastien's bones to be on her side of the river. The youth spent as maid to Valencia was one of part sister and part servant. As Amabelle grew up and realized that her life would not mirror Valencia's, she knew her place was not in the family but to serve the family Don Ignacio. The bones of her parents are washed clean by the river.

Amabelle's memories are the only things that are meaningful to her and so she goes on a pilgrimage of sorts to say goodbye. The idea of crossing the river with no papers doesn't deter Amabelle anymore than the crazy Haitian at the riverbank. In spite of her great strength of character she knows that she could just as easily be like him. Amabelle was never able to put the slaughter and the loss of Sebastien, Mimi, and so many others, behind her and step into a new life. Yves only found relief through years of hard labor. Valencia seeks Amabelle's forgiveness in some way and carries a terrible sadness. She has replaced Amabelle with a maid just as eager to please and fearful of disapproval as Amabelle herself was all those years ago. Realizing nothing has changed in Valencia regardless of her stories of hiding Haitians, Amabelle says a hasty goodbye to be with the memories of those who truly loved her.

The river is the thin layer between the two worlds Amabelle has lived in. On both sides of its banks she has felt in exile. Her man was taken and perhaps he drifted down the

current on his way to the next world. To get as close as possible to her people's bones and to be carried to where they are Amabelle lowers her own body into the very place that has ruled her dreams.

Characters

Amabelle Desir

Amabelle is orphaned at a young age when her parents drown in the river between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, as they try to cross over to attend a market on the far side. Distraught, she tries to follow them, but two river-crossing guides hold her back, saying, "Unless you want to die, you will never see those people again." She is found on the riverbank by kindhearted and wealthy landowner Don Ignacio, who asks her, "Who do you belong to?" "To myself," she answers. He takes her in as a house servant, where she grows up with his daughter Valencia; as Valencia grows up, Amabelle becomes her personal maid, altering the relationship from personal companion to respectful servant. When Valencia has twins and there is no one else to attend her unexpected and early delivery, Amabelle serves as midwife, having picked up a smattering of knowledge about this from her parents, who were both traditional healers back in Haiti.

Alone and alienated, a stranger in a strange land, Amabelle clings to her lover Sebastien, who works at brutally hard labor in the sugar cane fields. They meet often in a secret cave behind a waterfall, and she says of him, "When he's not there, I'm afraid I know no one and no one knows me." Having taken the place of her family, he is her rock in life. Like her, he has suffered loss□his father was killed in a hurricane□and their shared sadness bonds them together.

When Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo begins a genocidal campaign against all Haitians in his country, Amabelle must flee for her life. She is a survivor at all costs: determined, driven, she will do whatever it takes to live. When, in the ensuing chaos, Sebastien disappears and is presumed killed, she must once again rely on her own instincts.

Amabelle makes it across the border to Haiti, but not without paying a heavy price in physical and emotional suffering. For many years afterward, she grieves for Sebastien, even going back to the Dominican Republic in an attempt to find their old secret cave. Driven to find answers to the questions that haunt her□why people suffer, why they die, why she lived when others perished□she returns to the river, hoping "that if I came to the river on the right day, at the right hour, the surface of the water might provide the answer. . .But nature has no memory."

Don Ignacio

A wealthy Dominican landowner, Valencia's father, and employer of Amabelle and Sebastien. He was born in Spain, and constantly looks back to his lost homeland. Each night he listens to the radio for broadcasts of the progress of the Spanish Civil War. As Amabelle notes, "He felt himself the orphaned child of a now orphaned people." Sympathetic to the suffering of others, he takes Amabelle into his household when he

finds her orphaned on the riverbank; this sympathy comes from the fact that although he is wealthy now, his background was humble. Back in Spain, he says, "My father was a baker. . .There are times when he gave bread to everyone in our quarter for nothing. I was his only son but he would never let me eat until everyone else had eaten." When his son kills a Haitian worker with his car, Don Ignacio is sympathetic and wants to visit the grieving father, but he is human and has limits□when his own grandson dies, he forgets all about this, wrapped up in his own pain.

Doctor Javier

An intense, educated man, he admires Amabelle's intelligence and determination and invites her to work in a clinic in Haiti with him when he finds out that her parents were healers and that she has successfully midwifed Valencia's twins. "You can be trained," he says. "We have only two Haitian doctors for a large area. I cannot go there all the time, and I know of only one or two midwives in that region of the border. You are greatly needed." When he hears about the genocide, he warns Amabelle and others to run and tells her he and others have room in their trucks for her, but before this happens, he is arrested and is never seen again.

Kongo

An old mask maker and carpenter, whose true name is unknown. His son is struck and killed by Pico Duarte's car. When the genocide begins, he tells Amabelle that she must escape. He does not try to escape, saying that he is too old to run, but he performs a ritual for safe passage and tells her how to follow mountain trails and then cross the river.

