

# the farming of bones by edwidge danticat

**the farming of bones by edwidge danticat** is a powerful historical novel that explores themes of memory, trauma, and identity against the backdrop of the 1937 Parsley Massacre. Written by Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat, the book delves into the complex relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic through the eyes of its protagonist, Amabelle Desir. This novel is renowned for its lyrical prose and its unflinching portrayal of the atrocities that occurred during a dark chapter in Caribbean history. In this article, the farming of bones by edwidge danticat will be examined through its historical context, thematic elements, character analysis, and literary significance. Additionally, the narrative style and reception of the novel will be discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of its impact. This detailed exploration will assist readers and scholars alike in appreciating the depth and importance of Danticat's work.

- Historical Context of the Novel
- Thematic Elements in the Farming of Bones
- Character Analysis
- Narrative Style and Literary Techniques
- Reception and Critical Analysis

## Historical Context of the Novel

The farming of bones by edwidge danticat is deeply rooted in the historical events surrounding the 1937 Parsley Massacre, also known as El Corte. This massacre was a brutal campaign ordered by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, targeting Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent living in the border regions of the Dominican Republic. The novel provides a fictional yet historically informed account that brings attention to this often overlooked atrocity.

## Background of the Parsley Massacre

The Parsley Massacre occurred in October 1937 when Trujillo's regime sought to enforce strict racial and nationalistic policies by eliminating Haitians perceived as threats to Dominican sovereignty. The name "Parsley Massacre" derives from the use of the Spanish word "perejil" (parsley) as a linguistic test to identify Haitians, who often struggled to pronounce the Spanish "r" sound. Victims were executed based on

their inability to correctly pronounce the word, resulting in the death of an estimated 20,000 Haitian men, women, and children.

## **Haiti-Dominican Republic Relations**

The novel situates this massacre within the larger historical context of the fraught relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. These two nations share the island of Hispaniola but have distinct colonial histories, languages, and cultures, often marked by tension and conflict. Danticat's narrative highlights the legacy of colonialism, racial discrimination, and political instability that fueled the violence depicted in the novel.

## **Thematic Elements in the Farming of Bones**

Central to the farming of bones by Edwidge Danticat are themes of memory, trauma, identity, and survival. The novel investigates how individuals and communities cope with the aftermath of violence and loss. These themes are intricately woven throughout the story, enhancing its emotional and historical resonance.

## **Memory and Trauma**

The novel explores the enduring impact of trauma on both personal and collective memories. Amabelle, the protagonist, grapples with the psychological scars left by the massacre, illustrating how memory serves as both a source of pain and a means of preserving history. The narrative demonstrates that confronting the past is essential to healing and justice.

## **Identity and Displacement**

Identity is a complex and fluid concept in the novel, shaped by nationality, race, and personal experience. Amabelle's Haitian heritage and her life in the Dominican Republic place her at the intersection of cultural and political tensions. The farming of bones by Edwidge Danticat addresses themes of displacement and the search for belonging amid upheaval.

## **Survival and Resilience**

Despite the harrowing events depicted, the novel embodies the resilience of its characters and communities. Survival is portrayed not only as physical endurance but also as the ability to maintain dignity, hope, and humanity in the face of systemic violence and oppression.

# Character Analysis

The farming of bones by Edwidge Danticat features complex characters whose development enriches the narrative and underscores its themes. The protagonist, Amabelle Desir, serves as the emotional and moral center of the story.

## Amabelle Desir

Amabelle is a Haitian woman working as a housekeeper for a wealthy Dominican family. Her personal history and experiences during the massacre provide readers with an intimate perspective on the events. Amabelle's resilience, introspection, and quest for justice drive the plot forward and evoke empathy.

## Other Key Characters

The novel also includes significant secondary characters who represent various facets of the historical and social context. These include Amabelle's lover, Sebastien Onius, whose relationship with her introduces themes of love and betrayal, and the members of Trujillo's regime, who embody the oppressive forces at work.

- **Sebastien Onius:** Amabelle's lover, whose fate intertwines with hers in the tragedy.
- **Valentina Allegra de Fontaine:** Symbolic representation of political power.
- **Trujillo's soldiers:** Agents of violence and fear.

## Narrative Style and Literary Techniques

Edwidge Danticat employs a lyrical and evocative narrative style in *The Farming of Bones*, combining poetic language with stark realism. This stylistic approach enhances the emotional depth and historical authenticity of the novel.

## Use of Language and Imagery

Danticat's prose is noted for its vivid imagery and sensory detail. The language captures the beauty and brutality of the Caribbean landscape while conveying the psychological states of the characters. Symbolism and metaphor are used extensively to deepen the reader's engagement with the themes.

## Structure and Point of View

The novel is primarily narrated from Amabelle's first-person perspective, which allows for an intimate exploration of her thoughts and feelings. The non-linear structure, with flashbacks and fragmented memories, reflects the nature of trauma and the process of remembering.

## Reception and Critical Analysis

The Farming of Bones by Edwidge Danticat has been widely acclaimed for its literary merit and historical significance. It has contributed to increased awareness of the Parsley Massacre and has been studied extensively in academic circles.

