

Utopian (Post)Colonies: Rewriting Race and Gender after the Haitian Revolution

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

“Utopian (Post)Colonies: Rewriting Race and Gender after the Haitian Revolution” examines the works of French women authors writing from just before the first abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1794 to those writing at the time of the second and final abolition in 1848. These women, each in different and evolving ways, challenged notions of race and gender that excluded French women from political debate and participation and kept Africans and their descendants in subordinated social positions. However, even after Haitian independence, French authors continued to understand the colony as a social and political enterprise to be remodeled and ameliorated rather than abandoned. These authors’ rewritings of race and gender thus played a crucial role in a more general French engagement with the idea of the colony-as-utopia.

In 1791, at the very beginning of the Haitian Revolution—which was also the beginning of France’s unexpected first postcolonial moment—colonial reform, abolitionism, and women’s political participation were all passionately debated issues among French revolutionaries. These debates faded in intensity as the nineteenth century progressed. Slavery, though officially abolished in 1794, was reestablished in 1802. Divorce was again made illegal in 1816. Even in 1848, when all men were granted suffrage and slavery was definitively abolished in the French colonies, women were not

given the right to vote. Yet, throughout the early nineteenth century, the notion of the colony-as-utopia continued to offer a space for French women authors to imagine gender equality and women's empowerment through their attempts to alter racial hierarchy.

My first chapter examines the development of abolitionism through theatre in the writings of Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793). At a time when performance was understood to have influential moral implications, de Gouges imagines a utopian colony to be possible through the power of performance to produce moral action. In my second chapter, I analyze how, during the slowly re-emerging abolitionist movements of the 1820s, Sophie Doin (1800-1846) and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859) expose the individual emotional suffering of slaves in an effort to make the violence of enslavement visible. In the process of making this violence visible, Doin's *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles blanches et noires* (1825-6) and Desbordes-Valmore's *Sarah* (1821), in contrast with Claire de Duras's *Ourika* (1823), mobilize respect for motherhood to bolster their abolitionist claims. My third chapter analyzes the colonial novels of Madame Charles Reybaud (1802-1870), a forgotten but once-popular novelist, who uses the idea of the colony to develop a feminist re-definition of marriage involving the emancipation of males from their own categories of enslavement. Influenced by the Saint-Simonian thought of the July Monarchy, Reybaud imagines a utopian colony

organized by a feminized French humanitarianism that attempts to separate French racial identity from that of the “Creole” colonizer. My final chapter compares this French desire to yoke *utopia* to *colony* with nineteenth-century Haitian attempts to reveal the opposite synergy: the inseparability of the institutions of slavery and colonialism. Haiti’s first novel, *Stella* (1859) by Émeric Bergeaud (1818-1858), opposes racial hierarchy and defends Haitian independence in the face of harsh discrimination from an international community whose economies still depended on colonialism and slavery. In contrast with the previous texts studied in this dissertation, *Stella* imagines Haiti to have the potential to become a utopian *postcolony*, a nation freed from the constraints of colonialism in such a way as to serve as a model for a future in which racial hierarchy has no power.

Dedication

In memory and honor of my mom, Judith Ann (1944-2000).

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List of Abbreviations

AN.....Archives nationales, Paris

ABR.....Archives départementales des Bouches-du-Rhône, Aix and Marseille

AFF.....Archives départementales de la Martinique, Fort-de-France

BCF.....Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie française, Paris

BNF.....Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris

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Introduction

“Le commerce des femmes étoit une espèce d’industrie reçue dans la première classe, qui désormais, n’aura plus de crédit. S’il en avait encore, la révolution seroit perdue [...] ; cependant la raison peut-elle se dissimuler que tout autre chemin à la fortune est fermé à la femme que l’homme achète, comme l’esclave sur les côtes d’Afrique [?]”¹

– Olympe de Gouges, *La Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*

In February of 1790, only months after the ratification of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, Jean-Baptiste Mosneron, the brother of a slave trader from Nantes, defended the slave trade in front of the National Assembly. He explained that “ce qui est bon [et] juste dans la conscience d’un père de famille, ne convient pas toujours quand on gouverne un grand Empire: ... la morale d’un homme d’Etat doit être en chiffres.”² Besides, he argued, those who found France’s trade and enslavement of Africans cruel were mistaken. Slaves, he claimed, were treated “avec douceur et humanité.” Mosneron congratulated the authors of the *Déclaration* for writing an “enlightening” document; he warned them, however, that it should influence only the decisions of the National Assembly “[qui] auront la France pour objet.” Otherwise, for Mosneron, the *Déclaration*

¹ Postambule, *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (Paris : np), 1791, 14-15. Emphasis added.

² Jean-Baptiste Mosneron, *Discours sur les colonies et la traite des noirs, prononcé le 26 février 1790 par M. Mosneron de l’Aunay, député du Commerce de Nantes près de l’Assemblée Nationale, à la Société des Amis de la Constitution* (Paris: 1791), 9-10.

was an “écueil,” an obstacle, because maintaining slavery and the slave trade was crucial to avoiding the downfall of the French Empire.

At the same time that Mosneron was defending the slave trade and seeking to limit the influence of the *Déclaration*, he was deriding the abolitionist Société des Amis des Noirs for its support of a woman, Olympe de Gouges (1748-1793), in the very public debate that surrounded the performance of her abolitionist play *L'Esclavage des nègres, ou l'heureux naufrage*.³ In a letter published in *La Chronique de Paris* on December 25, 1789, the day of the play's first performance at the Comédie Française, Mosneron wrote to de Gouges:⁴

Quoique votre langage annonce un courage & des sentimens au dessus de votre sexe, & que vous paroissiez ne pas craindre de nous armer les uns contre les autres, nous sommes bien tentés de croire que c'est encore une *jeanlorgnerie* de vos Messieurs. Toute instruite que vous êtes, Madame, vous ne connoissez peut-être pas ce mot ; mais entourée d'académiciens & de gens de lettres, vous ne serez pas longtemps à en apprendre la signification, & je vous renvoie à eux pour une explication.⁵

³ According to the Society's minutes, the members read her correspondence with Mosneron. See Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot's *La Société des amis des noirs, 1788-1799*. (Editions UNESCO: 1998), 265 and 283.

⁴ Though many recent scholars shorten de Gouges to simply Gouges, I have chosen to keep the “de” for historical accuracy because the “de” is not a nobiliary particle, but rather part of her name. This is further proven by the fact that several texts during de Gouges's lifetime spell her name *Degouges*.

⁵ Published in the *Chronique de Paris*, No. CXVIII. December 25, 1789. Both this letter and de Gouges's response are signed or addressed to “un colon très aisé à connaître.” Christopher Miller and Gregory S. Brown have both suggested that Mosneron is likely the “colon” of this correspondence. See Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), and Brown, “The Self-Fashionings of Olympe de Gouges, 1784-1789.” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3 (2001), 383–401.

In these few sentences, Mosneron mocks de Gouges's intelligence by insinuating that she does not know the erudite word *jeanlorgnerie*, a term meaning foolishness deriving from plays by Pierre de Marivaux and Voltaire.⁶ Implying that de Gouges relied entirely upon well-educated men in order to understand the political debate in which she took part, Mosneron creates an image of the playwright as the victim of a hypothetical prank, a lost inferior searching for meaning among a group of men superior because of their sex.⁷ Furthermore, he imagines himself to have successfully shown a flaw in the abolitionist argument simply by suggesting that women speak for the abolitionist cause. Within a few months, Mosneron made his argument clear: the success of the French colonial empire depended upon the continued rule of white men, the oppression and enslavement of Africans, and the exclusion of French women from any conversation about political change.

Yet, French women did indeed take part in the ongoing debates about the colonies. Women who wrote about altering French colonial practices opposed, through the simple act of writing, the notion that they, as women, should avoid or were incapable of participating in the process of imagining how best to improve France's colonies. This

⁶ I owe my definition of *jeanlorgnerie* to Sylvie Molta, who notes in the 1994 translation of this letter published in *Translating Slavery*, that "Jean Lorgne" means fool and refers to characters in plays by Marivaux and Voltaire. This term might have been used because Mosneron imagined that if de Gouges did indeed not know of the character of Jean Lorgne, this would show her ignorance of well-respected plays and would help him further discredit her as a playwright.

⁷ In her response, de Gouges denies speaking on behalf of the Société.

notion of improvement, even following what we now know as the Haitian Revolution, readily captured the imaginations of a wide range of French authors and intellectuals who believed that an ideal or utopian colony was still possible. French women writers brought considerations of gender equality and women's rights to the conceptualization of the utopian colonial model. Moreover, flexible and fluctuating definitions of racial difference and its implications contributed to these women's imagined utopias.⁸

Mosneron, therefore, might be understood to foretell a coming *dystopia*—a story, as Fredric Jameson writes, “of immanent disaster” for the French Empire. For his opponents, however, the colony was instead a framework, “a mechanism or even a kind of machine...whose construction alone would render [the kind of human relations that might be found in a utopian condition] possible.”⁹ For those seeking to challenge and improve France's colonial practices, morality was not found in numbers, but in the creation of the ideal colony.

During this historical period of opposition to French colonialism and France's ultimate loss of Saint-Domingue, utopian fantasy served a purpose for French authors because of its power to transcend the realities of defeat. As Jameson writes:

⁸ It is crucial to note, however, that, while “race” is a legitimate category that permits us to analyze the ideologies presented in these texts, this word is generally not the term used in the period under study.

⁹ Fredric Jameson, *The Jameson Reader*, ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 384-385.

Utopian fantasy ... aims at the transfiguration of the world of everyday life in such a way as to restore the conditions of some lost Eden, or to anticipate a future realm from which the old mortality and imperfections will have been effaced.¹⁰

Olympe de Gouges, Sophie Doin (1800-1846), Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859), and Madame Charles Reybaud (1802-1870) understood the colony as a site where the imperfections of the past could be effaced. This belief explains, at least in part, why the loss of Saint-Domingue did not lead to widespread anti-colonial sentiment. As Jules de Gaultier writes, the utopian impulse, like *bovarysme*, "[compels] mankind to conceive of itself other than it is."¹¹ French authors could continue to conceive of the French colonial empire in a false yet comforting way thanks to the concept of the colony-as-utopia. In order to cope with the blow that the existence of Haiti dealt to the image of their country's colonial mastery, the French turned to a utopian fantasy centered on colonial improvement. Influenced by this fantasy, French women, within the framework of the ideal colony, imagine various forms of gender equality that take into account the notion of racial distinctions in diverse ways.

Haitian authors, on the other hand, understood colonialism and slavery as two united institutions. Utopia could only be achieved in the *postcolony*, which, in addition

¹⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 110. Jameson is referring here specifically to Frye's theory of Romance as wish-fulfillment or utopian fantasy.

¹¹ Jules de Gaultier, *Bovarysm*, trans. Gerald M. Spring (NY : Philosophical Library, 1970), 19.

to its opposition to colonialism, also opposed the racial hierarchy on which the institution of slavery depended. In my final chapter, I read Haiti's first novel, *Stella* (1859) by Émeric Bergeaud (1818-1858), as a counter to this French obsession with colonial reformation and redemption. Bergeaud, in contrast with his French contemporaries, exposes the inseparability of colonialism and slavery and posits that Haiti, as *the* post-colonial nation, has the possibility to serve as a model for a utopian future free from racial discrimination.¹²

Even though their understandings of colonialism differed tremendously, nineteenth-century French and Haitian authors did, therefore, possess a common interest in a "conception imaginaire d'un gouvernement, d'une société idéale" specifically for its ability to help them re-envision the world without Saint-Domingue.¹³ They also all shared the understanding that the categorizations of race and gender needed to be rewritten in this new utopia. In order to examine these categorizations, I turn to literature because of the large and increasing number of French women who wrote during this time period and also because French abolitionist thought, in contrast with that of England and of the U.S., was most often articulated by intellectuals in

¹² My use of the term *postcolonial* is meant to highlight Haiti's early opposition to colonial rule. I do not wish to downplay the significance of French colonial endeavors into the nineteenth century, especially in Algeria. Reading the period after 1804 as France's first post-colonial moment provides a useful framework for understanding the influence of Haitian independence on European colonialism.

¹³ *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, eighth edition, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/dictionnaire/> (accessed March 26, 2011).

writing rather than through popular political or religious movements.¹⁴ Moreover, *Stella* shows that some of the earliest works of Haitian literature responded to French abolitionist thought by opposing colonialism in a way that the French never did. I propose that, in the literature of the rapidly changing era between the first and second abolitions of slavery in the French colonies, scholars can find evidence of the multiple and intricate ways that both the colonizers and the colonized attempted to come to terms with the issues of power, difference, and freedom that the practice of colonialism inevitably posed.

For de Gouges, her utopian colony effaced imperfections in France's revolutionary empire by uniting differently raced and gendered individuals under the control of a benevolent French patriarch. Doin saw the development of a "mechanism" — to borrow Jameson's term — that was founded upon the common acceptance of nonviolent Christian doctrine to be a way of effacing the atrocities of slavery. Part of her utopian vision also required accepting heterosexual interracial relationships. Desbordes-Valmore's *Sarah* posits that a blurring of racial distinctions and empowering of a moral patriarch lay at the foundation of the utopian colony. The colonial presence of Sarah, a white woman, allows for the variability of these distinctions

¹⁴ See Laurent Dubois, *Avengers*, 72. The Société des Amis des Noirs and the later formed abolitionist branch of the Société de la Morale Chrétienne, while important abolitionist organizations, never had the political power or mass appeal of abolitionist organizations like the religious movements influenced by the Quakers or the Liberty Party in the US.

to become clear. For Reybaud, the blending of different racialized groups and classes that the colonial setting allowed could lead to a return to a harmonious society — “une scène de la Bible” — a lost Eden, so to speak. Bergeaud’s utopian fantasy required the effacement of the racial hierarchy on which the horrors of Saint-Domingue depended. Racial distinctions, for Bergeaud, not only should *not* matter, they were also mutable. Female characters in *Stella* lack human agency, but they prove this mutability and represent the sublime that motivates the work of Haiti’s founders. French and Haitian authors of the early to mid nineteenth century thus approached the notion of a utopian ideal with a broad variety of ideas that ranged from emphasizing the insignificance of racial difference to recognizing the shared humanity of differently raced people, from positing that racial distinctions could in fact offer positive ways of organizing society to imagining the power to transcend race.

