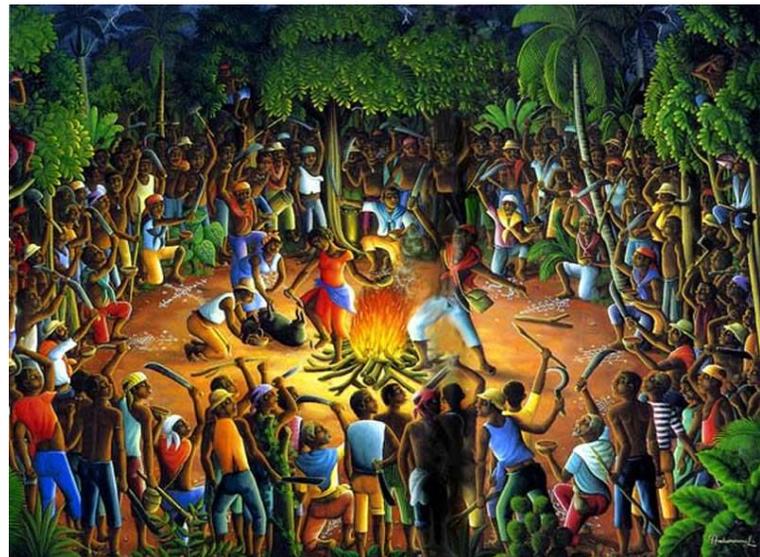




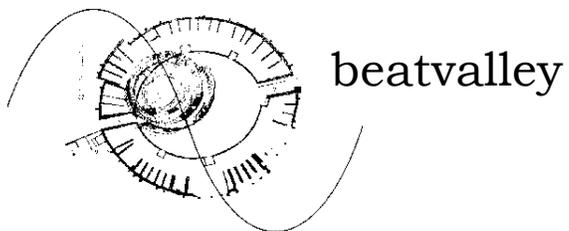
Cover artist unknown
Interior painting by January Suchodolski
Story by Lars Russell

©Beat Valley Press 2010
Member/Face Collective
Want more Beat Valley books?
beatvalley@gmail.com

The Devil & King Christophe



Lars Russell



Flower bundles are laid at the foot of an orange tree and the zombies stand around at their stations. When General Christophe signs to end the dancers, all clapping and the calabashes stop. The beads and talking drums fall silent. A negresse verte rubs the pig's neck with herbs, then splits its throat with a cane knife and spills the blood in a ring about the clearing

Christophe throws some ambergris in the fire, sending up a gleam of smokeless light, then draws out a string of spooky names and incantations:

CHRISTOPHE Azazel, Baphomet, Pluto...
The devil springs into the circle, in the outfit of one of the child soldiers. He wears a thin twine of moustache on his lip.

Unfathomably swiftly speeded,
Earth's pomp revolves in whirling flight,
As Eden's brightness is succeeded
By deep and dread-inspired night

—Goethe's "Faust", 1806

Evangelical broadcaster Pat Robertson says Haiti has been "cursed" because of what he called a "pact with the devil" in its history.

—Associated Press, January 13, 2010

CHRISTOPHE I'll say to Haiti: "Go, work hard."
DEVIL Yes, flatten mountains.
CHRISTOPHE Haiti shall see great movements of her earth. We'll drain the swamps, engineer the rivers...
DEVIL And harvest stone...
CHRISTOPHE ...turn the soil clod by clod. More farmsteads, and more. I see Haiti, thick in world currency, her men treated as equal in European courts. I see a bloom of educators and commerce, gifted black men writing letters. Science, and ingenuity. A revised version of heaven.
DEVIL I was thinking build a *giant* fortress...
*

Pétion...?

CHRISTOPHE Alright, alright. So what's the price of all of this?

DEVIL Just sign in blood. I'll be delightedly all yours, and serve your majesty, but when we meet again beyond, you do the same for me.

CHRISTOPHE (*Aside*) What we been through, when hell's on earth, what difference does it make if one's below or one's above?

He dots the parchment with a pricked finger

CHRISTOPHE It feels good now, doesn't it? I feel a beating like a drum. The tree of liberty grows again, just as L'Ouver-ture believed, now the roots are replen-ished with fresh blood. Forgive me devil,

this is a sublime moment! I scarce trusted I'd live to see Saint-Domingue's rebels freed of this diabolical machine.

DEVIL "Haïti's." But anyway, suit yourself, you're in the end just what you are! Put wigs on with a million locks and put your foot in Chinese socks, you still remain just what you are.

They start walking along a trail, where the sun is rising.

CHRISTOPHE What do you mean?

DEVIL (*Again twirling his little moustache*) The people of Haïti are a population that has no national conscience, only an agglomeration of tittle-tattle! As insurgents they are swell. But Haïti's enemy now is indolence. Her playfulness of spirit.

the flag-boy?

DEVIL (*Curving his moustache with a finger*) You trouble all this mumbo jumbo, Henri, then burn questions like tobacco. You like my red and gold attire? The lit-tle cloak. The rooster's feather in my hat....

CHRISTOPHE Now listen here, squirmy chap, I don't care if you'd stay for tea, or join your webby flock and fly to Ile à Vache. We're a hundred thousand murdered, starved. Toussaint dragged off to France. To liberate a rotten lot of sugar plants! If you're who you say—you're not holding up your part, is what I'm getting at.

