

THE FROWNING SUN

One day two years ago I was drunk and angrily fucked my boyfriend while the movie *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* played on ubuweb with the volume turned up loud. Eight months ago, that boyfriend found my subsequent boyfriend in bed with me and beat him severely in the head, screaming “You fucking rapist”. Now the former is married and the latter is far away.

While I was in Haiti, about five weeks ago, the man I referred to above as “my boyfriend,” “that boyfriend,” and “the former” got shot in the stomach by a neighbor in what the internet reported as a “dispute over a dog.” I hope he is alright and can continue to eat spicy foods, which he enjoys, and that his career of violence, like mine, is at an end.

In the days following Haiti’s earthquake, the subsequent boyfriend, a great poet whom I did not make happy, asserted that I ‘loved Haiti more than’ him. At the time this seemed unfair, but now I think that he was right. Once he told me that he saw me as someone drawn to the sore parts of the world and to the sources of pain in people and that I was a person who wanted to touch those places that hurt, and I think he was right about that too.

I have discovered that I cannot write about anything connected to Haiti without tracing the collapse of private trauma and a distant pain that not only does not belong to me but that I have no right to touch and that draws me to it anyway, and almost always welcomes me, and every once in a while does not welcome me.

Lately when I get close to people they want me to be close and to know the painful things and they want me to lay hand on them. Maybe this means I have the right. But still I stay bashful and shy, because my own appetite for suffering and for compassionate feeling requires vigilance, like all sentiments.

On the road called John Brown that runs through the Haitian capital there are craftspeople who work in metal and also make things out of brightly painted wood that you can hang on a wall. There are fish, mermaids, boats, angels with wings, men playing music, and many suns.

From John Brown, beyond the chainlink where the handicrafts are hung up, you can also see the sky and ocean and hillsides full of ruined buildings, so it took me a few weeks of going up and down it to notice that most of the painted suns for sale were frowning.

I asked my Haitian friends about the frowning sun and they laughed. What’s the deal with the frowning sun I said. The same thing as real life they said.

/// TWO PARAGRAPHS OF JOURNALISM

Food aid stopped around three months ago in the earthquake region. As far as I know water is still supplied, in limited fashion, to the tent camps by CARE. I saw a lot of very skinny babies. and very tired mothers. Vaginal infection, due to consumption of nonpotable water and inadequate sanitation, is rampant. It rains very hard when it rains, and hurricane season is just about here, and it is hard to be rained on when you live under plastic. Children do not have enough to eat. I was told by several medical workers that a whole generation will be stunted physically and mentally due to inadequate nutrition. Organized protest of Haiti's ineffectual and corrupt government happened nearly every day that I was there. Disorganized protest, in the form of eruptions of violence—men getting macheteed for infidelity, for example—as well as rape, are on the rise. Women absorb the responsibilities of civilization; their role as domestic laborers has become, in cities of dispossessed and homeless people, the single most powerful absorber of horror and transubstantiator of it into a lifegiving and generous force. The pride and dignity of people in their personal bearing becomes all the more important because everyone lives outside and everyone does not eat and drink enough and nearly everyone is without work and everyone is in mourning for their beloved, for their acquaintances, or homes, or for a ravaged world that was already pushed beyond all limits before January 12.

I am interested in Haiti because of the Vodou tradition, which is extremely beautiful, practical, and carries obvious power, and because of its revolutionary history, which positions Haiti as one of the most advanced nations on the planet, if not THE most advanced, for having abolished slavery sixty years before the United States dared to, for having rejected colonialism more than a hundred years before the twentieth century's wars against it would begin, and for having taken literally certain principles about liberty that much of the world still regards only as ideals.

/// READING

If you want to know about Haitian poetry, read Open Gate: An Anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry, edited by Paul Larague and translated by Jack Hirschman and Boadiba.

If you want to know about Vodou, read Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti by Maya Deren.