Abolitionism and Colonialism in French Literature

As the eighteenth century progressed, a growing number of authors wrote about the inconsistency between the Enlightenment’s agenda for social progress through education and tolerance and France’s slave-trading practices. Authors like Guillaume Thomas Raynal, Denis Diderot, and Louis Sébastien Mercier began a tradition of writing about slavery and the colonies that influenced revolutionary abolitionists, including de

Gouges and other members of the Société des Amis des Noirs, such as Jacques-Pierre Brissot, the Marquis de Condorcet, and the Abbé Grégoire. In 1771, Mercier imagined life over six hundred years in the future in his *L'An 2440*. In this new world, the French would no longer carry Africans “dans des boîtes infectes ... pour cultiver sous le fouet déchirant d'un lâche propriétaire des cannes à sucre.”¹⁵ Mercier foretold the end of the slave trade and spoke of a black man who would be the “vengeur du Nouveau Monde.”¹⁶ Jean-Jacques Dessalines would evoke Mercier's words when, in 1804, he proclaimed: “J'ai vengé l'Amérique.” Raynal, drawing on Mercier's image, warned in his popular *L'Histoire philosophique et politique du commerce et des établissements des Européens dans les deux Indes* that the slave did not need the advice of his master to free himself. Diderot, in an addition to Raynal's work, proposed that “crops ... gathered by free hands [would be] consequently consumed with a clear conscience.”¹⁷ Numerous eighteenth-century thinkers, therefore, at least recognized that slavery was antithetical to the Enlightenment ideals that society as a whole was supposed to represent.

These instances of abolitionism in the French literature of the eighteenth century are, however, often accompanied by more moderate, even reactionary suggestions for

¹⁵ Louis Sébastien Mercier, *L'An 2440, rêve s'il n'en fut jamais* (Amsterdam: Van Harrevelt, 1771), 2:358.

¹⁶ Ibid., chapitre XXII.

¹⁷ Guillaume Thomas Raynal, *A History of the Two Indies: A Translated Selection of Writings from Raynal's Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements des Européens dans les Deux Indes*. ed. Peter Jimak. (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2006), 159.

change. As Pratima Prasad explains in *Colonialism, Race, and the French Romantic Imagination*, literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was often characterized by “competing drives to both comply with colonial expansion and challenge the imperialist project.”¹⁸ Similarly, Enlightenment thinkers promoted colonialism even as they condemned the institution of slavery. Mercier, for example, suggested that sugar should instead be cultivated in Africa. Raynal, writing after the 1763 Treaty of Paris according to which France ceded considerable colonial territory to Britain, was hoping that his text would establish the “principles on which [Europeans] should found” their colonies. As Yves Benot has shown, only subsequent versions of Raynal’s *Histoire* focus more on the plight of the enslaved; yet these additions came from the pen of Diderot, not Raynal.¹⁹ Though Raynal does suggest abolishing slavery, he, like many of his contemporaries, proposed a gradual abolition that would “maintain order” in the colonies.²⁰

Criticizing or challenging colonial rule was therefore not uncommon among abolitionists, but the power of the utopian fantasy of the colony meant that colonialism was, for them, a practice to improve rather than abandon. While conservative, pro-

¹⁸ Pratima Prasad, *Colonialism, Race, and the French Romantic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3.

¹⁹ Yves Benot, *Les Lumières, l’esclavage, et la colonisation: textes réunis et présentés par Roland Desné et Marcel Dorigny* (Paris: Editions de la Découverte, 2005).

²⁰ Guillaume Thomas Raynal, *L’Histoire philosophique et politique du commerce et des établissements des Européens dans les Deux Indes* (Geneva: Chez Jean-Leonard Pellet, 1783), 1:2.

slavery lobbyists like Mosneron argued that continuing slavery was integral to the future of the French Empire, abolitionists like Raynal and the Marquis de Condorcet argued for a gradual abolition of slavery in the colonies. For Condorcet, “un défenseur de la cause des nègres” in each colony would improve the lot of slaves and add to colonial stability.²¹ This suggestion was part of changing colonial rule in order to show the colonized that Europeans were not “des corrupteurs ou des tyrans,” but “des instruments utiles ou de généreux libérateurs.”²² Deciding how France should maintain its colonial empire was a concern that abolitionists and anti-abolitionists shared in the face of increasing instability in France’s colonies. Even the stalwart abolitionist Abbé Grégoire wrote in 1791 that freeing slaves in the colonies would “serrer les nœuds qui [les] unissent à la métropole.”²³ De Gouges’s abolitionist play sought to recast slaves not as enemies, but rather as “nos cultivateurs” —farmers who would contribute to the common good. Though abolitionist arguments proliferated in the eighteenth century, an interest in how best to maintain the relationship between France and its colonies remained a preoccupation shared by abolitionists and anti-abolitionists alike.²⁴

²¹ Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain, suivie de Réflexions sur l’esclavage des nègres* (Paris: Masson et fils, 1822), 377.

²² Ibid, 274.

²³ Henri Grégoire, *Lettre aux Citoyens de couleur et aux nègres libres de Saint-Domingue* (Paris: l’Imprimerie du patriote français, 1791), 11.

²⁴ This is not to suggest that no one argued against colonialism. Maximilien Robespierre, Louis de Jaucourt, and Denis Diderot, for example, do suggest that France let go of its colonies rather than continue slavery.

The French Revolution coincided with slave revolts in Saint-Domingue that led to France's first abolition of slavery in the colony in 1793, which was made official French policy in 1794. It could be said that, while the French were arguing about whether or not to abolish slavery and how best to do it, the enslaved — over thirty thousand of whom were disembarked off ships arriving in Saint-Domingue in 1790 alone — took matters into their own hands.²⁵ As Dubois writes, "within a few years, these Caribbean revolutionaries gained liberty for all the slaves in the French empire."²⁶ Toussaint Louverture, the leader of Saint-Domingue, warned the French that any attempt to reestablish slavery would not succeed. His words proved to be prophetic. While the Martinican Louis Delgrès and his followers lost their battle against the reestablishment of slavery in Guadeloupe in 1802, Jean-Jacques Dessalines declared Haiti's independence in 1804. From this moment, the French, the US, and many other colonizing powers often saw Haiti as a model of colonialism gone wrong. As Kate Ramsey explains, "Haiti's self-deliverance from slavery and ultimate overthrow of

This was, however, an uncommon argument that was heard even less often in the nineteenth century after Haitian independence.

²⁵ For more information on the activism of slaves during the Haitian Revolution and scholarly debates surrounding it, see Louis Sala-Molin, *Dark side of the light: slavery and the French Enlightenment* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and Laurent Dubois, "An enslaved Enlightenment: rethinking the intellectual history of the French Atlantic," in *Social History*, vol. 31, no 1. February 2006.

²⁶ Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2.

French colonialism made it a pariah among the powerful states whose economies still depended on those institutions.”²⁷ Abolitionist movements became much more moderate in the early nineteenth century, focusing instead on the end of the slave trade. The enslaved in the colonies that France continued to control, including Martinique and Guadeloupe, would wait until 1848 for their freedom.²⁸

Events in the revolutionary Caribbean profoundly influenced France’s understanding of its colonial practice. As Marcel Dorigny notes, French abolitionists “[ont rejeté] l’insurrection noire ... avec horreur.”²⁹ De Gouges, though an abolitionist, spoke out against the slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue because they were in direct contradiction with the peaceful solution that she had hoped possible.³⁰ In January of 1793, *Le Moniteur universel ou la Gazette nationale* announced that slaves who were still revolting were “dépourvus de vivres et de munitions” and that most had gone back to work.³¹ Even once Haiti declared its independence, texts advocating for the re-

²⁷ Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 62. I thank Kate Ramsey for sending me an advanced copy of her book chapter.

²⁸ For more information about political rights in the French Caribbean after 1848, see the work of Silyane Larcher.

²⁹ Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot, *La Société des amis des noirs, 1788-1799*, 34.

³⁰ De Gouges, along with other abolitionists, also faced dangerous threats from pro-slavery lobbyists. See Chapter 1 for more information about the relationship between de Gouges and Mosneron.

³¹ *La Gazette Nationale ou le Moniteur Universel*, January 19, 1793.

colonization of Saint-Domingue continued to be circulated.³² It was not until 1825 that France recognized Haiti, a recognition that cost the young nation dearly because it came only after Haiti agreed to pay an “indemnity” to France, which can be read as the continuation of a different kind of colonial rule.³³ France’s 1825 recognition of Haiti slows but does not entirely stop the production of literature about the glory days of Saint-Domingue. Despite multiple arguments for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade, a profound sense of loss characterizes French writing about the colonies well into the nineteenth century.

In Victor Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal*, whose revised and definitive version was published in 1826, what the Captain d’Auverney loses in Saint-Domingue is described as so common as to have created a collective sense of pity aroused by the loss of “that magnificent colony”:

...s’étant marié à Saint-Domingue, il avait perdu sa femme et toute sa famille au milieu des massacres qui avaient marqué l’invasion de la Révolution dans cette magnifique colonie. A cette époque de notre histoire, les infortunes de ce genre étaient si communes, qu’il s’était formé pour elles une espèce de pitié générale

³² See Myriam Cottias, ed. *D’une abolition, l’autre: Anthologie raisonnée de textes consacrés à la seconde abolition de l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises* (Marseille: Agone, 1998) and Miller’s chapter entitled “Forget Haiti” in his *French Atlantic Triangle*.

³³ For more information, see Gusti Klara Gaillard-Pourchet, “Aspects politiques et commerciaux de l’indemnisation haïtienne,” in Yves Bénot and Marcel Dorigny, *Retablissement de l’esclavage dans les colonies françaises* (Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 2003), 231.

In the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake, several intellectuals suggested that France repay this money to Haiti. BBC News, “France urged to repay Haiti’s huge ‘independence debt’,” August 16, 2010.

dans laquelle chacune prenait et apportait sa part.³⁴

This “general pity” coincided with a fear that France had lost its chance to take part in the promise of the New World—the place where they might find the lost Eden of their utopian fantasy. Christine, the main character of Reybaud’s 1840 novel *Madame de Rieux*, arrives in Haiti for the first time in the early 1830s, looks around, and determines that it is “le paradis d’où nous avons été chassés.”³⁵ Similarly, in his 1827 *Voyage en Amérique*, François-René de Chateaubriand laments a downturn in French colonial expansion, imagining that it means an exile from the larger world: “Nous sommes exclus du nouvel univers, où le genre humain recommence.”³⁶ Revolutionaries sought to ameliorate the colony in order to prevent its demise and, even after Haitian independence, the New World continued to offer an exciting promise of renewal in the imagination of nineteenth-century French authors.

Anti-colonial sentiment, for the most part, did not play a role in early-nineteenth-century French thought. As Deborah Jenson explains, “unlike the postcolonial consciousness of the twentieth century, which rejected colonialism, French consciousness after the independence of Haiti registered the violence of its loss of colonial mastery, without fully processing the ideological similarity of the slaves’ conquest of freedom and

³⁴ Victor Hugo, *Bug-Jargal* (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1876), 5.

³⁵ H. Arnaud, *Madame de Rieux* (Bruxelles: Jamar, 1840), 49.

³⁶ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Amérique, Œuvres complètes*, Tome 6: (Paris: Académie, 1861).

French citizens' acquisition of revolutionary rights."³⁷ Indeed, Hugo describes the Haitian Revolution as an "invasion" of the colony by the French Revolution, one that produced misfortune. For him, what France lost overshadowed what the slaves of Saint-Domingue gained. This loss fueled France's fantasy of the colony-as-utopia.

Gender and Abolitionism

Within this tradition of authors writing about slavery and the colonies, I focus principally on female writers. I began this study after reading works of French writers and activists, from de Gouges to Prosper Enfantin, who shared a tendency to call women *slaves*. I wondered how — while France continued to buy, transport, and force Africans to work under brutal conditions for no pay — challenging the oppression of women in France might influence the way in which French writers represented and understood their country's slave societies, particularly those in the Caribbean. At the height of France's trade in Africans, when the enslaved revolted in Saint-Domingue, as abolitionists and anti-abolitionists argued their positions in front of the National Assembly, when slavery was abolished, then reestablished, then finally abolished again, what connections did French women make between their situation and that of the

³⁷ Deborah Jenson, "Mirror Insurrections: Haitian and French Revolutions in Ourika" in *Approaches to Teaching Ourika*, edited by Mary Ellen Birket and Christopher Rivers (NY: MLA, 2009), 47.

enslaved men and women in the colonies? What role did they believe women should play in the colonial empire and how did they articulate these beliefs in their writings?

With the intention of answering these questions, I began studying the works of women writing in France about the colonies. As the epigraph shows, de Gouges often associated women with slaves while arguing for the emancipation of both. Doin — perhaps the most radical abolitionist of this study — sees women as important moral influences who somehow betrayed their innate morality by not improving the treatment of slaves: “Peut-être Saint-Domingue et tant d’autres auraient encore des maîtres, si les femmes des propriétaires n’avaient pas tant de fois méprisé leur pouvoir le plus doux.”³⁸ Women, for Doin, had the capacity to balance out the cruelty of their male partners. Desbordes-Valmore, though less overtly political than de Gouges or Doin, focuses on maternity in her emphasis on the shared humanity of black and white people. Reybaud, like Doin, understands women as innately moral beings, but lacks a consistently strong abolitionist message in her writing. Each of these authors’ arguments about women’s and slaves’ rights vary in intensity, but they all share a similar awareness of the restraints placed on them as women who write. Whether they rebelled against these restraints or

³⁸ Sophie Doin, *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles blanches et noires*, ed. Doris Kadish (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002), 86.

sought to work with them, de Gouges, Doin, Desbordes-Valmore and Reybaud all knew that writing meant something different for men than it did for women.