Sebastien Onius

Amabelle's lover, who works in Don Ignacio's sugar cane fields. His father was killed seven years before the story begins, in a devastating hurricane; this led him and his sister to seek work in Dominica, though his mother remains in Haiti. He is a strong, calm man, her friend and protector; when the genocide begins he disappears, presumably killed, and is never seen again. He is an enigmatic figure: intensely strong and physical, often sweaty and dirty from his hard work, but he speaks like a poet when he and Amabelle lie together in their secret cave, telling stories of his dreams and the past, of the hurricane that killed his father. He likes to talk; he dislikes silence, because "to him [it] is like sleep, a close second to death." He disappears early in the book, apparently killed by the Dominicans, but he is an almost tangible presence throughout, as Amabelle grieves and asks everyone she meets if they know what happened to him.

Papi

See Don Ignacio

Man Rapadou

Mother of Yves, who has her own secrets: when she found that her husband, a Haitian, was planning to become a spy for American interests, she cooked him a meal filled with ground glass and rat poison, and killed him. She tells Amabelle, "Greater than my love for this man was my love for my country."

Father Romain

A Haitian priest who works with the poor Haitian workers and who runs a school for their children. He often speaks of their home in Haiti, and how common language, customs, and memories bind them all together as a community. Amabelle says of him, "His creed was one of memory, how remembering□though sometimes painful□can make you strong." During the genocide, he is tortured by the Dominicans and goes insane, but eventually is healed when he leaves the priesthood, marries, and has three children. "It took more than prayers to heal me after the slaughter," he tells Amabelle. "It took a love closer to the earth, closer to my own body, to stop my tears. Perhaps I have lost, but I have also gained an ever greater understanding of things both godly and earthly."

Valencia

Daughter of Don Ignacio, wife of Pico Duarte, and mother of twin babies, a boy and a girl. She and Amabelle grew up together, and later, during the genocide, she helps hide Haitians from the killers because she remembers how close she was to Amabelle: "I hid them because I couldn't hide you. . .I thought you'd been killed, so everything I did, I did in your name." She is one of the few characters in the book who does not murder, injure, or neglect someone else; despite being married to a man who carries out the orders to kill as many Haitians as possible, she works to save them.

Yves

A sugar cane worker, a refugee. Amabelle escapes with him, and not knowing where else to go, follows him to his mother's house in Haiti. They live together as if they're married, and his mother assumes they are lovers, though they are not□ Amabelle is still grieving for Sebastien, who has disappeared. Yves spends long days working in his fields, only coming home at night and going to sleep immediately. He is a good man, and Amabelle regrets that they have not found more comfort in each other.

Themes

Exile

As Scott Adlerberg observed in the *Richmond Review,* "Exile increases the poignancy of memory," and many of the characters in the book are exiled, cut off from their families or homes by death or distance. Amabelle remembers her parents constantly, replaying their death by drowning in the swollen river, and talks about them with her lover Sebastien, who likewise tells her about his lost childhood in Haiti. The poor, displaced Haitians in the book all share this sense of a lost home, and it serves as a bond to unite their community□as Amabelle notes, "In his sermons to the Haitian congregants of the valley he often reminded everyone of common ties: language, foods, history, carnival, songs, tales, and prayers. His creed was one of memory, how remembering□though sometimes painful□can make you strong." The Haitian sugar cane workers consider themselves to be "an orphaned people, a group of *vwayaje,* wayfarers."

The Haitians in the book are not the only exiles; Amabelle's employer, Don Ignacio, though born in Spain, came to the Caribbean to fight in the Spanish- American War in 1898. Now, each night he scrolls up and down the radio dial to hear reports from Spain about the progress of the Spanish Civil War. Amabelle notices his homesickness and is aware that "he felt himself the displaced child of a now orphaned people."

Despite these warnings, Amabelle, Sebastien, and the other Haitians are unprepared for the bloodbath about to occur, which will further exile those who are not slaughtered in it. The survivors, cut off from their past, those they love, and their own sense of safety and purpose, are spiritual exiles, looking for meaning and a sense of purpose; some find it, and some never do.

Genocide

The mass killing of Haitians is the central event in the book, and is described with nightmarish clarity; the book may remind readers of more recent atrocities in Bosnia and Rwanda, and the refugees flowing over the borders of these and other countries. Danticat is aware that despite the fact that events like these are visible on the news almost every night, these events seem very far away. She told Calvin Wilson in *The Kansas City Star,* "People don't want to believe that there is that kind of danger, if there is no precedent for it that they know of. They don't want to believe that, all of a sudden, thousands of people can be killed." The book is a vivid reminder that these events do happen, that they can happen to everyone, and that no one is left out of the whirlpool of death and destruction when they do occur.

Remembrance

The themes of exile and of remembrance are related: the exiles' pain is alternately increased or soothed by their remembrance of the past. In addition, however, the book is permeated with a sense of remembrance of the actual people who suffered through these events, and the unnamed, unrecorded tens of thousands who were killed. As a man says near the end of the book, "Famous men never die. . .It is only those nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke in the early moning air." Danticat sees changing this fate as part of her mission as a writer, wanting to create a kind of memorial in words for all the "nameless and faceless." As Amabelle says, "All I want to do is find a place to lay it [the slaughter] down now and again, a safe nest where it will neither be scattered by the winds, nor remain forever buried beneath the sod."

