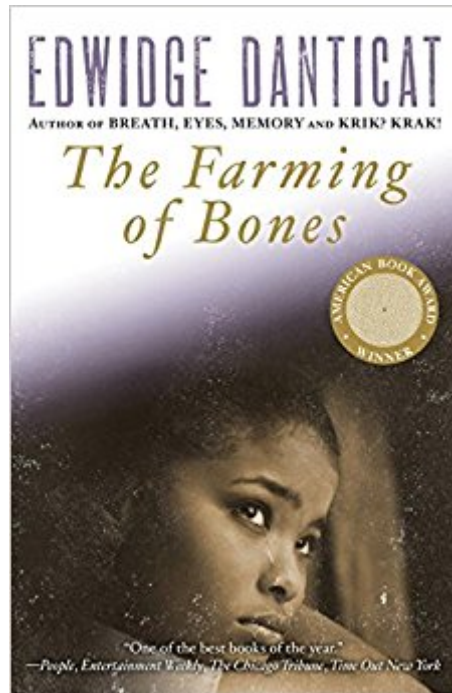




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# The Farming Of Bones



## Synopsis

It is 1937 and Amabelle Desir, a young Haitian woman living in the Dominican Republic, has built herself a life as the servant and companion of the wife of a wealthy colonel. She and Sebastien, a cane worker, are deeply in love and plan to marry. But Amabelle's world collapses when a wave of genocidal violence, driven by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, leads to the slaughter of Haitian workers. Amabelle and Sebastien are separated, and she desperately flees the tide of violence for a Haiti she barely remembers. Already acknowledged as a classic, this harrowing story of love and survival is from one of the most important voices of her generation is an unforgettable memorial to the victims of the Parsley Massacre and a testimony to the power of human memory.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In a 1930s Dominican Republic village, the scream of a woman in labor rings out like the shot heard around Hispaniola. Every detail of the birth scene--the balance of power between the middle-aged Seïra and her Haitian maid, the babies' skin color, not to mention which child is to survive--reverberates throughout Edwidge Danticat's *Fathering of Bones*. In fact, rather than a celebration of fecundity, the unexpected double delivery gels into a metaphor for the military-sponsored mass murder of Haitian emigrants. As the Seïra's doctor explains: "Many of us start out as twins in the belly and do away with the other." But Danticat's powerful second novel is far from a currently modish victimization saga, and can hold its own with such modern classics as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Color Purple*. Its watchful narrator, the

SeÃfÃ ora's shy Haitian housemaid, describes herself as "one of those sea stones that sucks its colors inside and loses its translucence once it's taken out into the sun." An astute observer of human character, Amabelle DÃfÃsir is also a conduit for the author's tart, poetic prose. Her lover, Sebastian, has "arms as wide as one of my bare thighs," while the SeÃfÃ ora's complicit officer husband is "still shorter than the average man, even in his military boots." The orphaned Amabelle comes to assume almost messianic proportions, but she is entirely fictional, as is the town of AlegrÃfÃ- a where the tale begins. The genocide and exodus, however, are factual. Indeed, the atrocities committed by Dominican president Rafael Trujillo's army back in 1937 rival those of Duvalier's Touton Macoutes. History has rendered Trujillo's carnage much less visible than Duvalier's, but no less painful. As Amabelle's father once told her, "Misery won't touch you gentle. It always leaves its thumbprints on you; sometimes it leaves them for others to see, sometimes for nobody but you to know of." Thanks to Danticat's stellar novel, the world will now know. --Jean Lenihan --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