In order to understand these restraints, I find Simone de Beauvoir's explanation of woman's *situation* particularly useful. Beauvoir writes:

Now, what specifically defines the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless discovers and chooses herself in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. ...The drama of the woman lies in this conflict between fundamental aspirations of every subject—which always posits itself as essential—and the demands of a situation which constitutes her as inessential.³⁹

De Gouges, Doin, Desbordes-Valmore, and Reybaud wrote in a world in which they had to “assume the status of the Other.” This is the commonality that unites these authors. I do not wish to argue that being a woman made them particularly empathetic, sentimental, or emotional or that being a woman made them write in a certain way or on a certain topic. I do believe that being relegated to the status of “an inferior Other” meant that what these women had to say was consistently mediated by their marginalization. Though they might have considered themselves to be as capable as any male human being (or not, given that they were often told that women were not), women writers had to contend, each in her own way, with a situation which deemed her inessential.

³⁹ Translated in Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: the making of an intellectual woman* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994).

Certain writers refer directly to the anxiety that this situation produced. De Gouges, for example, threatens in her *Correspondance de la Cour* to stop writing political texts and instead “tâcher de redevenir femme.”⁴⁰ Here, she recognizes that she has stepped out of her assigned status as a woman, that she has somehow betrayed her inessential status by participating in the political debates of her time. In this moment, de Gouges accepts a definition of *woman* that governed the thought of her adversaries, one that posited that a true, real, or proper *woman* was something that she had to re-become, something that she opposed by being a public and politically active person. Desbordes-Valmore also recognizes the limits placed on her as a woman. In *Une Lettre de Femme*, she writes: “Les femmes, je le sais, ne doivent pas écrire; J’écris pourtant.”⁴¹ Like de Gouges, she recognizes in this moment that she is engaging in an act considered inappropriate for people of her gender.⁴² Doin also experienced a double standard for male and female abolitionists. Though highly influenced by the Société de la Morale Chrétienne, Doin could not join the organization because she was a woman. This double standard did not prevent Doin from writing, but it does mean that her abolitionist writings were not

⁴⁰ Olympe de Gouges, *Correspondance de la cour: compte moral rendu et dernier mot à mes chers amis* (Geneva : Chez Buisson, 1786), 23. This text is dated 1786, but mentions historical occurrences, such as the fall of the monarchy, that happened in 1791. The changed date may reveal an attempt to avoid censorship.

⁴¹ Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, *Poésies de Marceline Desbordes-Valmore publiées par Gustave Revilliod* (Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1873), 4.

⁴² See Barbara Johnson, “Gender and Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and Marceline Desbordes-Valmore,” in *Understanding French Poetry: Essays for a New Millennium* (New York: Garland, 1994) for an informative examination of Desbordes-Valmore’s reception as a woman writer.

remembered as often and were not taken as seriously as those of her contemporaries, such as Thomas Clarkson and Auguste de Staël. Reybaud, though she states early on that she is opposed to women writing for a living, became a successful novelist whose works often portray the lives of powerful heroines. Whether she truly believed in women's inferiority or not, Reybaud claimed that female writers could only be justified by "un grand talent." As with many nineteenth-century female writers, her words and her actions tell two different stories.⁴³ Each one of these authors had to navigate social and cultural constraints that dictated that they should *not* write. Any one of these authors could have stated "j'écris *pourtant*" — they all aspired to write in a world that set limits on their ability to do so because they were women. How their experience of these restraints, however, manifests itself in their writing and particularly in their opinions about slavery and its abolition is a matter of debate.

It is problematic to analyze female abolitionists by making connections between oppression based on gender and oppression based on race because not all women who picked up a pen resisted their oppression or the oppression of the enslaved. There is a difference between taking into account the fact that women were socialized and wrote in

⁴³ Maurice Samuels notes that, even though close to half of the writers of the July Monarchy were women, "female authors in the period still faced social reprobation and encountered numerous material and legal obstacles." The fact that so many women wrote, even despite these obstacles, Samuels notes, "testifies both to the lack of other career options open to bourgeois women and to the changing economics of book publishing in nineteenth-century France." *Inventing the Israelite: Jewish Fiction in nineteenth-century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 42.

a sexist society and assuming one can account for or quantify exactly how this socialization influenced a particular author's writing. We must acknowledge, for example, that men were capable of making similar arguments for women's rights and against slavery, even if they were not similarly oppressed. Condorcet made arguments for abolition and women's political inclusion that parallel those of de Gouges. Desbordes-Valmore, though she likely witnessed some manifestations of the violent revolts against the reestablishment of slavery in Guadeloupe, only wrote a tiny number of texts that opposed slavery and they appeared almost twenty years after her visit to the colonies. Prosper Mérimée wrote "Tamango" in 1829, a story of slave revolt that some argue is radically abolitionist.⁴⁴ On the other hand, Reybaud is more interested in imagining the properly run ideal colony than the freedom of slaves, even though a few slaves and potential slaves are freed in her novels. I will therefore not assume a causal relationship between an author's gender and what or how she writes, even as I examine the sexism of a particular era.

This question of the relationship between gender and abolitionism in the French context recently came to the forefront of scholarly debate with the publication of Christopher Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* in 2008. Miller scathingly rebukes the 1994 edition of *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in*

⁴⁴ For more on "Tamango," see Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 186.

French Women's Writing, 1783-1823, co-edited by Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, because the authors, according to Miller, support "the 'impression' that sympathy and abolitionism may be an exclusively female tradition." He is particularly opposed to the notion that women writing about slavery were "more sensitive than everyone else."⁴⁵ Kadish, perhaps the most well known American scholar on the topic of French women's writing and slavery, has responded to Miller's accusations by warning him against critiquing female authors in the same trivializing manner in which many nineteenth-century writers did. In the latest and expanded edition of *Translating Slavery*, published in two volumes in 2009 and 2010, Kadish describes her disagreements with Miller as "deep-seated and far-reaching theoretical differences" between her "feminist project and Miller's deconstructive objectives."⁴⁶ Below, I examine Miller's and Kadish's different theoretical approaches in order to suggest that the relationship between gender and abolitionism can be analyzed in a way that avoids essentialism but also accounts for the sexism of the past.

I should first note that the recently published new and revised edition of *Translating Slavery* includes works by men and responds to many of Miller's remarks. I wish to begin, however, with Kadish's earlier works because they best represent the

⁴⁵ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 107.

⁴⁶ Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, ed., *Translating Slavery*, Vol. I (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009) and Volume 2 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010).

theoretical approach with which Miller takes issue. First, Kadish and her co-authors theorize that personal experience has significant influence on an author's writing. Second, they believe that a woman's personal experience in a sexist society influences the way she writes about others who are oppressed. This connection between authors who are oppressed because they are women and the oppressed people about whom they write is the subject of controversy.

Even in a post-structuralist world in which the author has been declared dead, the notion that an author's personal experiences might influence what and how she writes does not seem farfetched, especially if we consider that literature has something to teach us about the place and the time period in which it was written. As Toril Moi explains, "literature is the archive of a culture. We turn to literature to discover what makes other human beings suffer and laugh, hate and love, how people in other countries live, and how men and women experienced life in other historical periods."⁴⁷ If we consider the works of French women who wrote about slavery during and after the Haitian Revolution part of the "archive of a culture" that exploited Africans for economic gain while also relegating its women to a secondary status, then this literature has much to teach us about how France understood its practice of colonialism and the

⁴⁷ Toril Moi, "I Am Not a Woman Writer': About Women, Literature and Feminist Theory Today," *Feminist Theory* 9.3 (December 2008), 268.

relationship of its women to that practice. It can also teach us about how French women thought about colonial issues and how certain conceptions of gender influenced this thought.

Kadish and her co-authors, however, go beyond simply connecting personal experience and literature. They link oppression based on gender with oppression based on race and many other types of marginalization by assuming a quantifiable result; for Kadish, as for many of the authors about whom she writes, oppression in general enhances one's capacity for empathy. Kadish posits, for example, that in addition to the influence of gender on de Gouges's work, her "disempowerment as a speaker of Occitan" added to her own understanding of the "disempowerment of the persons of color about whom she wrote."⁴⁸ She argues that personal suffering enhances the ability of an author to identify with her oppressed subject. Massardier-Kenney argues similarly when she states that texts dealing with gender and race "can be better [translated] by translators who have a stake in it."⁴⁹ Having suffered discrimination based on gender, race, or even being a member of a linguistic minority thus, according to Kadish and Massardier-Kenney, better qualifies an author to write about suffering. In her 1995 article

⁴⁸ Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney, ed., *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783-1823* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994), 39.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

on women's abolitionist writing, Kadish explains the implications of "having a stake" in the topic about which one writes:

Because female writers had a personal stake in resisting their own oppression as women, as well as a political and humanitarian stake in resisting the oppression of slaves, there arose a feminine intertextual tradition of abolitionist writing, which began with the British writer Aphra Behn's seminal work *Oroonoko* in the seventeenth century, and which a century and a half later included the American writer Harriet Beecher Stowe's celebrated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852.⁵⁰

Kadish connects women who write with an investment in opposing one's marginalization due to sexism. She then assumes, without explanation, that women would have a "political or humanitarian" investment in opposing slavery. Considering that women were just as capable of profiting from the exploitation of slave labor, however, I find it difficult to argue that this investment in abolitionism is natural, particular to women, different for women or even common among women.

Kadish does *not* suggest that a writer's position as a marginalized woman makes her abolitionism above reproach. She explains that "it is clearly a mistake to glorify writers such as [de] Gouges, Staël, and Duras or to fail to acknowledge that as members of a European, privileged society their concern for slaves was inevitably fraught with contradiction, ambiguity, and ambivalence."⁵¹ For Kadish, the way in which both women in Europe and the enslaved in the colonies were marginalized offers a particular way of

⁵⁰ Doris Y. Kadish, "The Black Terror: Women's Responses to Slave Revolts in Haiti," *French Review* 68, no. 4 (March 1995): 668-680.

⁵¹ *Translating Slavery*, 1994, 50.

reading women's writing about slavery as long as one keeps in mind the great difference between "members of a European, privileged society" and those who were literally in chains. Yet, without denying the privilege of European women authors, Kadish still posits that suffering based on gender discrimination leads to a particular understanding of suffering based on racial discrimination. While racism and sexism as oppressive systems do share similarities, they do not completely map onto one another. Émeric Bergeaud, for example, does not translate his experience of racism into an opposition to sexism. The women represented in his novel are abstract, collective, or divine characters whose demise spawns the actions of the novel's heroes or whose divine presence guides them. Being the victim of one oppressive system (racism or sexism) does not necessarily provide insight into the experience of a victim of another, or, of both.

Kadish also connects all women writing about these topics with each other within a "feminine intertextual tradition." The evocation of this supposed tradition implies a connection between female writers that transcends time and place. Though Doin, for example, never read de Gouges, the two women are connected in Kadish's analysis by the fact that they are *women* who write about slavery.⁵² De Gouges, however, in her *Réflexions sur les hommes nègres*, cites the powerful experience of seeing an

⁵² Doin shows her lack of knowledge of de Gouges's work when she declares that she is the first to write such abolitionist texts, even though de Gouges did so over three decades earlier.

enslaved black woman for the first time as a child as the source of her abolitionism. This experience could have influenced her more than the misogyny she faced as a woman playwright in Paris since her abolitionist play was written years before her famous *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*. To imply that the discrimination that de Gouges suffered as a woman, and particularly as a woman writer and activist, led her to write abolitionist works and that the discrimination that Doin suffered as a woman in a sexist society also led her to write abolitionist works is to assume a contributory correlation between the experience of sexism and writing. Evoking a “feminine tradition” assumes a connection between all women who suffer gender discrimination and write about slavery.

Theoretically, relating being a woman in a sexist culture with abolitionism is a very difficult argument to make considering that one would be hard pressed to determine if and precisely how much any one aspect of an author’s life, such as being a woman, might influence her writing. Highlighting the gender of female authors as a factor having similar influence on each author’s capacity for empathy and as an impetus for moral activism against slavery recasts eighteenth- and nineteenth-century essentializing characteristics assumed to be true about women as positive traits. In other words, Kadish and Massardier-Kenney theorize that female writers turned their unfair experience into something positive by fighting for the rights of others who were

oppressed. This reinterpretation supports the notion that women are united by a common experience of discrimination. It also assumes that one can determine what the upshot of this discrimination will be for all oppressed women. Instead, I suggest that one should work to account for sexism without assuming its consequences to be the same in all circumstances.

The distinction I wish to make is subtle, but crucial. For example, we can clearly say that de Gouges's play was not taken as seriously as those of many other male playwrights and that many people told her she could not or should not be political because she was a woman. We cannot say, however, that she *necessarily* understood slavery or its abolition differently because of these aforementioned experiences. If we are to believe de Gouges, it was her childhood experience, along with her readings of Rousseau and perhaps her associations with the Orléans circle in Paris, that most influenced her abolitionism. Similarly, Doin's Christianity, more so than her gender, influenced the way she expressed her abolitionism. We can say, however, that, because nineteenth-century women were socialized to believe that religion and morality were in the domain of the feminine, it is more likely that female writers of the time period would have argued for abolition from this perspective. Yannick Ripa suggests that, because of nineteenth-century education traditions for women and the pressure to marry young, women's movements were also often based on an acceptance of women's religious and

maternal roles. Women of the early nineteenth century, according to Ripa, insisted "sur la fonction maternelle et domestique des femmes ; c'est donc en tant que femmes, chrétiennes et mères qu'elles réclament les droits."⁵³ French women saw themselves primarily as mothers and moral role models because of socialization. The results of this socialization, however, are not absolute nor can they always be determined.