The River of Death

The Massacre River, named for a mass slaughter in the seventeenth century, lives up to its name in the events of the book. Throughout the book, the river is a place of actual and symbolic death: many people die in it, corpses float down it, and once people cross it, their lives are never the same. Crossing it a second time is even harder, leading to alienation: you can never truly go back to the other side.

Amabelle's life is marked early by the river: when she is a child, her parents try to cross it to get to a market in the Dominican Republic. Though the water is visibly rising and the young boys who work carrying people and goods across refuse to go, her father insists that they enter the current. "My father reaches into the current and sprinkles his face with the water, as if to salute the spirit of the river and request her permission to cross," Amabelle says. "My mother crosses herself three times and looks up at the sky before she climbs on my father's back." Despite these ritual precautions, Amabelle's parents are swept away. Amabelle is prevented from going after them by the river boys, who drag her away, saying, "Unless you want to die, you will never see those people again."

Later, during the mass slaughter of Haitians, she and some other refugees reach the river. "From a distance," she says, "the water looked deep and black, the bank much steeper than I remembered." They hear splashing: the Dominicans are throwing corpses into the water. When they cross, they must swim to avoid the bodies and the belongings of slain Haitians: the water is literally a river of death. And when Odette, another refugee, panics because her husband has been shot while he swims across, Amabelle covers her nose and mouth to keep her quiet, "for her own good, for our own good." Odette does not struggle, but gives up to the lack of air and the motion of the river, as if she has already decided to die.

Near the end of the book, Amabelle crosses the river again, returning to the Dominican Republic, and tries to find Alegria, the region she lived in for so long. All is unrecognizable, the landmarks changed or gone, the people gone or moved, and when she finally finds her former employer Valencia, Valencia does not recognize her until she

tells the story of her parents' death in the river. Valencia apologizes for this, and Amabelle tells her she understands and says she feels "like an old ghost had slipped under my skin."

Style

Pace

Danticat's story begins slowly, told with a languid, measured pace, set in a traditional agrarian society, and the first scene, after a dreamlike encounter between Amabelle and her lover Sebastien, involves the birth of twins, a boy and a girl, to her wealthy employer. At first, the book seems very much like many weighty classics of nineteenthcentury literature, which begin with the birth of the protagonist.

Danticat turns this expectation upside down, however: the real hero of the story is not either of the children, but Amabelle, the servant, who midwifes them using half-remembered skills taught by her healer parents. Tinges of violence creep into the story: the twins' father kills a sugar cane worker when he runs into him with his car, but is never officially brought to justice, because the cane workers' lives are considered expendable and because he is a ranking military officer. In addition, Amabelle and Sebastien have both lost one or both parents at a young age, hinting at the precarious nature of their lives□or, as Danticat makes clear, everyone's life: no one is exempt from the possibility of violence that lurks in every person and every society.

As the story moves on, the violence escalates, along with the pace. Rumors of an impending slaughter of Haitians begin circulating. One of the twins, the boy, dies of crib death. Haitian workers begin telling stories they've heard of other workers who were killed in recent weeks. Amabelle is almost killed by a stray bullet from her employers' target practice. And when the genocide begins, people are stabbed, shot, drowned, crushed by trucks, forced to jump off cliff, and choked with bunches of parsley□because their inability to say the word properly in Spanish marks them as Haitians.

Point of View

Throughout, Danticat's narrator Amabelle tells the story in the first person. She is there, she suffers through all these events, and Danticat's choice of this point of view, and her vivid imagery and sensory detail, gives everything an almost choking immediacy. Amabelle's narrative style is flat, almost documentary in style, as in the following paragraph:

> Her face flapped open when she hit the ground, her
> right cheekbone glistening as the flesh parted from it.
> She rolled onto her back and for a moment faced the
> sky. Her body spiraled past the croton hedge down the
> slope. The mountain dirt clung to her dress, her arms,
> her face, her whole body gathering a thick cloud of dust.

Danticat deliberately avoids depicting too much emotion in the body of the book, capturing the numbness inherent to the survivors of catastrophes. Instead, she presents

the scenes and allows the reader to view them and fill in the emotional impact of the slaughter, torture, and dislocation of the refugees. This participation on the reader's part makes the scenes hard to dismiss, and hard to forget. As Danticat said in an interview with Calvin Wilson in the *Kansas City Star,* "The things that I have written so far are things that almost give me nightmares."

Separation of Emotions

In the beginning and end of the book, Danticat allows Amabelle to speak more openly of her feelings in short sequences, in which she describes her dreams, her memories of her departed parents, her wishes, and her fears. These sequences are deliberately separated from the main story of the book, since Amabelle only feels safe to express them when she is alone, enclosed, in a secret cave where she hides with Sebastien, or at the end of the book, when she has reached some measure of peace with his loss and is able to come to terms with her life as a survivor apart from him. As she says, "I sense that we no longer know the same words, no longer speak the same language. There is water, land, and mountains between us, a shroud of silence, a curtain of fate."