The almost dreamlike pace of Danticat's second novel (*Breath, Eyes, Memory*, 1994) and the measured narration by the protagonist, Amabelle Desir, at first give no indication that this will be a story of furious violence and nearly unbearable loss. The setting, the Dominican Republic in 1937, when dictator Trujillo was beginning his policy of genocide, is a clue, however, to the events that Amabelle relates. She and her lover, Sebastien Onius, are Haitians who have crossed the border. Amabelle is a servant to a patrician family, while Sebastien endures the brutal conditions of work in the cane fields. The lovers each have poignant memories of parental deaths, and other deaths enter the narrative early, subtly presaging the slaughter that is to come. Haitians in the DR, always regarded as foreigners, are "an orphaned people, a group of vwayaje, wayfarers." When a military-led assault against them does erupt, it is a surprise, however, and as Amabelle barely survives a massacre by soldiers and an equally bloodthirsty civilian population, the narrative acquires the unflinching clarity of a documentary. In addition to illuminating a shameful, little known chapter of history, Danticat gives us fully realized characters who endure their lives with dignity, a sensuously atmospheric setting and a perfectly paced narrative written in prose that is lushly poetic and erotic, specifically detailed (the Haitians were betrayed by their inability to pronounce "parsley") and starkly realistic. While this novel is deeply sad, it is infused with Danticat's fierce need to bear witness, coupled with a knowledge that "life can be a strange gift" even when memory makes endurance a difficult task. 50,000 first printing; first serial to VLS; QPB selection; rights sold in U.K., Germany, Spain, Holland, Denmark and Finland; paperback rights to Penguin; author

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The range of Haitian literature is considerably limited, and primarily consists of books by "outsiders" (those not of Haitian blood who have not lived there for any considerable length of time), and books by Haitian immigrants, with a smattering of poetry and transcribed stories and memoirs preserved from Haiti proper. Danticat writes one of the most lovely portrayals of the dynamics between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which share an island and have engaged in conflict since before the independence of Haiti. The author is able to paint a picture that does not seem to me to take sides, but simply states the reality of what happened through the fictional lives of the characters. I am interested in the way that the relationships between the Haitians and Dominicans are not always strained, and sometimes are extremely close, but those relationships are challenged in the middle of the political strains. I highly recommend this book for those who appreciate good historical fiction, and those who are interested in Haiti and relations in the Caribbean, as well as those interested in literary contributions from the minority and immigrant populations of the U.S.

I will be glad to hear how my fellow book club members liked this book. I thought that the writing was pretty good really, but reading all of this book was a chore. The narrative was a real downer. I had a certain admiration for the narrator, in that she grimly soldiered on toward the grim end. It may be that there was more in the novel than I found. I look forward to what others have to say.

This was an amazing, well-written story. And for me very eye opening. A must read!

Sad, but stunningly beautiful, *FARMING OF THE BONES* is a powerfully written evocative account of the horror of the genocide committed in 1937 against poor Haitian cane workers and others by the Dominican General Rafael Trujillo. Through the voice of a young orphaned Haitian woman, Amabelle Desir, we follow the lives of desperate Haitian exiles working the Dominican cane fields in deplorable conditions with paltry wages and sparse living conditions. Danticat is a master storyteller and her prose lifts and carries, even as the atrocities of what she is telling unfold on the page. She travels a very painful path with humbling grace. She allows the reader to witness grave injustices while keeping them safely wrapped in her beautiful and poignant prose. Dreaming... remembering...and family are strong elements which serve to enrich the story and draw the reader in as the reality of the despair becomes readily apparent. Trujillo wants to 'whiten' his populace and

thus begins the recounting of an unimaginable and shocking ethnic cleansing. Towards the end of the novel, a man says "Famous men never truly die... It is only those nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke in the early morning air." ...on the island which Haiti and The Dominican Republic share. Through the eyes of the narrator, Amabelle working as a maid in the Dominican Republic, we see scores of Haitians cruelly massacred. None of those killed is anyone famous, nearly all the slaughtered are poor Haitians working as cheap labor in the neighboring country, but Amabelle's story serves to refute those words spoken about the nameless and faceless of the earth. In this book, they are remembered, and in her story they do have names and faces.

Historical fiction examining the 1937 genocidal attacks on the Haitian citizens living in the Dominican Republic. The story is well crafted, includes a lot of poetic language, and maintains a credible examination of the historical era. While reading the story, I learned a lot about a historical event.

This book is absolutely beautiful, intense, emotional, and a must read. Danticat opens your eyes to the world of Haïti and the Dominican Republic. At times, it can be hard to get through, for the sheer shock of it all, but it definitely is worth it!

I had to read this book for my college class and I can thoroughly say that I enjoyed it. It opened my eyes on a new subject in an unfamiliar time that I never would have known existed had it not been for this book.

Amazing historical fiction book! A word of advice is look up the history and relations of haiti and dominican republic before reading this book. You will understand the situation and feelings between the people better. Not a happy read, but a awakening, shocking, and surprising one.

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