On the other hand, to say that gender is *not* a factor that separates male and female authors is to deny, as Moi explains, that women "are socialized in a world in which men consistently cast them as Other."⁵⁴ Miller opposes Kadish's stance on women authors, claiming that "the relation between the authors' gender and the texts they wrote cannot be said to be causal."⁵⁵ Yet, scholars can examine the influence of sexism without assuming a *causal* relationship between feminism and abolitionism. In his critique, Miller offers the example of the Baron Roger who also "revoiced the colonized," as Kadish and her co-authors describe the work of the female writers in their study. Miller goes on to ask if Roger, by the definition of *woman* offered in *Translating Slavery's* 1994 edition, might also be considered a woman: "Ain't he, so to speak, a woman?"⁵⁶

Though the fact of Sojourner Truth's speech has been debated, Miller's reference to it still evokes the image of Truth as she, according to bell hooks, "stood before an

⁵³ Yannick Ripa, *Les Femmes, actrices de l'Histoire* (Paris: Sedes, 1999), 60.

⁵⁴ Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: the making of an intellectual woman* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), 155.

⁵⁵ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

assembled body of white women and men at an anti-slavery rally in Indiana and bared her breasts to prove that she was indeed a woman."⁵⁷ Miller recalls this public scene of the exposure of physical difference in his critique of Kadish's work. Yet, by insinuating that Roger could be considered a woman, Miller is also removing physical difference from the equation. This removal disparages Kadish's connection between physical (sexual) difference and abolitionism. In so doing, he mocks scholars' attention to women's writing by suggesting that their focus on gender excludes and therefore discriminates against men; Miller implies that Roger was wrongfully excluded from the study of abolitionist literature because of *his* gender. The focus on oppression is reversed, insinuating that what Kadish calls a "feminist project" unfairly forgot about a certain sector of the population in the same way that Truth was not considered a woman or worthy of the respect that white women received.

This insinuation belittles scholars' attention to female writers by suggesting that it somehow repeats the exclusionary practices of racist and sexist institutions. It opens up a space of competition, suggesting that one cannot lament the fact that de Gouges's opponents openly proposed that she actually deserved her execution because she was a politically active woman *and* also admit that she might not have effectively argued against the horrors of slavery. This debate begs the questions: Does it matter that de

⁵⁷ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999) 159.

Gouges was unfairly treated, ignored, and marginalized as a woman author when thousands of Africans were chained, tortured, and died? Does it matter that Claire de Duras wrote an important first-person account of a Senegalese woman raised in France when so many other potential Ourikas who were not saved from the Middle Passage were thrown overboard in the middle of the Atlantic?⁵⁸ If we believe that the writings of French women still have something to teach us about the people who were both complicit with and victims of an empire, then we cannot ignore one form of suffering because it is milder than another.⁵⁹

Miller ends his critique by declaring that: "... any suggestion that there was ever a popular abolitionist movement of women (or men) in France is particularly unwelcome, given the belated, derivative, elitist, and generally anemic nature of the efforts that were made."⁶⁰ Without implying that a popular or common abolitionist movement existed, or that women had more to say on the subject than men, scholars can still, however, focus on women authors in an effort to foreground the work of people who were often marginalized during their lifetime or forgotten after their death.

Resurrecting and examining the thoughts of these under-studied authors adds to what

⁵⁸ I am specifically referring here to a story that Miller recounts in his *French Atlantic Triangle* about young enslaved Africans being thrown overboard in a French attempt to hide their continued slave trading practices from the British. See Miller, 172.

⁵⁹ Beauvoir begins *The Second Sex* with this quote from Sartre : "A moitié victimes, à moitié complices, comme tout le monde."

⁶⁰ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 108.

we know and understand about France's colonial practices and the common assumptions about and connections between race and gender that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century authors made.

In addition to accounting for the sexism and misogyny that women authors experienced during their lifetime, feminist scholars also oppose a long tradition of literary scholarship that ignored female authors by studying long-forgotten women's writing. In 1994, Kadish and her co-authors were responding precisely to this tendency to detract from women's experiences by ignoring or devaluing their writing. It does not take much research to see that de Gouges, for example, was scorned both during her life and after her death for being a woman writer. Due to the mounting hostility against any political participation by women at the time, her execution, as Marie Josephine Diamond remarks, coincided with the "end of the extraordinary participation of women in the drama of the French Revolution."⁶¹ Jacobin leaders wanted de Gouges's demise to scare women out of public life. The November 17, 1793 edition of the Jacobin journal *Feuille du Salut Public* states that de Gouges, along with Madame Roland and Marie-Antoinette, were killed for being politically engaged *women*. In a section entitled "Aux Républicaines," de Gouges (who had been executed just days earlier) is derided for

⁶¹ Marie Josephine Diamond, "The Revolutionary Rhetoric of Olympe de Gouges," *Feminist Issues*, Volume 14, no. 1. March 1994, 3.

having forgotten “les vertus qui conviennent à son sexe” and women, if they are to be proper *républicaines* (and if they wish to keep their heads), are warned to stay away from public political roles.⁶² In the mid-nineteenth century, Jules Michelet dismissed de Gouges as an illiterate, weak-minded woman caught up in a world she did not and could not understand.⁶³ In 1864, less than a decade after Michelet’s *Les Femmes de la Révolution*, Charles Monselet condescendingly explained de Gouges’s desire to write by what must have been her fear of becoming unattractive after thirty.⁶⁴ At the end of the nineteenth century, psychologists inspired by Gustave Le Bon’s *La Psychologie des Foules* examined de Gouges’s works in detail for proof of rampant hysteria among female revolutionaries.⁶⁵ Alfred Guillois’s 1904 study on the playwright examined her œuvre as “the document that best allows [us] to judge the disorder of her judgment and reasoning abilities.”⁶⁶ As Joan W. Scott explains, for Guillois, “demands for women’s rights ... could not be taken seriously as politics, but must be treated as illness.”⁶⁷ It is therefore clear that de Gouges’s opinions and experiences were, during her lifetime and for almost

⁶² *Feuille du Salut Public*: Septidi Brumaire l’An 2^e de la République, 3-4.

⁶³ Jules Michelet, *Les Femmes de la Révolution* (Paris: Adolphe Delahays, 1855), 105-107.

⁶⁴ Charles Monselet, *Les Oubliés et les Dédaignés: Figures littéraires de la fin du 18^e siècle* (Alençon: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857). Monselet writes: “Déplorable erreur de ces femmes sans vocation qui se servent de la rhétorique comme d’un pot de fard ou d’une boîte à mouches, qui pensent qu’un volume leur ôtera une ride, et que la jeunesse du verseau fait l’éternelle jeunesse du visage!” (104).

⁶⁵ These include works by Edouard Forestié, Léopold Lacour, and Alfred Guillois.

⁶⁶ Alfred Guillois, *Etude médico-psychologique sur Olympe de Gouges: considérations générales sur la mentalité des femmes pendant la Révolution française* (Lyon : A. Rey, 1904), 59. My translation.

⁶⁷ Joan Scott, “A Woman Who Has Only Paradoxes to Offer,” in *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, ed. Sarah Melzer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 115.

two centuries after her death, considered inferior to those of men. Because “literature is a cultural archive,” and the writings of Revolutionary women were not taken seriously as a part of that archive, a significant gap existed in our understanding of the history of de Gouges’s time period. Kadish and her co-authors’ 1994 feminist project sought to fill this gap.

This desire to resurrect forgotten women writers has led some, however, to criticize this scholarship. Miller takes issue with the way in which many feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s championed de Gouges as a maligned and unfortunately forgotten early feminist activist, claiming that these positive portrayals often overlooked problems with the author’s work. He suggests that we should “consider [de Gouges’s] faults and weaknesses as integral parts of her theatrical work and of its significances...We can analyze the badness—for example her shaky command of geography—without being prisoners of a misogynist aestheticism.”⁶⁸ In other words, Miller argues that something about this wish to defend de Gouges, to focus on the good as a way of championing the playwright against almost two centuries of detractors, deters scholars from fully understanding her work and its importance. Kadish, in her review of Miller’s book, focuses on his “shaky command of geography” comment, cautioning him against using the “same dismissive, evaluative language that ... has

⁶⁸ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 111.

blocked the entry of so many historically significant female writers into the literary canon."⁶⁹

While, as I explain in my first chapter, it is certainly not clear that de Gouges had "a shaky command of geography," it is true that scholars have perhaps been a bit too focused on championing female writers to the detriment of scholarly analysis. Olivier Blanc, de Gouges's most well-known biographer, demonstrated this defensive tendency, for example, when he called Gregory S. Brown "misogynist" for merely suggesting that de Gouges profited from the popularity of abolitionist movements during the early years of the Revolution.⁷⁰ In the following pages, I have attempted to recognize the unfair and often lamentable position from which French women authors wrote while also working *not* to privilege gender as an underlying factor leading to a particular kind of thought on slavery and its abolition. I hope to promote the uncomfortable understanding that gender both does and does not matter in the analysis of French colonialist and abolitionist literature.

⁶⁹ Doris Kadish, review of *The French Atlantic Triangle*, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, Volume 37, Number 1 and 2, Fall-Winter 2008, 143-144.

⁷⁰ Blanc, 171 and 251. Olivier Blanc wrote three biographies of Olympe de Gouges. Unless specifically noted, my quotations come from his extremely well-researched latest biography, *Marie-Olympe de Gouges: une humaniste à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: René Viénet, 2003).

The common thread that binds the works of this dissertation is that each author pays special attention to the categorizations of race and gender in their process of imagining a utopian (post)colony. My first chapter, *The Dramatic Abolitionism of Olympe de Gouges*, places de Gouges, whom we might consider the founding mother of feminist-abolitionism in France, in the context of the rapidly changing world of revolutionary Paris.⁷¹ Within this world, the playwright formulates her thoughts on the intimate connections between theatre and political action through her demands of the actors of the Comédie Française, who delayed the performance of her abolitionist drama *L'Esclavage des Nègres, ou l'heureux naufrage* (1789) for almost five years. Though de Gouges was tragically executed before France's first official abolition of slavery in its colonies, her strong belief in the power of performance to incite moral political action and her play's depiction of an idealized colonial empire demonstrate that she always intended to use theatre to bolster her abolitionist claims, even when she found it necessary to moderate these claims based on the very real dangers she faced as a politically active woman in revolutionary Paris.

The second chapter, *Reconditioning Violence in Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's Sarah and Sophie Doin's La Famille noire, Noire et blanc, Blanche et noir, and Le Négrier*, investigates

⁷¹ Following Robyn Wiegman's work, I hyphenate feminist-abolitionism in order to suggest that the movement should be understood not as a *feminist* kind of abolitionism, but as a logic that promoted an "analogic wedding of women and slaves..." (197). *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

a later period during which, due to the violence of the Haitian Revolution, abolitionists tended to focus on more moderate goals like ending the slave trade. Colonists and other supporters of slavery denied the fundamental violence of the state of being enslaved; challenging this denial required exposing this original violence so that slave revolts could be understood as the result of provocation—*not* justification for enslavement. In this chapter, I analyze Desbordes-Valmore's and Doin's attempts to make the violence of the colonial system visible through their attention to the suffering of individual characters. By comparing *Sarah* (1821) and *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles blanches et noires* (1825-26) to the well known and well studied novel *Ourika* (1823), I conclude that, in opposition to the dystopia of Ourika's inevitable isolation in France, Doin's and Desbordes-Valmore's texts imagine that recognizing and opposing the violence of the colonial system will lead to a utopian society of communal harmony.

My third chapter, *Conceptualizing Race and Romance in the Colonial Novels of Fanny Reybaud*, explores the colonial works of a little remembered yet once-popular nineteenth-century novelist who, influenced by the Saint-Simonian movement, uses the colonial setting as a way of imagining the romantic liberation of French women. The ability of French women, as moral leaders in the colonies, to save their male partners from potential enslavement provides her with the framework for a feminist re-imagining of

marriage.⁷² In the process of redefining heterosexual relationships, Reybaud also envisions a new French national-racial identity. In contrast with the other texts of this study, her novels speak to a desire to create a utopian society that does not *necessarily* require the liberation of the enslaved. She instead associates the empowerment of French women with the *amelioration* of the condition of the enslaved. In the process of imagining this idealized form of social hierarchy, Reybaud separates *distinction* from *discrimination*, which, for her, allows a religious, feminized French humanitarianism to emerge as the defining characteristic of her utopian French colony.

In my final chapter, *Remembering Revolution and Writing Independence in Émeric Bergeaud's Stella*, I read Haiti's first novel, *Stella* (1859), as a work that portrays Haiti's battle for independence in a positive manner that opposes the dominant discourses of the time. Bergeaud makes the Haitian Revolution proof of both the insignificance of

⁷² Though I recognize that using the term *feminism* or *feminist* for this study is inevitably anachronistic, I have decided to use these terms based on bell hooks' simple definition of *feminism* as "a movement to end sexism and sexist oppression," (*Talking Back*, South End Press, 1989, 23). I am also influenced by Susan James's definition of feminism: "Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified," (Susan James, "Feminism in Philosophy of Mind: The Question of Personal Identity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, ed., Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 576). Building on James's definition, I define the kind of feminism that unifies the writings of the authors in this dissertation as based on a belief that [French] women are *excluded* from a society of men. The texts in this study tend to theorize that the inclusion of [French] women would perhaps legitimate, justify, or ameliorate the practice of colonialism. I use *feminist* to describe any text advocating for women's rights or for increasing women's role in society, i.e. their inclusion in the realm of the political, the necessity of their contribution to a better society, or the nineteenth-century tendency to validate what was believed to be women's inherent moral and emotional qualities—movements whose feminism might be considered questionable today because of their insistence on a natural and inescapable feminine essence.

racial difference and the possibility of transcending this difference; Haiti, thanks to these attributes, will lead the way to a future free from racial discrimination. In this process of transcending race, the oppression of women is understood as an act for which Haiti's founders have taken revenge. In the novel, women lack agency, but are shown respect through men's defense of them. *Stella*, therefore, also highlights the unusual nature of the attention that de Gouges and Reybaud, for example, pay to women's social and political roles. On the other hand, the novel's attempt to move away from racial distinctions also brings to light the conservative nature of Bergeaud's French contemporaries' thought on race. Whereas *Stella* imagines that race will one day not matter, the works of mid-nineteenth-century French writers, especially the colonial writings of Reybaud, are beginning to re-envision racial distinctions as potential justifications for the hierarchical organization of a new socialist utopian society.