Historical Context

The Massacre River

In an essay in *Kreyol,* describing a 1995 visit to the river, Danticat writes, "Between Haiti and the Dominican Republic flows a river filled with ghosts." The Massacre River was named for a seventeethcentury bloodbath, but as Danticat makes clear, it has continued to live up to its name. The river divides the small Caribbean island of Hispaniola into the countries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Because the countries are so close, their fates have historically been intertwined. *The Farming of Bones* begins in the Republic, during the regime of General Rafael Trujillo.

Trujillo's Regime

From 1930 to 1961, the Dominican Republic was ruled by General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, whose ascension to power was inadvertently aided by American efforts to bolster stability in the Caribbean. American leaders were interested in the Caribbean because it was a gateway to the Panama Canal, central to U.S. shipping and trade interests, and the U.S. wanted to keep the area stable and free from European intervention. Because the nations in that area were poor, politically unstable, and, in the case of the Dominican Republic, still recovering from past Spanish rule, the U.S. took over Dominican finances, occupying the country from 1911 through 1916.

The harshness of this occupation offended Dominicans, and when the American marines left the island in 1924, they left behind an armed National Guard. Trujillo, one of the officers of the guard, used his military connections to foster a coup six years later, remove then-President Vasquez from office, and establish his own dictatorship, which lasted over three decades.

Once in office, Trujillo killed anyone opposing him and sent his thugs through the countryside, armed with machine guns, to terrorize the population. Money and ownership of land was funneled to him, resulting in widespread poverty and uprooting of entire communities. Mail was censored, telephones were monitored, and citizens needed government permission to move or practice any profession.

In 1931, a devastating hurricane struck Haiti and the Dominican Republic, killing 2,000 people and injuring many more. Trujillo used the destruction to his advantage, taking absolute power in the crisis and controlling all medicine and building supplies. He imposed "emergency" taxes, never repealed. Naturally, resentment against him grew, and he murdered, tortured, or imprisoned anyone he suspected of disloyalty.

During this period, many Haitians crossed the border into the Dominican Republic, seeking work in the wake of the devastating hurricane. Their sheer numbers began to make some Dominicans uneasy, and there was a racist tone to this unease. As the book notes, Dominicans were told, "Our motherland is Spain, theirs is darkest Africa, you

understand? They once came here only to cut sugarcane, but now there are more of them than there will ever be cane to cut, you understand? Our problem is one of dominion. . .Those of us who love our country are taking measures to keep it our own."

Trujillo Orders Genocide

In 1937, to stop this tide of humanity and implement these "measures," Dominican troops killed between 10,000 and 15,000 Haitians. As Scott Adlerberg remarked in the *Richmond Review,* "None of those killed is anyone famous, nearly all the slaughtered are poor Haitians working as cheap labor in the neighboring country." Danticat also notes that there is often no difference in color between the two sides, despite the insistence that "our motherland is Spain, theirs is darkest Africa." Language is the only differentiating feature, and Dominican troops use the Haitians' inability to pronounce the trilled Spanish "r" in *perejil,* the word for parsley. "Que diga perejil," the soldiers demanded, and anyone who answered "pewejil" would be shot as a Haitian.

Literary Heritage

Haiti is a country long marked by its political unrest and economic depravity as a result of years of dictatorship, government corruption, and a large gap between the wealthy elite and profitable cities and the poverty-stricken non-industrial provinces.

A written or recorded literature was never a priority in Haitian culture, therefore, the number of internationally recognized Haitian authors is understandably few. In addition, Haitian women writers are rare due to the secondary positions they hold within the society, remaining mostly in the home or in non-professional occupations.

Although fiscally poor, Haiti is a culture rich in its language, folktales, customs, and community. The Haitian people often looked to their families and friends not only for support but also for forms of entertainment. In a sense, it was the effects of poverty and illiteracy that made the practice of storytelling an important and favorite pastime, allowing this craft to endure throughout the generations, preserving the nation's culture and history.

Haitian literature was not known outside its borders until well into the 1960s, when the Civil Rights and Women's movements pushed for social reforms and gave the Haitian people an impetus to search out and explore their voices. Still, it was not until the 1990s that Haiti and Haitian literature started to receive the attention it deserved. As more and more nations began to learned of Haiti's oppression and the violence its people faced under the Duvalier government, the call for information about the country and its people increased. New emerging writers began to meet this demand, describing the horrors as well as the jewels of this besieged nation. These writers were creating a literature of social consciousness that demanded acknowledgement from the outside world. Their writing also served as a mirror in which to look back and examine their own background and culture.

When Haitian-born writer Edwidge Danticat began to write and record her memories of Haiti, fictionalizing them in her books, her writings became an extension of the oral tradition of her culture, capturing in print what was natural to her at an early age. What is present in Danticat's work is Haiti's painful history but also its uniqueness and beauty. It is this beauty and cultural lushness that are making people more open to Haitian literature and leading to changes in its presence and proliferation.