## Critical Acclaim

Critics have praised the novel for its compelling narrative, nuanced characters, and its successful blending of history and fiction. Danticat's work is recognized for giving voice to marginalized histories and for its contribution to Caribbean literature and postcolonial studies.

## Impact on Readers and Scholarship

The novel has had a profound impact on readers by humanizing a historical tragedy often ignored in mainstream discourse. It serves as a vital resource in educational settings and has sparked discussions on themes of memory, justice, and reconciliation.

1. Heightened awareness of Haitian-Dominican history
2. Encouragement of dialogue on racial and national identity
3. Inspiration for further literary and historical research

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the main theme of 'The Farming of Bones' by Edwidge Danticat?

'The Farming of Bones' primarily explores the themes of memory, trauma, and the impact of the 1937 Parsley Massacre on the Dominican Republic and Haitian communities.

## **Who is the protagonist in 'The Farming of Bones' and what is her significance?**

The protagonist is Amabelle Desir, a Haitian woman working as a maid in the Dominican Republic. Her story highlights the experiences of Haitian immigrants and the horrors they faced during the Parsley Massacre.

## **How does Edwidge Danticat portray the historical context in 'The Farming of Bones'?**

Danticat vividly portrays the historical context through detailed descriptions of the cultural tensions, racial violence, and political oppression leading up to and during the 1937 massacre.

## **What role does memory play in 'The Farming of Bones'?**

Memory serves as a crucial element for preserving the history and personal trauma of the characters, allowing them to process grief and ensure that the atrocities are not forgotten.

## **How does 'The Farming of Bones' address issues of identity and belonging?**

The novel explores identity and belonging by depicting the struggles of Haitian immigrants caught between two cultures and facing discrimination, highlighting themes of displacement and resilience.

## **Why is 'The Farming of Bones' considered an important work in Caribbean literature?**

'The Farming of Bones' is significant for its powerful narrative on a lesser-known historical atrocity, its exploration of Haitian-Dominican relations, and its contribution to discussions on memory, identity, and human rights in Caribbean literature.

## **Additional Resources**

### *1. The Farming of Bones by Edwidge Danticat*

This novel tells the harrowing story of Amabelle, a young Haitian woman working as a servant in the Dominican Republic during the 1937 massacre of Haitians ordered by the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo. The book explores themes of memory, trauma, and the complex relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Danticat's lyrical prose captures the resilience of her characters amid brutal historical realities.

2. *Blessed Are the Dead* by Edwidge Danticat

A collection of short stories that delve into the lives of Haitian and Haitian-American characters, exploring themes of exile, identity, and loss. The stories offer intimate glimpses into personal and political struggles, much like those in *The Farming of Bones*. Danticat's evocative storytelling highlights the endurance of the human spirit in the face of suffering.

3. *In the Time of the Butterflies* by Julia Alvarez

This historical novel recounts the true story of the Mirabal sisters, who opposed the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. It shares with *The Farming of Bones* a setting in the Dominican Republic and themes of political violence and resistance. Alvarez's narrative shines a light on courage and sacrifice during oppressive regimes.

4. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz

A novel that explores the Dominican-American experience, mixing magical realism and historical context, including the legacy of Trujillo's dictatorship. It parallels *The Farming of Bones* in its exploration of Dominican history and the impact on personal and collective identity. Díaz's energetic and innovative style brings history to vivid life.

5. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat

This debut novel follows Sophie, a Haitian girl growing up between Haiti and the United States, grappling with trauma and cultural identity. Like *The Farming of Bones*, it examines the effects of personal and historical pain on women's lives. Danticat's compassionate narrative probes the intersections of memory, family, and healing.

6. *The Dew Breaker* by Edwidge Danticat

A collection of linked stories about a former Haitian torturer and his family, exploring themes of violence, guilt, and redemption. This work, like *The Farming of Bones*, confronts the aftermath of political brutality and its impact on survivors and perpetrators. Danticat's nuanced characters illuminate the complexities of history and memory.

7. *The Last Night of the Earth Poems* by Charles Simic

While not directly related to Haitian or Dominican history, Simic's poetry collection captures themes of war, loss, and human endurance that resonate with the tone of *The Farming of Bones*. His haunting and surreal imagery evokes the emotional landscape of trauma and survival. The collection offers a poetic complement to narratives of historical violence.

8. *What Is the What* by Dave Eggers

This novel is based on the true story of Valentino Achak Deng, a Sudanese refugee who survives civil war and displacement. It shares with *The Farming of Bones* a focus on the human cost of political conflict and the struggle for survival and dignity. Eggers' compelling storytelling brings attention to global issues of violence and migration.

9. *América Central* by Edwidge Danticat

A short story collection that explores the lives of Haitian immigrants and their descendants in the United States, dealing with themes of displacement, identity, and cultural memory. Like *The Farming of Bones*, it delves into the Haitian experience and the enduring effects of history on individuals and communities. Danticat's poignant narratives reveal the complexities of belonging and loss.

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