1: The Dramatic Abolitionism of Olympe de Gouges

Olympe de Gouges has captured the attention of feminist scholars for the past thirty years and has been the topic of several recent studies of abolitionism during the Revolution.¹ Because of her recent popularity, her occasional inconsistency and her complexity, it is difficult to know where to begin when writing on de Gouges's life and works. Beginning by focusing on her feminist arguments has led some to assume that her abolitionism was a result of her belief in women's rights. Indeed, many early feminist studies of de Gouges treat her abolitionism as secondary to her feminism, even though her abolitionist writings precede her feminist works. Though she is perhaps most remembered today as the author of the *Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*, her less often studied experience with the Comédie Française likely influenced her decision to promote the rights of women during the early years of the Revolution. Some literary critics and biographers begin their writings with the author's unjust execution in 1793, an approach that I find to promote pity for the author and to detract from what she achieved in her life. Then again, beginning with some of her

¹ These works include Christopher Miller's 2008 *The French Atlantic Triangle* and Doris Kadish and Marie-Pierre Le Hir's *Translating Slavery*, updated in 2009. Mary Jane Cowles has also published on de Gouges's abolitionist play *Zamore et Mirza*. The manuscript of this play's performed version was republished by Sylvie Chalaye with L'Harmattan in 2006.

boldest statements—like her attacks against Maximilien Robespierre at the height of the Terror—gives the impression that de Gouges did not recognize or did not care about the dangers of the chaotic times in which she lived.

This chapter, a combination of historical investigation and literary analysis, presents de Gouges as an actor within the turbulent world of late eighteenth-century Paris. I have scoured archival sources in the Archives Nationales, the Bibliothèque Nationale, the Bibliothèque de la Comédie Française, and the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand in order to better know and understand the thought of a woman passionately dedicated to transforming her era for the better. By reading her demands for performance articulated during her fight with the Comédie Française as part of a larger philosophical stance on the importance of theatre, I find de Gouges to be a playwright who helped usher in the French Revolution's era of political drama. Through an analysis of the content and the controversy surrounding the performance and publications of the three extant versions of de Gouges's only surviving abolitionist play, I conclude that the playwright's conception of a utopian colony constituted an essential part of her abolitionist and feminist philosophy and that, though her thought varied and developed throughout the early years of the Revolution, she enthusiastically searched for a way to ameliorate the condition of women and slaves within the crumbling structures of the Ancien Régime and its empire.

The Power of Words and the Importance of Family

I invite my readers to believe, if only briefly, as de Gouges did—that the better world that she imagined might have been possible had she been given the attention and respect that she desired. It is crucial to read de Gouges’s intense belief in the power of her words to create political change in the context of the world in which she lived. Marc-Eli Blanchard’s description of the importance of revolutionary rhetoric accurately illustrates how de Gouges thought about the political work she sought to accomplish as a playwright and activist whose letters were at times read on the floor of the National Assembly:

A l’Assemblée un orateur parle, non seulement pour augmenter, mais pour donner des lois au pays dans la confusion. Le mot fait force de loi. Le discours aboutit au décret ... La parole est proprement législative. Elle ordonne le monde révolutionnaire: d’où la gravité inaltérable du discours...²

De Gouges authored (often dictated) politically engaged plays, pamphlets, essays and novels during the last years of the Ancien Régime and the early years of the French Revolution, a time during which words came to forge “the strength of laws.”³ As noted

² Marc-Eli Blanchard, *Saint-Just et Cie. La Révolution et les mots* (Paris: Nizet, 1980), 28.

³ Because de Gouges dictated almost all of her writings—a practice common for the time—some rumors circulated that she was illiterate. After reading the letters that she wrote from prison when no scribe was available to her, I can attest that she was certainly capable of writing French, even if she occasionally made minor spelling mistakes. In a letter to Dorat-Cubières located in the file containing her trial documents (AN W 293 no. 210), de Gouges’s adjective agreements are inconsistent and her spelling is consistent with oral pronunciation: she writes “dousse” instead of “douce” and “voi” instead of “voit,” and “le loje” instead of “l’éloge,” for example. Her well-formed handwriting shows that she might have had someone teach her to write. De Gouges was aware of her poor spelling and self-consciously apologized for it in letters to Mercier;

in the introduction, she had a difficult time being taken seriously by her contemporaries and by several generations of sexist readers for years after her death. I find that, in addition to being ignored or belittled because of sexism, de Gouges's works have also been devalued by a large contingent of readers who do not share or fully comprehend her belief in the seriousness and power of words (particularly those aided by the spectacle of theatre) to incite moral and political action.

In addition to the power of words, the genre of the drama, as the title of this chapter suggests, played an key role in the articulation of de Gouges's abolitionism. Drama was a genre that women traditionally did not use, but one that de Gouges sincerely believed had the power to effect social and political change. The melodrama, born in France in the 1780s, was designed, through its exaggerated characters and occasional musical accompaniment, to appeal to one's emotions. Moreover, it often brought the private into public view by dealing with issues of family life. Susan Maslan accurately describes the goal of late-eighteenth-century drama as one that could produce plays "capable of instructing fathers, mothers, and children how best to fulfill their

she also speaks of her native language, Occitan, in her preface to the play *L'Homme généreux*. For more information on eighteenth-century French, see Jean-Pierre Seguin's *La Langue française au 18^e siècle* (Paris: Bordas, 1972).

familial responsibilities and, in so doing, find happiness.”⁴ De Gouges benefitted from this newfound attention to the family by making her play’s family the larger French colonial world; her instructions for fathers, mothers, and children changed the rules for proper behavior in a colonial empire that she viewed as a familial structure.

When de Gouges first submitted her play to the Comédie Française, Saint-Domingue was the richest colony in the world and slave mortality there was at its highest rate.⁵ By the time her play was performed in late 1789, many colonialists were scrambling to contain revolutionary rhetoric in hopes that its effects would not spread to the colonies. In the summer of 1789, slaves were turned away at French ports for fear that they might be exposed to ideas that would be dangerous to the stability of colonial rule.⁶ In April of 1790, all mail from France addressed to slaves or any person of African descent in the colonies was redirected to the municipality.⁷ As the Revolution grew, so did anxiety about the future stability of the empire. Late-eighteenth-century inhabitants of Saint-Domingue felt that their colony could erupt into violence at any moment.⁸ The king acknowledged this potential for violence and tried to counter it in the mid-1780s by issuing reforms to the Code Noir—a one hundred year old set of laws concerning

⁴ Susan Maslan, *Revolutionary Acts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 184.

⁵ Malech Walid Ghachem, ‘Sovereignty and Slavery in the Age of Revolution: Haitian Variations on a Metropolitan Theme’ (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), 20.

⁶ Laurent Dubois, “An enslaved Enlightenment,” 9.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 67.

slavery in the French colonies.⁹ These reforms, although not well received by slave owners, were designed to alleviate tension in the colony; they made the king a central figure in abolitionist arguments because he was understood as a power that could oppose the cruelty of slave masters.¹⁰

De Gouges submitted a feminist and abolitionist play, her solution for calming colonial tension, to the Comédie Française at the exact time of these reforms to the Code Noir. *Zamore et Mirza, ou l'heureux naufrage* portrays the pardon and manumission of two slaves on an ambiguously located “Indian” island. Women are helpful and respected companions to their men who share the same skin color and class distinctions. The play ends with a utopian vision of the model colonial society: enslaved and free people, whites, non-whites, women, and men live harmoniously together in a familial, patriarchal hierarchy. An admirer of Rousseau, de Gouges was certainly influenced by his connection between family and political structure: “La famille est ... le premier modèle des sociétés politiques; le chef est l’image du père, le peuple est l’image des enfants.”¹¹ Following this philosophy—and in direct contradiction with Mosneron’s assertion that, for the leader of an empire, making money was more important than

⁹ France was the first European country to establish a set of laws concerning slavery. Louis XIV signed the Code Noir in 1685.

¹⁰ Dubois, “An enslaved Enlightenment,” 11.

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social, ou Principes du Droit politique* (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1762), Livre 1:6.

having a fatherly conscience—de Gouges insisted that the proper behavior of a father and that of the leader of an empire were one in the same. Her emphasis on the importance of a benevolent patriarch aligns with the short-lived belief that the French king was a force that could ameliorate the condition of the enslaved while also maintaining order in the colonies.¹²

The Play, its Performance, and its Politics

Zamore et Mirza, first submitted anonymously to the royally controlled Comédie Française (known during the Revolution as the Théâtre de la Nation), was accepted into their repertory without reservations.¹³ This fact proves that the negative reactions to de Gouges's play that followed are related to who she was, to her behavior toward the

¹² De Gouges originally sought the support of the aristocracy in the formation of a new government. Some of her views on class equality, especially early on, are quite conservative. She opposed, for example, the notion that the children of the aristocracy should go to school with the children of artisans. In the last year of her life, de Gouges became less supportive of the aristocracy and supported a more radical egalitarian political plan. One might assume that her turn away from supporting the aristocracy would have continued had she lived. For more information about de Gouges's conception of the nation, see the recent work of Marie-Pierre Le Hir.

Along with her support of the aristocracy, de Gouges' desire to defend the king also coincides with her opposition to violence. She protested against the plan to execute him. Word of her defense of the king spread internationally. London newspapers mention her name as a defender of the monarch: "A *Madame* Olympe Degouges has offered herself to be Counsel for Louis XVI, stimulated, she says, by the cruel selfishness of Target, in refusing himself upon the occasion. This lady is the author of some pieces which have appeared upon the *Parisian* stage, filled with sentiments perfectly republican. The Convention passed to the order of the day, upon her offer," *General Evening Post* (London, England), December 22, 1792. In January of 1793, after it became obvious that the king would indeed be executed, de Gouges wrote an *Arrêt de Mort de Louis Capet* in which she proposed that killing the king was in fact acceptable, but only in direct defense of the Republic.

¹³ See Gregory S. Brown, "The Self-Fashionings of Olympe de Gouges, 1784-1789," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34, no. 3 (2001).

Comédie and to the emergence of a growing abolitionist presence in Paris in the late 1780s. It also shows that her play was perhaps not *originally* understood to deviate radically from other plays of its time about Africans or slavery. On the other hand, given the play's confusion of the words *nègre* and *indien* and its ambiguous location, the actors might not have noticed the political nature of its message if de Gouges had not been so keen to point it out. (In contrast, it is quite possible that this geographic confusion could have been the result of later censorship and not proof, as Miller states, of her "shaky command of geography.") Other indicators, such as de Gouges's references to Mirza's "langage naturel," seem to suggest that an earlier version of her play—which de Gouges claimed to have first written in 1782—has been lost.¹⁴ Instead, scholars must work with the version of the play that was first published in 1788 as *Zamore et Mirza, ou l'heureux*

¹⁴ Unfortunately, several of de Gouges's texts, including two plays entitled *Le Marché des noirs* and *Le Danger des préjugés, ou l'école des hommes*, were burned after her execution. De Gouges references these plays in relation to her abolitionism in *Départ de M. Necker*. Brissot also references them in his unedited papers, AN 446 AP 15. See Olivier Blanc, *Marie-Olympe De Gouges: une humaniste à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* for more information about the decision to burn de Gouges's papers.

Except for one likely typo in the 1788 play, one in which Mirza says "je voudrais être aussi *instruire* que toi," no incorrect French is used in the existing versions of the play. Because of de Gouges's reference to Mirza's "langage naturel," Chalaye conjectures that Mirza might have originally spoken a form of "petit nègre" as used in Radet's *La Nègresse ou le pouvoir de la reconnaissance*, performed just two years before de Gouges's play. Chalaye believes that Radet was one of the first to use a form of grammatically incorrect French for African characters. There exists, however, a long tradition dating to Molière at least, of using incorrect grammar to indicate differences of status between characters. De Gouges used this kind of language in *Le Couvent ou les vœux forcés* to indicate class differences. Her obvious use of these grammatical mistakes in *Le Couvent* would tend to indicate that an original version of *Zamore et Mirza* with more obvious differences in the language of Mirza existed. Marie-Pierre Le Hir has also recently suggested that a previous version of the play might exist or have existed. See the revised version of her chapter in *Translating Slavery's* 2009 edition.

naufnage, the version performed as *L'Esclavage des nègres, ou l'heureux naufrage* in 1789, and the second published version from 1792, entitled *L'Esclavage des noirs, ou l'heureux naufrage*. De Gouges's alterations to these versions and her writings demanding the performance of her play show us that she always intended her play to be a commentary on the need to ameliorate the condition of slaves in the colonies, that she saw powerful women as part of this process, and that, even among members of a growing abolitionist movement, she believed to have unique ideas about how this amelioration should proceed, including her decision to use theatre as a tool to incite political action.

A close examination of the plot of de Gouges's play along with the alterations that she made to later versions proves that the playwright always intended for her play to serve as a critique of slavery in the French colonies, that she grew more insistent about this goal as the Revolution progressed, and that she also wanted her play to offer a moderate, nonviolent solution to the "troubles" in the colonies. *Zamore et Mirza* may not appear exceptionally abolitionist to the modern reader: in the end, not all slaves are freed and those who are do not leave their master. One must consider, however, that, as she explains in her prefaces and letters, de Gouges was attempting to portray the transatlantic slave trade in a much more overt manner than most of her contemporaries, that she made alterations to her play based on strict rules of censorship and, perhaps, as discussed below, in reaction to threats that she received from pro-slavery lobbyists.