Critical Overview

Danticat is the first Haitian woman to write in English, be published by a major American press, and earn wide publicity, so she is the first one to open the door of her culture to mainstream America. Her work has received almost universally favorable reviews, and she has won numerous awards and honors for her two novels, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Farming of Bones*, and her short story collection, *Krik? Krak!*

An interesting aspect of criticism of Danticat's work is that, unlike discussions of many other writers, commentary on her work always also includes a lengthy discussion of her life, even though she is relatively young. Perhaps this is because Haiti and its culture and history are not well known to most American and European readers, so there is a certain fascination inherent in Danticat's life and in her unfamiliar culture. Perhaps it's because her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* was the semiautobiographical story of a young girl raised by an aunt, who comes to the United States at age twelve and must deal with her family's generational issues and the dislocation of immigration to a strange place. A book like this makes readers ask about the author's life in an attempt to determine how much of the novel is "true."

Dan Cryer, who wrote one of the few unfavorable reviews of *The Farming of Bones*, in *Salon,* seemed to be reacting to this seemingly excessive interest in Danticat's life, mainstream Americans' fascination with her "exotic" settings, and her lionization as a spokeswoman for Haitian Americans (a position that Danticat says she does not want). "Pity the young novelist surfing the wave of novelty and hype," he wrote. "Sooner or later, she's going to wipe out." Regarding the awards she's won, he asked, "A prized seat among the literati-in-waiting of *Granta* magazine's 20 Best American Novelists and a National Book Award nomination for *Krik? Krak!*? Oh, please! Has anyone actually read these books?" Cryer criticized Danticat's characterization, saying that Amabelle and Sebastien are depicted only with the broadest brush, making it "hard to care, except in the most abstract way," about their fates. "This is by far Danticat's longest book, and the stretch shows," he commented. "Only 29, Danticat has plenty of time to achieve her considerable potential. But overpraising her work won't help her get there."

Cryer seemed to be alone in his opinion, however, as other critics praised the work. "No antiseptic, nothing for the pain, just the serrated slice of her words," wrote Christopher John Farley in *Time,* ". . .every chapter cuts deep, and you feel it." Farley also remarked that Danticat's prose "never turns purple, never spins wildly into the fantastic, always remains focused. . .[and] uncovers moments of raw humanness." Scott Adlerberg, in the *Richmond Review,* praised *The Farming of Bones* as an "indelible work of art," remarking on Danticat's "effortless style" and "simple but sensual language [that] brings her tropical world to life; one can feel the heat, see the luxuriant colors, taste the spicy foods. . .Amabelle is a flesh and blood woman. . .we share in her joys and sorrows, her dreams, memories, and day-to-day struggles." In *Newsweek,* Sarah Van Boven cited Danticat's beginning the book with the birth of a wealthy child, while the true hero is the servant girl Amabelle, as one of many "masterful inversions" in the book; among others,

she noted, "joyful reunions turn hollow, damnation masquerades as salvation, big questions are met with a silence more profound than any answer."

As Van Boven suggests, Danticat does not provide any neat conclusion, moral lesson, or encompassing answer to the horrific events that take place in the novel. Sebastien, who is named in the first line of the book ("His name is Sebastien Onius"), soon disappears and is never seen again, and his fate is uncertain—he's presumed killed, but Amabelle, and readers, never have the satisfaction of knowing exactly what became of him. Amabelle herself, by the end of the book, is still grieving, still alone, deeply scarred by the genocide—and she always will be. Nothing in the book is predictable except that inevitably, pain and sorrow will enter everyone's life. A *Publishers Weekly* reviewer noted that when violence does erupt in the book, the story develops the "unflinching clarity" of a documentary. The review also praised Danticat's realistic characterizations, the dignity of the people described, and her "lushly poetic and erotic, specifically detailed" prose. Calvin Wilson, in *The Kansas City Star,* wrote, "There's little doubt that, at a time when some writers gain attention simply by emphasizing the glib, the trendy and the superficial, Danticat will continue to create works of enduring weight."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Kelly Winters is a freelance writer. She has written for a wide variety of academic and educational publishers. In the following essay, she discusses themes of remembrance, racism, and hope in The Farming of Bones*.*

In her afterword to *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat writes:

> In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle is similarly obsessed with the loss of the past, and the unrecorded or forgotten stories of thousands of lives cut short or stunted. Even before the slaughter, she ritualistically tells herself the story of her parents' drowning, keeping alive every word and gesture; but she realizes that the older she gets, the more her memories of them are fading. At the end of the book she knows, painful though it is, that her memories of her lost lover Sebastien will fade in the same way.

She is not the only one who believes in the importance of stories and memory. The Haitians in the book share their stories, and Amabelle com ments: "This was how people left imprints of themselves in each other's memory, so that if you left first and went back to the common village, you could carry, if not a letter, a piece of treasured clothing, some message to their loved ones that their place was still among the living."