DEVIL I'm not?

CHRISTOPHE Is this a joke?

DEVIL You were expecting *Tonton Macoute*? Maybe Rumpelstiltskin?

The zombi guards constrict on the boy, swords to his chin. But their machetes break into many pieces that crawl away as worms.

DEVIL I'm a *bad* man. I'm pretty!

CHRISTOPHE You can't mean—you are the demon?

DEVIL I'm part of the part that once was everything. I am the goat without horns. When the first wrong was done to the first Arawak, I was there. When the first slaver put out for Nigeria, I stood on her deck.

CHRISTOPHE But why show up as Sass,

When this land was last left alone its na-
 tables. Stinks of Europe's interference.
 DEVIL "Saint-Domingue"? Too many syl-
 scored *underneath his shoulder*) Branding?
 CHRISTOPHE (*Rubs a mark of puffy skin*
 of some re-branding.
 DEVIL First thing I see is you're in need
 mind?
 CHRISTOPHE What did you have in
 the cylinders all to pieces.
 there with the bolts and rods and take
 presto-change-o. We've got to get in
 thing up my sleeve, but it's still not
 sors. Order of operations. I've got some-
 out the other end. It's rock paper scis-
 one wrong corner, and all the air goes
 ditions so suspended, where, you grasp

tives called it *Hayti*.

CHRISTOPHE Didn't work so well for
 them, though.

DEVIL They didn't have me as their
 guide! Notice how an umlaut civilizes,
 makes a little crown above the word. I'll
 make you king, and be your chief advi-
 sor. We'll build a reservoir of power so
 well dammed, its waters flow on Haïti
 for centuries.

CHRISTOPHE Ridiculous. I can't be des-
 pot. I reject monarchy. Same as its sisters,
 slavery and tyranny.

DEVIL You want a sovereign nation or
 don't you? I need a strong executive
 or else my labor falls apart. Maybe
 Dessalines would rather, or Alexandre

The devil shrugs.
 hands and watch the royal tumble?
 CHRISTOPHE And after, you clap your
 slaves won your revolt. A deal's a deal.
 you over your white chastisers. You
 liberate your blacks from labor and lift
 my agreement made at Bois Caiman was
 DEVIL No offense to you and your lore,
 for another curse!
 in our hands, and growing. Not traded
 burn the fields. We bartered for freedom
 CHRISTOPHE To starve our enemy, we
 DEVIL I'm sensing buyers' remorse.
 we beat at the start.
 Frenchmen who cut the heads off French
 Today we run the jungles fighting

CHRISTOPHE Twelve years ago my peo-
 ple called on you for freedom. Today
 Saint-Domingue's up to her elbows in
 blood, with fighting, and every night we
 rest in a niche of skulls and skeletons
 and death.

DEVIL Go on.

CHRISTOPHE You promised victory over
 our tormentors! You promised glory!

DEVIL And did you not overthrow the
grands blancs?

CHRISTOPHE We did, and since we're
 overrun with conquerors.

DEVIL You knocked out the British. You
 threw back Spain.

CHRISTOPHE Like playing Whac-a-Mole!

DEVIL Only technically...

CHRISTOPHE We'll make a new deal. I set you free—you do my asking in return. And then we're square. No extra fees, no bothering, no wooden dolls. No hexes.

DEVIL Bad luck's my favorite pastime.

CHRISTOPHE I understand. That's always in the game.

DEVIL Hot dog! Now what can I do for you? Mansa Musa's gold? Helen of Troy?

CHRISTOPHE I want everybody to be free men. And Saint-Domingue rid of all her worries. Now till *fin du temps*, you understand?

DEVIL Haha! You have a chip. I'm talking

seashells baby! Beside, it doesn't work like that. A carefree freedom, *sans-souci* like you insist, needs freedom from attackers. I can smite the whites, but it's up to you to hold your own. I can't keep them from fighting you forever. Not any more than you'd submit for long (or did, when tables were reversed). Anyway that sort of thing could put me out of business.

CHRISTOPHE More like "Que Sera, Sera" than tables turning....

DEVIL Look, it doesn't happen as a magic trick—

CHRISTOPHE Then what good are you, infernal menace?

DEVIL —unless you want your new con-

DEVIL The truth is, champ, the spell is sealed. I'm here. And once I'm here I'm bound to serve you. In whatever kind of bargain. There's orders. I can't leave to go, or say farewell, until I'm given pardon.

CHRISTOPHE Well then, piss off.

DEVIL You have to say it thrice.

Now *Christophe* walks all round the devil and looks him in the eyes. He even fakes a jab or two, to see what would happen. The devil cocks his head somewhat and keeps his eye-lids steady.

CHRISTOPHE You're in my power. The way I see it, phantom, that's a chip.

CHRISTOPHE If that's the way it is, what are you doing here?

DEVIL You invited me, though. Didn't you?

CHRISTOPHE I thought to collect (with interest added).

DEVIL What can love do, Henri, that dares not love attempt?

CHRISTOPHE Get out of here.

DEVIL You don't want more?

CHRISTOPHE You're on my nerves.

DEVIL My Henri, dear! Where is your famous ambition? I've got a thousand favors. We have a fine selection in damsels—all shades of course....

CHRISTOPHE I told you, devil, I'm not