De Gouges attempts to balance her portrayal of the enslaved by emphasizing their humanity and their dedication to their French ruler, deemphasizing the importance of racial difference, and insisting that Zamore's crime (which animates the plot of the play) is forgivable because it rid the colony of a corrupt overseer who abused his power and mistreated women. *Zamore et Mirza*, *L'Esclavage des nègres*, and *L'Esclavage des noirs* all begin with a conversation between Zamore and his love Mirza, two slaves who have escaped their kindly master Monsieur de Saint-Frémont after Zamore killed an overseer to protect Mirza.¹⁵ They have fled to an island for fear that the governor will not understand Zamore's chivalric behavior and instead punish him for his crime. While alone, Zamore and Mirza question the system that oppresses them. Zamore, who has been educated "like a son" by the governor, tells Mirza that change might come through the Enlightenment.¹⁶ Mirza asks simple questions about racial difference like: "Why ... such a great difference between their kind and ours?"¹⁷ When Zamore responds, he

¹⁵ Zamore is spelled with an "e" in the first version and without an "e" in the last version. For consistency, I will use the spelling *Zamore* throughout. There are three known versions of this play. I cite from all three. The third and final version, entitled *L'Esclavage des noirs* is abbreviated as 1792. *Zamore et Mirza*, the first published version, is abbreviated as 1788. The *manuscrit de souffleur* from the 1789 performed version was republished as Olympe de Gouges, Sylvie Chalaye, and Jacqueline Razgonnikoff, *L'esclavage des nègres, ou, L'heureux naufrage, Autrement mêmes* (Paris: Harmattan, 2006). This version is abbreviated as Chalaye.

¹⁶ "Une morale douce ... a fait tomber en Europe le voile de l'erreur." Act I, Scene I, 1792, 15.

¹⁷ The only English translation of the play was done by Maryann DeJulio and was published in Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney's book *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783-1823* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994), which was republished in a revised and expanded edition in 2009. The first translation is mainly based on the 1792 version; the second 2009 version takes into account the earlier versions.

serves as de Gouges's abolitionist mouthpiece, repeating her theory as stated in the 1788 postscript *Réflexions sur les hommes nègres* that "[cette différence] n'existe que dans la couleur."¹⁸ Zamore's and Mirza's conversation highlights the difficulties of the enslaved and shows their humanity. Zamore, educated according to French customs, is wise, brave, a good partner, and a loyal subject. Though many reviewers were dismayed that the main character had murdered an overseer, Zamore's crime is meant to show that he was capable of recognizing abuse of power, correcting it, and saving the honor of his beloved.¹⁹

The play subsequently minimizes the violence of Zamore's past actions by emphasizing his dedication to saving others and his opposition to revolt against benevolent leaders; this lack of emphasis on violence becomes more prominent in the version of the play written after 1791. In all three versions, Zamore again proves his heroic nature when he jumps into the ocean to save the passengers of a ship that has crashed ashore. Sophie and her husband Valère are on a quest to find Sophie's father and have shipwrecked. (In the 1788 version, they are traveling with a baby and a

DeJulio first translated "espèce" as "kind" rather than "race" in her 1994 translation of the play.

¹⁸ Act I, Scene I, 1788, 6; Act I, Scene I, 1792, 13.

¹⁹ The *Mercure de France* declared: "Zamore est coupable d'un homicide ; ... la sûreté publique veut qu'il soit toujours puni par la loi." *Mercure de France*, December 29, 1789.

domestic servant.)²⁰ Zamore saves them; Sophie and Valère vouch for the two slaves when representatives of the governor come to arrest them. Slaves in the colony rise up in protest. The governor, Monsieur de Saint-Frémont, laments that he must kill Zamore as an example for the “good of the colony.” In the last version (published after the slave uprisings in Saint-Domingue that we now understand as the beginning of the Haitian Revolution), Zamore accepts his fate, warning his fellow slaves that they should never use excessive force to free themselves: “Ne vous livrez jamais à des excès pour sortir de l’esclavage.”²¹ De Gouges admonished any revolutionary calls for violence, including the slave uprisings. She likely added this line because part of defending her writings against her detractors required that she *not* be understood to promote violence, especially that of the enslaved.

De Gouges’s play therefore works to focus attention on slaves’ willingness to support leaders as long as they are benevolent. Zamore always has the best interest of the colony at heart; his saving of Sophie serves as the ultimate proof of his dedication to the welfare of the colony because of the familial connection between Sophie and the governor. This connection becomes apparent when the governor confesses to his wife that he had a daughter with a woman in France whom he was not allowed to marry

²⁰ Notes in the 1789 *manuscrit de souffleur* version show that de Gouges was advised to remove these characters to improve the play. See Chalaye’s 2006 republication.

²¹ Act III, Scene XI, 1792, 83.

because he had no fortune. His wife figures out that Sophie is this daughter and rushes to let her husband know that he must save the two slaves. In a melodramatic final scene, Sophie begs the governor's pardon for the two slaves, who are then freed because everyone learns that Zamore saved the governor's daughter's life. In its 1789 and 1792 versions, the play ends with a speech from the governor telling slaves that he wishes he could free them all or at least "adoucir leur sort."²² He then warns slaves to never lose sight of the public good.²³ At the play's end, Zamore and Mirza prepare to marry yet stay on as happy servants reunited (like Sophie) with their father/master the governor. The first version of de Gouges' play ends with Zamore's and Mirza's happy reunion with their colonial family, but the second and third versions end by stressing the moral leadership of the French governor.

De Gouges's play, in all its versions, thus works to support the amelioration of the condition of slaves without dismantling the structures of colonial rule. Her emphasis on the importance of maintaining order in the colonies led de Gouges to question why colonists would be so opposed to her work: "Que me veulent donc ces Colons pour parler de moi avec des termes si peu ménagés?"²⁴ Indeed, de Gouges was not alone in

²² Act III, Scene XIII, 1792, 90. In 1789, he says "apporter quelque soulagement à la rigueur de leur sort" (Chalaye, 142).

²³ Chalaye, 142.

²⁴ Preface, *L'Esclavage des noirs*, 4.

her portrayal of black people²⁵ on stage; she did, however, emphasize her belief in the humanity of slaves and the importance of women to abolitionism more overtly than her contemporaries. Comparing de Gouges's play with Jean-Baptiste Radet's popular play, *La Nègresse ou le pouvoir de la reconnaissance*, performed at the Comédie Française in 1787, just two years before de Gouges's, offers insight into the radical nature of her imagined colonial society and why her play might have been ill-received by the actors. There are several similarities between the two plays: Radet's hero Dorval, shipwrecked on an island, is selflessly in search of his shipwrecked father. In the end, his benevolent father intervenes, producing a happy ending. Yet, in contrast with *Zamore et Mirza*, Radet's play portrays black characters on an African island who are *not* enslaved. Furthermore, the female characters of his play, two African women named Zilia and Zoe, are mindlessly loyal women who attract French men through their devotion. Radet avoids portraying slaves, questioning the institution of slavery, or empowering women in his play. De Gouges does all three.

De Gouges's female characters are active women who set a moral standard for others. Radet's women, on the other hand, have little agency or intelligence. Zilia asks Dorval why he cannot sing and play the flute at the same time. The women happily dote

²⁵ I use the terms "black people," "white people," "whites," or "blacks" to refer to the racial categories that the nineteenth-century authors of this study used, developed and accepted. They do not necessarily correspond to modern understandings of these classifications nor are they meant to promote any type of acceptance of these socially constructed divisive categorizations.

on white men in a way that makes them extremely attractive to Dorval and his sidekick Frontin. At the end of Radet's play, Dorval and his father save Zilia from slavery and they leave for France. Dorval's father suggests that he and Zilia marry, supposing that eventually people would lose their prejudice against the marriage. Zilia leaves for France happy that "demain [moi] serai blanche." Dorval and Zilia's union is based on a hierarchical model similar to a master/servant relationship. De Gouges, who preferred to theorize that women should be equal companions to men, avoids portraying any interracial relationships in her play. Women's equality comes, at least in part, from sharing their male partner's racial background and social status.²⁶ Radet places no taboo on interracial romance; he portrays France as a racial paradise where Zilia can fully assimilate, i.e. become white. He does not disturb the notion that women, regardless of their race, should be subservient to men. Because Zilia is extremely deferential to Dorval, she makes an ideal wife.

The female characters in de Gouges's play, in stark contrast to those of Radet's, actively espouse abolitionist ideas. De Gouges gives her female characters positions of moral and political authority. Her white heroines have active roles in aiding Zamore.

²⁶ De Gouges does oppose restrictions on romantic relationships based on financial inequalities. She in fact challenged Beaumarchais to a literary duel. Each author would write a play and the money would go to marrying six Parisian woman who had no dowry. Beaumarchais did not accept. For more information on de Gouges's exact requests to Beaumarchais, see Carla Hesse's *The Other Enlightenment: how French Women became Modern* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 59.

Madame de Saint-Frémont is as wise as her husband and in fact alerts *him* to the need to pardon Zamore. Sophie jumps in between Zamore and Mirza in an effort to save them. Her husband stands by and notes that his wife's heroism only endears her more to him. An enslaved woman named Coraline, new to the last version of her play, declares that slaves in the French colonies "will not always be in chains."²⁷ Moreover, Betzi, the governor's wife's slave, is the character who calls the slave trade "repugnant to humanity."²⁸

Furthermore, *La Nègresse ou le pouvoir de la reconnaissance*, like many of Radet's plays, was an opera-comedy; it would have been written with the primary purpose of entertainment. De Gouges's play is, on the other hand, a drama—a genre that Diderot theorized was particularly conducive to moral education.²⁹ Reviews of Radet's play highlight its "agreeable scenes" and "light ending."³⁰ Indeed, its happy ending lacks the moral message that de Gouges made so central to her play's importance. Radet avoids discussing France's enslavement of Africans and makes it appear that the French in fact *save* Africans from slavery. His play reinforces the notion that there are no slaves in

²⁷ Act II, Scene II, 1792.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The announcement for the performance of *L'Esclavage des nègres* published in *Le Moniteur Universel* on December 25, 1789 lists the play as a comedy rather than a drama. This might be an indication that de Gouges's claims to have written a drama of political value were ignored. I thank my former student Daniel Stublen for this astute observation.

³⁰ *Annales dramatiques ou Dictionnaire général des théâtres* (Paris: Cappel et Renand, 1811), 17.

France and that a benevolent patriarch exists to ensure this freedom. Even though both plays share a similar focus on France's role in helping slaves, de Gouges's play stands out from Radet's through its portrayal of active women characters, its acknowledgment that slaves did indeed exist in the French colonies, and its critique of slave owner's cruelty.

Another detail that separates de Gouges's play from Radet's is that *La Nègresse* was performed in January 1788 in Saint-Domingue as *Créoles africaines ou les effets de l'amour*. De Gouges's play was never performed in the colony.³¹ Had her play been successful at the Comédie Française, it is likely that it would have been performed in Saint-Domingue, which had a thriving theatre scene that often performed plays from Paris without long periods of delay. De Gouges knew this and claimed that her play would *not* incite slaves to violence.³² She thoroughly believed that a nonviolent solution to the problems surrounding slavery in the colonies was possible. Despite her insistence, however, her play was shut down after three performances and, according to the rules of the theatre under the Ancien Régime, became the property of the actors.

³¹ Laurent Dubois and Bernard Camier, "Voltaire, Zaïre, et Dessalines, le Théâtre des Lumières dans l'Atlantique français," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, December 2007, 49.

³² Olympe de Gouges, *Les Comédiens démasqués ou Madame de Gouges ruinée par la Comédie française pour se faire jouer* (Paris: l'Imprimerie de la Comédie française, 1790), 48.

The Quest for Performance

The story of de Gouges's relationship with the Comédie is long, complicated, and contentious because it involves debates about authors' rights, the political nature of theatre, and women's participation in political debate in revolutionary France. In their analysis of her battle with the *comédiens*, several scholars have emphasized one issue, such as the power of pro-slavery lobbyists or the insidious nature of sexist discrimination, as having the most influence over de Gouges's relationship with the Comédie. In this section, I present the many difficulties that the playwright faced and conclude that we may never know whether her gender, outspokenness, political positions, or some combination of all three most irked the *comédiens*. De Gouges made her feelings about authorial control clear, did not hide the fact that she was a *female* playwright, and provoked a powerful pro-slavery lobby through her public support of the amelioration of the condition of the enslaved. Because the story of de Gouges's battle with the Comédie, including the resulting articulations of her thoughts on theatre, happens as the French stage is transforming into an arena for political debate, studying this conflict illuminates the complexity of the theatre world in revolutionary Paris at the moment that royal censorship was losing its power to control production and performance.

Once her play was accepted, de Gouges demanded that its performance be scheduled as soon as possible; in reaction, the *comédiens* struck it from the repertoire.³³ She was in fact arrested briefly before Madame de Montesson, wife of the Duc d'Orléans, intervened on her behalf.³⁴ After de Gouges made amends, the Comédie reinstated the play, but the playwright would wait almost five years to see it performed. When it was, it was scheduled on off days and shut down due to a supposed lack of ticket sales. Sylvie Chalaye theorizes that the actors of the Comédie finally agreed to perform the play in December of 1789 in order to avoid "toute mauvaise publicité."³⁵ Yet, given that the play was shut down so quickly, it is more likely that the actors knew that it would become their property after three failed performances and saw this as a way to get rid of de Gouges for good.³⁶ De Gouges's case shows that the theatre's rules could be manipulated so that the actors staged the plays they wanted to perform. Letters located in the archives of the Comédie Française indicate that in August of 1788, de

³³ For more information about de Gouges's relationship with the *comédiens*, see Brown, "The Self-Fashionings of Olympe de Gouges, 1784-1789."