Later, after the slaughter, in a refugee camp run by nuns, the survivors call out their stories, testifying to what they have seen, telling tales of wanton killing and destruction. Desperate to tell what happened to them, they interrupt each other, "the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words. . .One could hear it in the fervor of the declarations, the obscenities shouted when something could not be remembered fast enough, when a stutter allowed another speaker to race into his own account without the stutterer having completed his."

Later, she hears that the government supposedly will give reparation money to the survivors of the massacre and record their stories. Amabelle and Yves go to see the Justice of the Peace and tell about their experiences, and find over a thousand other people waiting. They wait for several days, and in the end, find that their story will not be recorded and no money will be paid; the government simply does not have the resources to deal with everyone who was affected. Amabelle and Yves are more upset by the fact that no one will listen to them than by the loss of money: money disappears, but stories, if recorded, endure forever.

But, as they see, listening and recording all this suffering is an arduous and painful task; even when Amabelle goes to visit the priests of the cathedral, they tell her that they too have stopped listening to the survivors' tales, since they can do nothing to bring back those who have died or to change the suffering that people have already experienced.

"It was taking all our time, and there is so much other work to be done," one priest tells her. He is focusing on the future, not the past, an act that Amabelle later realizes is the only thing that can be done.

The only way to reconcile these two conflicting urges—to constantly keep the past alive, and to move beyond it into the future—is to record the past in a safe place, somewhere outside an individual's memory, some place where facts will remain and not fade, but where the person won't have to carry the memory daily. Amabelle says, "The slaughter is the only thing that is mine enough to pass on. All I want to do is to find a place to lay it down now and again, a safe nest where it will neither be scattered by the winds, nor remain forever buried beneath the sod."

That safe place, Danticat invites readers to say, is this book.

In addition, *The Farming of Bones*, in telling the stories of so many ordinary people whose lives were disrupted or destroyed, tells us that this could happen to anyone. No one is safe from disaster, grief, or pain. Even before the genocide, many people have been uprooted by a hurricane that devastated the island. Amabelle's parents die on a routine marketing trip across the river. Throughout the book, Danticat makes clear that everyone is born to suffer and that no one can afford to be complacent.

This applies especially to the beaten-down workers in the cane fields, but also to the wealthier, more established Haitians, the ones who don't have to work in the cane fields, but have houses made of wood or cement, with metal roofs, beautiful gardens, and fruit trees. "We all regarded them as people who have their destinies in hand," Danticat says, but when the genocide begins, it's clear that they don't, that in fact there is no difference between their fates and those of the poor laborers. Even before the slaughter, some of these people begin to realize that the Dominicans regard them as alien and unwanted, that they don't have Dominican identification or birth certificates, and that they could be pushed out of their settled existence at any time. People begin telling stories of poor Haitians who have been killed. As Amabelle notes, "Poor Dominican peasants had been asked to catch Haitians and bring them to the soldiers. Why not the rich ones too?"

And Danticat doesn't stop there. She makes it clear that no one—not even the Dominicans—is exempt from suffering. Some Dominicans are slaughtered or injured, as the killers mistake them for Haitians. Even for those who are not attacked, the changes wrought by the massacre are so far-reaching and all-encompassing that when Amabelle revisits her Dominican neighborhood, nothing there is recognizable. Haciendas have been transformed into guarded fortresses surrounded by walls topped with broken glass and metal spikes; the landscape is so changed that she can't find her old home, and the people are so changed that she sees no one she recognizes, and no one recognizes her until she tells the story of her parents' drowning.

As a man who was shot and left to die in a pit full of dead bodies says, "It is no different, the flesh, than fruit or anything that rots. It's not magic, not holy. It can shrink, burn, and like amber it can melt in fire. It is nothing. We are nothing."

This existential despair touches everyone, Dominican and Haitian—after all, the division between the two nations is false, an arbitrary marker—the river—and both sides suffer. They share the same island, Hispaniola. This false division and misplaced hatred is made apparent in Pico Duarte, the racist military officer, whose wife has twin children. One is "coconut-cream colored, his cheeks and forehead the blush pink of water lilies." The other is "a deep bronze, between the colors of tan Brazil nut shells and black salsify," and this child's grandfather remarks that she got her color from Duarte's side of the family. There is no such thing as racial purity, and the island cannot be neatly divided into two sides, one white, one black. Both sides are a mix of many skin colors and many heritages; in hating people of African descent, Duarte must also hate himself and his child. Each time he sees the baby, he displays a "stinging expression of disfavor growing more and more pronounced. . .each time he laid eyes on her," despite the fact that she looks like him.