If you want to know about Haiti's revolution, the third democratic revolution in the world and the first successful rejection of slavery and colonialism ever, read The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution by C. L. R. James.

If you want to know in detail about the work I did in Haiti, along with other aspects of my private life, I have started putting fragments here: <http://arianareines.tumblr.com>.

If you are curious about books and literature in Haiti, I translated the list of titles that were released at Haiti's annual bookfair in an APPENDIX to this note.

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WHAT I DID (six more paragraphs that sound like journalism)

In March I worked with a trauma outreach team in Haiti's capital, spending every day with children and orphans outside a hospital. When I came back to the states I became obsessed with a modest idea of getting tents and shoes to the people I had gotten to know in Haiti, before hurricane season.

In April the artist Jorge Pardo offered me the use of his private plane to transport donated tents to a grassroots organization called the Haiti Response Coalition. Jorge's pilot, an extraordinary man named Armando Lewin, volunteered his time and expertise for the mission. We flew from Los Angeles to Midland Texas to Miami, where we filled the plane with 400 pounds of tents, and then to Port-au-Prince.

It is extremely inefficient and impractical to transport tents in a Cirrus plane. I didn't know this when I was organizing the project. Also, four hundred pounds of tents is not that much. I think I must have been insane to think this would be a reasonable way to do good on any scale at all, and I was insane enough to convince others this would be a useful thing to do. In any case, the plane had bad mechanical problems on its first run back to Miami from Port-au-Prince, where I had stayed behind. The engine cut out while Armando was flying over water, and then once it came back he had to fly over a thunderstorm and then a power surge cut out all of his instruments. Jorge ordered the plane and Armando back to LA for maintenance.

I had gotten myself back to Haiti in the most expensive and impractical way possible, had gotten tents to the Haiti Response Coalition and to the people I knew on a scale much smaller than I had intended, and then got myself stuck in the country (I admit that I wanted to get stuck there). I spent the rest of the month of May working with women and children in and around a tent camp where many of my Haitian friends live. I also helped move boxes of medical supplies for a scrappy, indefatigable, and tiny NGO called Materials Management Relief Corps, whose core members are superhuman, worked one-on-one with a teenage rape survivor, funneled as many maxi pads, diapers, and vitamins, to a women's group as I could, did movement therapy with orphans when I was lucky enough to walk among them, wrote, and began an initiation into Vodou.

If you are interested in Haiti, please support the Haitian-run grassroots organizations in the Haiti Response Coalition. Go to their site and learn what they do and then give them all of your money: <http://www.haitiresponsecoalition.org/>

Materials Management Relief Corps <http://www.mmrc-us.org/> are the supermen of medical supply logistics in the capital, and keep hospitals and orphanages stocked with what they most urgently need. They also transfer patients in emergencies, performing miracles such as transporting two women, both in labor in the back of a dented pickup truck, in the rain, down a mountain and to the hospital. Among many other things. They were kind enough to take me in for three weeks. Support them in any way you can. And read their blog: <http://sebringphotography.wordpress.com/>.

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APPENDIX

Because readers of this blog are, I think, readers of books, you should know that on June 3, Haiti's annual bookfair took place. For your sake, I have translated the ad for it, below. The titles, taken together, feel like a map to me. Only two titles were in Kreyol (Creole), and I left them that way, so you could feel it.

BOOKMANIA

16th Edition

Thursday June 3

BAYORO, Josette – Real Beauty

BERNARD, Joseph Junior – History of the Arab and Jewish Colonies of Haiti

BERTRAND, Michel G. – Karla

BIEN-AIMÉ, Kesler – Pieces of Emperor Jacques I (trinlingual edition)

BOISSON, Sabine -- Pirouli 12

Pirouli 13

BOYARD, James – The UN and Peacekeeping Operations

CADET, Pierre Josué Agénor – The Beautiful Gourgandine

CARRÉ, Jean-Claude – Breast Milk in Haiti: Contamination, Necessity, and Danger

CASIMIR, Bertrand – Messenger of Love

CHARLES, Christophe – Ten Vaudou Poems

Los juegos del amor [Love Games]