³⁴ In his memoirs, the actor Fleury notes that it was Madame de Montesson who first introduced de Gouges to the theatre. See *Mémoires de Fleury de la Comédie française* (Paris: A. Delahays, 1847), 2:85. For more information about Fleury, see below.

³⁵ Chalaye, xxiii.

³⁶ De Gouges requested numerous times to have the play postponed or rescheduled but the Comédie refused. (Olympe de Gouges's *dossier d'auteur*, Bibliothèque de la Comédie Française, letter dated January 4, 1790). When she submitted a second play for performance at the theatre in 1791, it was outright rejected. For more information about the complicated story of de Gouges's play's production, see Chalaye's introduction to the 2006 edition of *L'Esclavage des nègres*.

Gouges's play was ninth in line to be performed. By September, it was nineteenth.³⁷

Though they never admit any transgression, the actors were obviously opposed to de Gouges's play and its performance.

For male and female playwrights alike, having one's play performed at the Comédie—the most well respected theatre in Europe—required complicated maneuvering. De Gouges was not the only one to demand more rights for authors. The well-known author of *The Marriage of Figaro*, Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, fought for more rights for playwrights through his Société des Auteurs Dramatiques. De Gouges had similar feelings about the need for more authorial control, but, because she was a woman, she was not admitted to Beaumarchais's society. Her approach to demanding her rights was more overt than Beaumarchais's.³⁸ Her tactic was twofold: she began to complain of a double standard for male and female playwrights at the same time that she touted the moral and urgent nature of her play's abolitionist message. Gregory S. Brown's work on the history of eighteenth-century theatre details the complicated system that de Gouges had to navigate in order to become a successful playwright. Brown notes that, according to appropriate eighteenth-century codes of conduct for authors,

³⁷ From letters located at the Bibliothèque de la Comédie Française in Olympe de Gouges's *dossier d'auteur* dated August 4, 1788 and September 14, 1788.

³⁸ For more on this Society, see Gregory S. Brown's *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture, and Public Theater in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

attributing one's motivation in publishing a play to a desire to please 'the public' and blaming the royal troupe (rather than the police censor) for one's inability to do so in the accepted fashion provided a rhetorical strategy for justifying the seemingly uncivil act of illegitimate (although not illegal) publication.³⁹

De Gouges was therefore not unusual in publishing her play after three years of waiting for its performance (the minimum amount of time allowed before publication) and then blaming the royal troupe for this delay. This fact indicates that it was perhaps the way that she navigated the system, her gender, and the controversial nature of her subject matter (which she did anything but play down) that most influenced the actors' decision to delay performance, to shut down the play after three performances, and to reject any further plays de Gouges wrote.⁴⁰

Very few women had their plays performed at the Comédie; de Gouges was thus rare as a woman to have had the privilege of being among the *auteurs* of the Comédie Française.⁴¹ In the late eighteenth-century, it was often stated that women were incapable of writing plays of literary quality. A reviewer of her play's first performance

³⁹ Brown, "Reconsidering the Censorship of Writers in Eighteenth-Century France: Civility, State Power, and the Public Theater in the Enlightenment," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Jun., 2003), 235-268.

⁴⁰ The Comédie rejected her play *Le Marché des noirs* in 1791.

⁴¹ Sylvie Chevalley, "Les Femmes auteurs dramatiques et la Comédie-Française," *Europe*, November-December, 1964, 41-47. In 1964, Chevalley writes that, of 2,627 plays in the theatre's repertoire since its creation in 1680, only seventy-seventy had been written by women.

As an author whose play was accepted by the Comédie, de Gouges received free admission. Despite her rocky relationship with the royal theatre, this free admission likely began as of the fall of 1785 and continued until 1793, when she was still listed as one of the "auteurs vivants" of the Comédie. For more information on author privileges, see Brown, "Self-Fashionings," 386.

made a sexist declaration that beards were necessary for writing a good play.⁴² Marie-Pierre Le Hir has also pointed out the influence of misogyny in the actors' relationship with de Gouges. Indeed, Abraham-Joseph Bénard, better known as Fleury, made remarks in his memoirs that speak to his profound contempt for insistent, politically engaged women such as de Gouges.⁴³ De Gouges also gives us a lot of detail about the misogyny she faced. In February of 1787, she wrote to the actors, criticizing their sexist practices:

Les femmes qui ont eu, avant moi, le courage de se faire jouer sur votre théâtre m'offrent un exemple effrayant des dangers que court mon sexe dans la carrière dramatique. On excuse volontiers les chutes fréquentes qu'y font les hommes, mais on ne veut pas qu'une femme s'expose à y réussir.⁴⁴

This double standard annoyed de Gouges; in this moment, she articulates one of her common feminist philosophies: that women are as capable as men. In 1790, she went so far as to call herself a woman-turned-man: "une femme qui s'est fait homme ... pour trouver une manière de tout dire."⁴⁵ This statement suggests that her interaction with the Comédie encouraged her increasingly strong feminist views. Just as Zamore's difference is only related to his color; her difference is only related to her sex. Neither of these

⁴² See the review of de Gouges's play in the *Chronique de Paris*, December 28, 1789.

⁴³ Fleury writes: "[Mme de G] était une de ces femmes auteurs auxquelles on serait tenté d'offrir en cadeau une paire de rasoirs; une de ces femmes qui sont parvenues avec des peines infinies à se rendre le moins femme possible." *Mémoires de Fleury de la Comédie française* (Paris: A. Delahays, 1847), 2:85.

⁴⁴ Letter dated February 9, 1787, located at the BCF, *dossier d'auteur* de Gouges.

⁴⁵ *Départ de Necker*, 14.

prevents one from acting as morally or intelligently as any white man. De Gouges admits the accepted worth of white men while simultaneously opposing the belief that differently racialized and gendered subjects inherently lack this worth.

De Gouges is thus passionately dedicated to authors' rights, to the rights of female playwrights, but also to the message of her play. Brown subtly suggests that de Gouges might have benefited from the growing abolitionist movements in Paris at the time and that she might have emphasized her play's abolitionist message in order to argue for the importance of its performance. Without being able to examine a version of the play that existed prior to 1788, it is difficult to determine whether de Gouges altered the political message of her play as abolitionist movements became more prevalent. (De Gouges would have ardently defended herself against such an accusation. In her response to pro-slavery lobbyists, she claimed that her play had in fact incited the formation of the Société des Amis des Noirs.)⁴⁶ If the play's original version were indeed less overtly about slavery, then one might imagine that she altered the play according to popular opinion. But, given that in both the 1788 and 1792 versions of the play Zamore complains in the first scene of the first act that "...nous ne sommes que des hommes. Ils se servent de nous dans ces climats comme ils se servent des animaux dans les leurs," it would be difficult to deny that de Gouges always intended to make a political statement

⁴⁶ Olympe de Gouges, *Réponse au champion américain, ou colon très aisé à connaître* (Paris: s.n., 1790), 6.

against slavery through her play.⁴⁷ The fervor with which she defended herself, the consistent political nature of most of her plays, and the common Enlightenment belief that performance had the capacity to incite moral action demonstrate that de Gouges was never principally motivated by profit or success in her demands for her play's performance.

Though they might not have initially done so, the actors certainly recognized that the play was a suggestion for how France should form its colonies. Fleury claimed that the play was merely a "long commentaire sur le gros livre [de Raynal]." ⁴⁸ Though his comment was meant to disparage de Gouges's text, it in fact indicates that the play was understood as part of and reacting to a long tradition of writings on colonialism and slavery.⁴⁹ This made her work controversial; colonialists had great power at the Comédie Française and probably began asserting more pressure on the *comédiens* after de Gouges made herself and her play more well-known among the supporters of slavery in Paris—especially when she changed the name to *L'Esclavage des nègres* in 1789. Miller notes that the Duc de Duras (whose grandson would marry the author Claire de Duras) signed a

⁴⁷ Act I, Scene I, 1788, 6 and 1792, 14.

⁴⁸ Fleury, *Mémoires de Fleury de la Comédie française* (Paris: A. Delahays, 1847), 2:92-93.

⁴⁹ Fleury's decision to disparage de Gouges's play by referring to its connection to Raynal's *Histoire* is curious since other plays of the period defended themselves by saying that they were based on Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes*. It could be that he condescendingly considered her work too literarily inferior to be compared to Raynal's. See Sybille Fischer's analysis of the play *L'Héroïne américaine* in *Modernity Disavowed* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and the preface to *Le Blanc et Le Noir* by Charles-Antoine-Guillaume Pigault-Lebrun.

warrant for de Gouges's arrest after her first run-in with the *comédiens* in 1785; Duras also had colonial investments.⁵⁰ Once news of this play spread among the pro-slavery community, the forty colonialist owners of expensive year-long memberships at the theatre mobilized to act against de Gouges.⁵¹ Based on an examination of Le Club Massiac's financial records, Le Hir suggests that the pro-slavery Club Massiac had much to do with helping shut down the play in January 1790.⁵² Fleury recounts arguing with de Gouges about the topic of her play before its first performance in 1789. He states that the Comédie proposed "des changements géographiques" in order to avoid a direct portrayal of enslaved Africans on stage. De Gouges's declaration in the preface to her 1788 play confirms Fleury's account:

Je finis cette préface en observant au lecteur que c'est l'Histoire des Nègres que j'ai traitée dans ce drame, et que la Comédie m'a forcé à défigurer par le costume et la couleur, et qu'il m'a fallu y substituer des sauvages.⁵³

De Gouges was not alone as a playwright who believed it necessary to fight to have her play performed, but she consistently and publically opposed every excuse that she was given. In so doing, she made this conflict about abolitionism, discrimination against female playwrights, and the importance of performance to politics.

⁵⁰ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 114.

⁵¹ Blanc, 100.

⁵² For information about funds that the Club Massiac might have used to oppose de Gouges's play, see Marie-Pierre Le Hir's "Feminism, Theatre, Race: L'Esclavage des Noirs" published in Kadish and Massardier-Kenney's *Translating Slavery*, 1994.

⁵³ Preface to *Zamore et Mirza, ou l'heureux naufrage* (Paris: Cailleau, 1788).

Morality through Spectacle: Portraying and Observing Racial Difference

The substitution of “sauvages” that de Gouges resentfully made according to the Comédie’s suggestions affected the moral and political message that she sought to convey; observing slaves on stage was, for her, crucial to provoking pity and thereby spawning moral action. De Gouges was certainly not alone in her belief in the power of theatre to incite moral behavior. As Le Hir explains: “Diderot, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, and [de] Gouges shared a perhaps naive assumption about the dynamics of drama performance: they thought that through the powerful emotional communion with their characters’ sufferings, the spectators’ true nature, their ‘humanity,’ would resurface, allowing them to shake prejudices and be better human beings.”⁵⁴ Though de Gouges did not receive a formal education, she did circulate in the intellectual communities of late-eighteenth-century Paris, learning and writing among the intellectuals of her day. She therefore, not surprisingly, shares this optimistic view of theatrical performance with Diderot and Mercier. Moreover, she appears to ignore Rousseau’s objections to theatre’s false reality by making no distinction between theatrical performance and lived experience in her effort to recreate a personal childhood moment (one that she credits with giving birth to her abolitionist opinions) on stage.

⁵⁴ Marie-Pierre Le Hir, “Feminism, Theatre, Race: L’Esclavage des Noirs” in *Translating Slavery*, 3.

Diderot is known as perhaps the most ardent eighteenth-century proponent of the *performance* of theatre. As Moi explains in her work on *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, Diderot opposed the longstanding Aristotelian tradition of theatre in France:

The difference between Aristotle and Diderot is the difference between a theatre based on words and a theatre based on pictures. Diderot preferred spectacle to plot, and would never have agreed that to read a play could be just as powerful an experience as to see it.⁵⁵

Like Diderot, de Gouges thought a performed play would incite more emotion and therefore more sympathy in her audience; this is why in her play's 1788 epilogue *Réflexions sur les homes nègres*, she touts her idea to put slaves on stage as a unique contribution to the abolitionist movement:

Plusieurs hommes se sont occupés [du] sort [des nègres]; ils ont travaillé à l'adoucir; mais aucun n'a songé à les présenter sur la scène avec le costume et la couleur, tel que je l'avois essayé, si la Comédie Française ne s'y étoit point opposée.⁵⁶

De Gouges believed that she had an exceptional idea for ameliorating the condition of slaves through performance and set up the *comédiens* as the party responsible for the failure of this idea. She believed that performance, through its ability to portray images, created a more effective result in a spectator than any experience of reading.

⁵⁵ Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 113.

⁵⁶ *Réflexions sur les hommes nègres*, published with *Zamore et Mirza*, 92-93.

The reality of a theatrical performance, for de Gouges, was the responsibility of the actors. Diderot also encouraged actors to pretend that the audience did not exist: “[N]e pensez non plus au spectateur que s’il n’existait pas. Imaginez, sur le bord du théâtre, un grand mur qui vous sépare du parterre ; jouez comme si la toile ne se levait pas.”⁵⁷ De Gouges hoped to achieve a similar level of reality on stage, declaring that her play was “le tableau fidèle de la situation actuelle de l’Amérique.”⁵⁸ These beliefs led de Gouges to place tremendous responsibility for her play’s moral effect on the actors. She waited outside the theatre to speak to certain actors she believed to be opposed to her abolitionist agenda.⁵⁹ Furthermore, part of her insistence on the superiority of spectacle over plot or literary quality required that the actors perform in blackface, which was a common practice at the time, even in the colonies.⁶⁰

De Gouges details her feelings about racial difference in her postscript, *Réflexions sur les hommes nègres*, which predates the two later modified versions of her play, thereby elaborating on her first reasons for writing an abolitionist play. She describes a

⁵⁷ Denis Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique, Œuvres complètes de Diderot* (Paris: Brière, 1821), Tome 4: 500.

⁵⁸ Preface to *L’Esclavage des noirs*, 3.

⁵⁹ According to Fleury’s *Mémoires*, she was especially interested in convincing the actor Des Essarts of her political agenda’s importance.