In the same way, Danticat points out, there is also no such thing as moral purity. Most of the characters are guilty of many sins: Amabelle murders another refugee and shows little remorse, brushing it off as something she had to do in order to survive; Man Rapadou, a respectable matriarch, reveals that she killed her own husband to prevent him from becoming a spy; Kongo, the honorable old carpenter, reveals a senseless prejudice against a perfectly good woman simply because her grandfather once stole a hen, and he fears that thievery is in her blood; the refugee Tibon tells Amabelle that when he was ten, he almost killed a Dominican boy simply to make him say that even if he lived in a big house, he was no better than Tibon was. Sebastien seems to understand this complexity of the human heritage, both physically and spiritually; as he strokes Amabelle's skin, he tells her he sees "all the shades of black in you, what we see and what we don't see, the good and the bad."

In the same way that some Haitians are capable of evil acts, some of the Dominicans are capable of good. Some pity the Haitians instead of hating them, and others hide them from the killing mobs. Valencia in particular hides many refugees, even though her husband is involved in the slaughter. She does this out of remembrance and friendship for Amabelle, whom she grew up with, and whom she believes is dead.

So how, Amabelle and others in the book ask, can one escape this feeling of existential despair and fear? The only way out of suffering, Danticat shows, is not to forget the past, but at the same time, to renew one's relationship with the flow of life. Father Romain, who is tortured and brainwashed by the Dominicans so severely that he becomes insane, is eventually healed—not by the church, but because he marries and has three children. Holding their lives against his heart, loving his wife, he finds something to live for, despite his grief for all those who were lost. He has acknowledged the loss, but is now more invested in the future. We have to let go and go on, his healing shows.

Amabelle also learns this lesson at the end of the book, when she goes to the river, thinking that if she visits it enough—the site of her parents' deaths, and the massacre—that she will find some answers to the questions that torment her: why people die, why people suffer, why she has survived. In the end, she realizes, nature

has no answers, but she literally lies down in the river, surrendering herself to its flow, "looking for the dawn," in faith that someday, she will be at peace.

It's a lesson Danticat knows well, as she wrote in *Kreyol.* When she visited the river in 1995, and saw no sign of the slaughter, her hope for the future was renewed by the sight of people from both sides□Dominicans and Haitians□washing and fishing in the water. To her, they seemed to be "part of a meaningful celebration. Not only of the continual flow of a boundless body of water, but essentially of the resilience of life itself."

Source: Kelly Winters, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students,* Gale, 2000.

Critical Essay #2

In the following review of Danticat's The Farming of Bones*, Dean Peerman characterizes the author's work as a distinctive and poetic blend of fully realized characters, seamlessly interweaving history, politics, and fiction in a compelling manner.*

"El Corte," the cutting, it was called□a euphemism akin to "ethnic cleansing." It was one of the worst massacres of modern times, though much of the world seems to have forgotten about it. It took place in the Dominican Republic in 1937. Raphael Trujillo, a military leader and former sugar plantation guard (and former hoodlum) who had been trained by U.S. Marines during the 1916-1924 U.S. occupation of his country, managed to get himself elected president in 1930 (there were more votes than eligible voters). Seven years into his rule, Trujillo secretly ordered the killing of thousands of immigrants□most of them sugarcane cutters□from Haiti, the country with which the DR shares the island of Hispaniola. In his view, the Haitians, whom he considered inferior beings, had simply become too numerous. The military police were instructed to use machetes in their murdering, in the hope of putting the blame on civilians. Some Haitians were given a choice, however, of jumping off a high cliff rather than being hacked to death.

The novel *The Farming of Bones*, by Haitian- American writer Edwidge Danticat, is set in that terrible time, but while politics, race and class are among its subjects, it is far from being an ideological tract. Danticat writes a poetic, evocative prose that is replete with vivid human details, and her characters are distinctive, fully realized individuals. In this work, history and fiction are interwoven in a seamless and compelling fashion.

Amabelle Desir, the novel's Haitian-born narrator, is a servant in the home of a prominent Dominican family□a family that has raised her since the age of eight, following her parents' death by drowning (an event she observed helplessly from the riverbank). When Senora Valencia, the mistress of the house, is about to give birth, Amabelle unexpectedly has to serve as midwife. The senora has twins□a boy, who shortly dies, and a dark-skinned daughter. At one point she says to Amabelle□in words she no doubt thinks are inoffensive: "Do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now? My poor love, what if she's mistaken for one of your people?" Senor Pico, the twins' father, a colonel in service to "the Generalissimo" (as Trujillo is referred to through out), cannot bear even to look at his swarthy daughter after her twin brother dies.

Mature for her 25 years and remarkably confi- dent despite her servant status, Amabelle allows herself to show a more tender and vulnerable side only in the presence of her lover, a canecutter named Sebastien Onius. When the crackdown comes and Amabelle and Sebastien realize they must flee for their lives, circumstances separate the two, and Sebastien is arrested (by Senor Pico, we learn much later) along with Father Romain, a liberal priest who had arranged to smuggle a group to Haiti. Eventually Amabelle finds out that Sebastien has been executed. She and Sebastien's friend Yves do manage to escape, and after a harrowing odyssey (including a near-fatal ordeal that leaves

Amabelle disfigured) they finally reach Haiti. Amabelle survives, working as a seamstress, but she never marries, and she remains troubled by her painful memories. At age 50□after the Generalissimo has been assassinated□ she returns to visit the senora, but communication is awkward and difficult between them after so many years. The senora tries to apologize□and make excuses□for her husband's role in "El Corte.