Mayilò

CHÉRY, Jacky – Youth and Wisdom

CHERY, Frédéric Gérald – State Action and Economy in Haiti

CORVINGTON, Georges – The National Palace of the Republic of Haiti

Port-au-Prince through the Years (The Contemporary City 1950-

1956) volume 8

DE ROME, Leo – Success... A State of Mind. The Art of Success

DESHO,ES, Fritz – Subcontracting and Minimum Wage

DOMOND, Grégory -- Issues in Information and Communications Technologies Volume

Two

DORET, Michel R. Ph. D. – Alienation in Haitian Poetry

Creole-French Lexicon (Lexique créole-français /Leksik

kreyòl-franse

FÉVRY, Osner Junior –Haiti is Not Cursed. January 12 Was Not a Punishment.

FÉVRY, Milet and REASON – Education for Change: The 5 Domains of Education in

Our Vision for a New Haiti

FRANÇOIS, Pierre Enocque – Educational Politics and Inequality in Scholastic

Opportunity in Haiti

FRANKETIENNE – Testamentary

Visa for Light

GERMAIN, Féguès – Benoît Batrville and the Caco Guerrilla Against the American

Occupation (1818-1920)

GILBERT, Myrtha – The Catastrophe Was Not Natural

GILOT, Rony (Dr.) – Memories: François Duvalier, Misunderstood

Memories: Jean-Claude Duvalier, or Captive Ingenuity

GOUSSE, BERNARD – Rural Code

JEUDI, Inema – Gouyad legede – Zile fou

JOLYBOIS, Woogens – A Good Meal. Collection of Poems
 LAFERRIÈRE, Dany – Everything’s Moving Around Me
 LAGUERRE, Alex – Memoir of Errant Souls
 LAROSILIÈRE, DANY – Everything Naked / Intimate Problems of Haitian Earth and
 Haitians Laid Bare
 LAUDUN DENIS, Micheline – Musical Garden 1 – Chicks
 LE NOUVELLISTE (daily newspaper) – 35 Seconds
 LOCHARD, Marcel – Using Excel
 LORQUET, Joël – Boukan dife literati
 MAGLOIRE, Lauture – François Duvalier / History in Parallel Spirals
 Haiti / God Was On His Throne Tuesday January 12 2010
 Become The Imitators Of God
 MANIGAT, Leslie F. -- Haiti’s Living History Vol. I (pocket edition)
 Haiti’s Living History Vol. II (pocket edition)
 Haiti’s Living History Vol. III (pocket edition)
 MANIGAT, Mirlande – The Cause for a New Constitution (new revised and augmented
 edition)
 MARS, Kettly – Savage Seasons
 MAXIME, Jean Miguelite – The Haitian Policeman’s Guide to Social Convention and State
 of Mind
 MICHEL, Georges (Dr.) – The 1987 Constitution:: The Declaration of Revision is
 Worthless
 MIDY, Clausel – Bizarre...Bizarre... Stories to Make You Think
 MOMBRUN, Teddy Kessler – Alain Possible and the Earthquake
 MYRTIL, Farell – Tuesday the 12 and its Acolytes
 ORCEL, Makenzy – The Dawn of the Crossings and other poems
 PÉRONO, Bettina – Children of the Devil
 SAINT-FLEUR, James – A Dream Under Lock and Key
 SUPPLICE, Daniel – On Naturalization
 TOUSSAINT, Jean-François / LOUIS, Jean Gounod / PIERRE, Jean Ricot – The Hell of
 Hollow Seasons
 TROUILLOT, Jocelyne – Goudougoudou*

(* note from Ariana: Goudougoudou is one of the epithets for the earthquake. I am told
 that is the sound it made. The earthquake is also commonly referred to as The Event.)