" Danticat's semiautobiographical first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, was an impressive debut, but *The Farming of Bones* is a richer work, haunting and heartwrenching.

Tensions continue between the Dominican Republic and its much poorer and culturally different neighbor. Just last year, for example, at least 14,000 Haitians were repatriated in many cases minus possessions and paycheck. One faint sign of hope: also last year, direct mail service was established between the two countries; previously mail between them had to be routed by way of Miami.

Source: Dean Peerman, "Bookmarks," (book review), in *The Christian Century,* Vol. 116, Issue 25, September 22, 1999, p. 885.

Critical Essay #3

In this brief review of Danticat's The Farming of Bones*, Jacqueline Brice-Finch gives the reader an overview of Danticat's memorialization of the genocide of Haitian immigrants as framed by a love story between two Haitians involved in the political machinations of their times.*

Readers of Caribbean literature are no strangers to the harsh conditions of the cane field, particularly in the French Antilles during the early twentieth century. Joseph Zobel in *La Rue Cases-Negres* (1950; *Black Shack Alley*) and Simone Schwarz-Bart in *Pluie et vent sur Telumee Miracle* (1972; *The Bridge of the Beyond*) graphically related the degradation that workers endured to eke out a subsistence living. However, it is the second novel by Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones,* which is the focus of another aspect of the history of cane workers, the massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic in 1937.

Due to a growing xenophobia under the rule of Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, the Dominicans were told:

> Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? They once came here only to cut sugarcane, but now there are more of them than there will ever be cane to cut, you understand? Our problem is one of dominion. . . . Those of us who love our country are taking measures to keep it our own.

Thus, a wave of genocide which decimates the Haitian emigre population is justified. What is striking about this historical fact is how relevant the situation is to current immigrant backlash in many countries around the world. While the workers were initially welcomed to build or to create a thriving infrastructure, they become an encumbrance when they choose to stay in the host country. This story of emigres is particularly revolting because the slavelike conditions endured by the Haitians are imposed on them by their neighbors sharing the island of Hispaniola. Danticat is careful to illumine just how perverse is the prejudice. Color is not the determinant, for the melanin is apparent in both groups. Only language separates these people. For example, while Dominicans could trill the r in parsley, in response to the question "¿Que diga perejil?," many Haitians could only voice "pewegil." Thus, when Trujillo ordered their roundup, Haitians would be spared if they "knew as well how to say the Spanish 'pesi' as to say the French 'perejil.'"

The Farming of Bones is a stark reminder of the massacre as well as a tribute to the valor of those Haitians who escaped the terror. The love story of Amabelle Desir and Sebastien Onius frames the novel. After her parents drown, Amabelle becomes a maid to the Dominican officer Pico Duarte and his wife. Sebastien, her Haitian lover, works in the Duarte cane field. During the roundup, Amabelle manages to escape, but Sebastien dies, presumably shot by Duarte's regiment. Many of the pursued are forced by soldiers

to jump from cliffs; others face being beheaded or beaten to death by civilian thugs before reaching their homeland.

While Danticat's novel is a searing indictment of Dominican barbarism, the Haitian government also merits some censure. In the aftermath, Haitian President Stenio Vincent dispatched government officials to various sites only to record the testimonies of victims and to give them stipends. The citizens wondered why the Haitian government did not avenge the slaughter of its people. By writing her vivid account, Danticat memorializes this farming of human bones and all those "nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air."

Source: Jacqueline Brice-Finch, "Haiti," (book review) in *World Literature Today,* Vol. 73, Issue 2, Spring, 1999, p. 373.

Topics for Further Study

Research the 1937 massacre of Haitians by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo and compare it to more recent ethnic genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia.

Choose another dictator, such as Adolf Hitler or Haitian leader Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, and compare him to Rafael Trujillo. What methods did these men use to gain and keep control over their countries?

Investigate the hurricane of 1931 and the damage it caused in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Other than destruction of property, what longterm effects did the storm have on the economy, society, and culture of these countries?

Consider the society you live in. Is there any evidence that a dictator like Trujillo could come to power in your own culture?

What Do I Read Next?

Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* is a collection of short stories set in Haiti. The title comes from a traditional Haitian custom of listeners asking "Krik?" before a story is told. The teller answers "Krak" and begins the tale.

Breath, Eyes, Memory, also by Danticat, tells the story of a twelve-year-old Haitian girl, raised by an aunt, who comes to the United States and is reunited with her mother for the first time since infancy.

Trujillo: The Death of the Dictator, by Bernard Diederich, documents Trujillo's ascension to power, rule over the Dominican Republic, and assassination.

Philip Gourevitch's *We Regret to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families* is a collection of harrowing first-person accounts of the genocide in Rwanda.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and

undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LDNfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literature of Developing Nations for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LDNfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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