Des Essarts’ opinion of de Gouges confirms her reputation as a “naturally” educated woman: “Son éducation avait été extrêmement négligée, mais la nature l’avait douée d’une imagination ardente, d’un esprit facile, de beaucoup de bon-sens...” Des Essarts, *Les Siècles littéraires de La France, ou nouveau dictionnaire historique, critique, et bibliographique de tous les écrivains français, morts, vivans, jusqu’à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Chez l’Auteur, Imprimeur Libraire, 1800), 3:286.

⁶⁰ See the work of Laurent Dubois and Bernard Camier.

theatrical scene of herself as a little girl observing a black person, a female slave, for the first time. No words are exchanged between the little girl and the woman; no dialogue is present in her recreation of the scene for her readers. The observation of racial difference and the outward signs of a woman's misery are enough to spawn de Gouges's abolitionism. As with her opposition to a Roussealian anxiety about the false reality of theatre, de Gouges also challenges Rousseau's notion that words, more so than appearance, spawn the pity of the observer.⁶¹ In Rousseau's *Essai sur l'Origine des Langues*, he writes:

Supposez une situation de douleur parfaitement connue, en voyant la personne affligée vous serez difficilement ému jusqu'à pleurer ; mais laissez-lui le temps de vous *dire* tout ce qu'elle sent, et bientôt vous allez fondre en larmes.⁶²

The scene of pity that de Gouges describes as the origination of her abolitionist sentiment involves no words. In the process of recreating this personal moment of recognition for an audience in the capital of a slave-owning empire that was, in her opinion, in need of a moral awakening, de Gouges is also articulating the differences between her ideas and those of Rousseau.⁶³ By downplaying the significance of words in

⁶¹ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre à D'Alembert sur les spectacles* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1889).

⁶² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues* (Bordeaux: Ducros, 1970), 35, emphasis added.

⁶³ In her 1789 *Bonheur primitif*, de Gouges claimed that, in comparison with Rousseau: "mais moi, qui me ressens de cette première ignorance, & qui suis place & déplacée en même temps dans ce siècle éclair, mes opinions peuvent être plus justes que les siennes" (6).

this scene, she further insists on the importance of performance and further aligns herself with Diderot.⁶⁴

De Gouges claims that the *sight* of a black woman as a child led her to ask questions about this woman's "deplorable fate" and ultimately led to her abolitionist opinions:

L'espèce d'hommes Nègres m'a toujours intéressée à son déplorable sort. A peine mes connoissances commençoient à se développer, & dans un âge où les enfans ne pensent pas, que l'aspect d'une Nègresse que je vis pour la première fois, me porta à réfléchir, & à faire des questions sur sa couleur.⁶⁵

In these few words, she paints an image of the moment of the birth of her abolitionism.

Yet, how likely is it that this moment actually occurred? Miller has questioned the possibility of this moment's authenticity, but I suggest that de Gouges wished to promote this childhood experience as a factual event because, like Diderot, she saw theatre as a tool for the reproduction of *reality*. A recreation of a real moment of her *prise de conscience* would, in her mind, naturally lead to the idealized colony that she imagined.

⁶⁴ For more information on the differing opinions of Rousseau and Diderot in regard to theatre, see the work of Jeffrey M. Leichman.

⁶⁵ *Réflexions sur les hommes nègres*, published with *Zamore et Mirza*, 92.

De Gouges's positive recounting of the sight of a black woman is contrary to Edmund Burke's 1757 *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime* (London: Dodsley, 1767) in which he recounts a blind boy who, upon regaining his sight, was "struck with great horror" upon viewing a black woman for the first time, 276.

As a child in her native Montauban in the 1750s, de Gouges did not see many black people.⁶⁶ According to Pierre H. Boulle, whose research focuses on the census of 1777, only one black man was living in Montauban in 1777 and he arrived there only in 1765.⁶⁷ It is likely, however, given the number of black people coming into the port of Bordeaux and the amount of travelers from Bordeaux to the Montauban region, that a person of African descent traveled to Montauban in the 1750s as the slave of a person coming from Bordeaux. This, unfortunately, would have been someone who would not have been officially registered in Montauban's records.⁶⁸ The woman that de Gouges describes could quite possibly be one of these slaves. Given the rarity of this phenomenon, the sight of this woman was a memorable experience for the young girl. She describes the woman as a "négresse," which would have meant that she was both black and enslaved. If the woman had been a free black woman, this vision might not have struck the would-be author as so terrible. The sight of an actual slave—something that de Gouges could reproduce on stage—gave life to the abolitionism that the playwright sought so ardently to spread in Paris at the height of France's trade in African people.

⁶⁶ In *There are No Slaves in France: the political culture of race and slavery in the Ancien Régime* (Oxford University Press, 2002), Sue Peabody writes that, for the number of black people in France in the late eighteenth century, "an upper limit of 4000-5000" is a good estimation, 4.

⁶⁷ Pierre H. Boulle, email message to author, April 29, 2009.

⁶⁸ In *There are No Slaves*, Peabody also cites the research of Léo Elisabeth, who estimates around 3500 black people entering the port of Bordeaux in the eighteenth century, 4.

De Gouges explains that she understood the role that “force and prejudice” played in the lives of black people as she grew older:

Ceux que je pus interroger alors, ne satisfirent point ma curiosité & mon raisonnement. Ils traitoient ces gens-là de brutes, d’êtres que le Ciel avoit maudit ; mais, en avançant en âge, je vis clairement que c’étoit la force & le préjugé qui les avoient condamnés à cet horrible esclavage, que la Nature n’y avoit aucun part, & que l’injuste & puissant intérêt des Blancs avoit tout fait.⁶⁹

She probably saw *free* black people for the first time after her arrival in Paris in the late 60s or early 70s.⁷⁰ De Gouges was close friends with the Marquise de Montesson whose “directeur artistique” was the Chevalier de Saint-George.⁷¹ The son of a French plantation owner and a former slave, Joseph Boulogne, later known as the Chevalier de Saint-George, came to Paris from Guadeloupe via Bordeaux in 1755 or 1756 with his mother, Nanon, who had been freed in 1755.⁷² De Gouges did not come to Paris until long after the Chevalier, but it is likely that she would have known him in the 1780s through the Marquise de Montesson. Though it is impossible to know for sure, de Gouges could have had the Chevalier in mind when writing her *Réflexions*.

⁶⁹ *Réflexions sur les hommes nègres*, published with *Zamore et Mirza*, 92.

⁷⁰ When exactly de Gouges left Montauban for Paris is unclear. Erica Harth states that de Gouges left her native Montauban for Paris in 1767 (*Cartesian Women: Versions and Subversions of Rational Discourse in the Old Regime*, 213). Olivier Blanc notes that Olympe de Gouges must have lived in Paris from before 1776 because she is cited in the *L’Almanach de Paris* this year, a fact that proves she was a “dame de société” by 1776 (Blanc, 57).

⁷¹ See Blanc, 69.

⁷² Pierre Boule, email message to author, April 28, 2009.

The power of de Gouges's visual experience led her to challenge the prejudiced responses that she received when questioning the enslavement of black people. She heard two answers for the questions that this experience caused her to ask: black people were brutes and they were cursed by heaven. In other words, she was told that black people were somehow naturally inferior or made for enslavement and that some kind of divine power had made them this way. De Gouges refers here to the biblical Curse of Ham, which David Goldenberg describes as "the assumed biblical justification for a curse of eternal slavery imposed on Black people."⁷³ Ham, the son of Noah, sees his father's nakedness. Noah then curses Ham's son, Canaan. Africans and their descendants were often believed to be the descendants of Ham and therefore cursed. By the time de Gouges is referring to it here, the Curse of Ham had been bandied about for generations. Yet, it became even more commonly referred to during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when it could be used to justify the transatlantic trade in Africans and their continued enslavement in the Americas. De Gouges's concern for this woman was thus dismissed by claiming that a curse—something out of the control of humans—was responsible for the misery that the little girl observed. In a radical move, de Gouges defied this terribly problematic rationalization and instead blamed the power and

⁷³ David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 168.

prejudice of white people. She hoped that, by observing a similar scene, her audience would come to a similar conclusion. For her, observation was so powerful that it could reveal the fallacy of such a longstanding myth.

De Gouges's decision to begin her *Réflexions* with the observation of a child conveys her belief that recognizing the immorality of oppressing black people was best left to the uninitiated whose observations were not encumbered by learned racist beliefs. Erica Harth explains that de Gouges saw "learning as an agent of corruption."⁷⁴ For her, the role of the author is an educational one, but this education is meant to return humans to an earlier, less corrupt "natural" state: "L'Auteur, ami de la vérité, l'Auteur [...] n'a d'autre intérêt que de rappeler les hommes aux principes bienfaisants de la Nature."⁷⁵ For de Gouges, humans should *naturally* pity the suffering other. If they do not, they must be brought to this recognition through observation—an uncorrupted, natural educational tool. De Gouges alludes to this understanding of learning and education in her 1789 political treatise: "L'homme de génie apprend presque tout *d'un coup d'œil*, et devine le reste."⁷⁶ As Lynn Festa explains, in the eighteenth century, if "pity is the spontaneous instinct of the man of nature, in society it must be laboriously

⁷⁴ Erica Harth, *Cartesian Women* (Cornell University Press, 1992), 224.

⁷⁵ Preface to *L'Esclavage des Noirs*, 1792, 2-3.

⁷⁶ *Le Bonheur Primitif de l'Homme* (Paris: 1789), 56. Emphasis added.

induced”⁷⁷ De Gouges believed that observation, specifically the spectacular experience that theatre provides an audience, could do the work of returning humans to this natural, highly moral state.⁷⁸ In this state, she believed, humans should not and would not accept oppression based on racial difference.⁷⁹

As an informally educated author whose task was to guide others back to a state of “natural” harmony, de Gouges wanted to *show* that any justification for the wrong of slavery was part of a corrupt and immoral society. With a glance, de Gouges recognized the injustice of enslaved people’s suffering. This knowledge stands in opposition to the corrupt racist justifications for slavery that de Gouges heard as a child and it places de Gouges in opposition to all the “educated” and “unnatural” people who deny the humanity of others because of racial differences. Her theory that “la différence n’existe que dans la couleur” is born in this childhood moment of pity. As Miller explains, by dating her first acknowledgment of racial difference to her childhood, de Gouges makes

⁷⁷ Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in eighteenth-century Britain and France* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 39.

⁷⁸ De Gouges often wrote of the educational benefits of theatre. Madame de Circey in *Bienfaisance, ou la bonne mère*, for example, only went to plays in order to “procurer des leçons salutaires” for her children. *Bienfaisance, ou la bonne mère* (Paris, 1788). In her Rousseauian philosophical treatise, *Le Bonheur primitif de l’homme*, de Gouges suggests forming schools funded by two national theatres, one for women and one for men: “Au bout de dix ans de cet établissement [le théâtre national] [...], que l’excédent des dépenses & des appointemens puisse fournir à élever deux écoles dramatiques ; qu’on joigne à ces écoles tous les arts, comme musique, peinture, architecture, pratique, philosophie, tout ce qui pourroit mettre les jeunes gens à même de choisir un état propre à leurs dispositions,” 74-75.

⁷⁹ De Gouges, at least initially, did not understand social structures defined by class difference to be oppressive. In 1789, she proclaimed that the “maladie nationale” of late eighteenth-century France was that everyone wanted to philosophize, to “s’élever,” without realizing that a society of only high class philosophers could not function. *Le Bonheur*, 22.

racial difference “foundational to her apprehension of the world.”⁸⁰ It is also important to note that de Gouges began to be aware of race at the same moment that she became aware of slavery. To elaborate on Miller’s argument, the subordination that led to the enslavement of Africans and their descendants was “foundational to her apprehension” of racial difference.

De Gouges’s career as a playwright—a career she authenticated by her ability to guide others based on her own observations—was thus intimately tied to her desire to erase oppression based on physical difference. As she often does with gender difference, she highlights the difference of “color” while simultaneously downplaying its significance. De Gouges was a female playwright, but she believed she could create works as great as any man’s and even transcend this difference by making herself into a “man” in order to speak. Similarly, Zamore was indeed of a different color, but he could be a loyal subject, just like any white Frenchman. De Gouges could achieve her goal of demonstrating the irrelevance of difference by having her audience *observe* what she had also observed. Hence the power of theatre for de Gouges and the reason why, as a playwright, she transitioned seamlessly into working as a political activist as the Revolution progressed.

⁸⁰ Miller, 118.

De Gouges among Playwrights and Abolitionists

Submitting *Zamore et Mirza* almost fifty years after the first performance of Voltaire's *Alzire*, de Gouges believed her play to differ from his through its portrayal of the plight of *black* slaves. Voltaire's play takes place in Peru; his slaves are Incan, not African. *Alzire* contains several subtle critiques of colonialism in the Americas; it does not, however, directly address the very real problem of the enslavement of Africans in the French colonies. According to Miller, Voltaire, through the location of his play, "[avoids talking about] the transatlantic trade in Africans..."⁸¹ Diderot could certainly be referring to *Alzire* when, in an addition to Raynal's famous *L'Histoire des deux Indes*, he complains that Europeans pity the suffering, "surtout au théâtre," but do not seem to care about the "fatale destinée des malheureux nègres."⁸² In contrast, de Gouges sought to criticize the institution of slavery openly.

To the modern reader, however, de Gouges's play comes across as ambiguous in its portrayal of race. In addition to the possible effects of censorship, a different understanding of "race" in the eighteenth century contributes to this confusion. In de Gouges's era, *nègre* could mean both dark-skinned and enslaved and did not necessarily

⁸¹ Miller, 73.

⁸² Raynal, *Histoire des deux Indes* (Geneva: Pellet, 1780), Tome 3, livre, 11, chapitre XXII.

Yves Benot credits Diderot for this addition to the 1780 edition to Raynal's 1770 work. See Benot's *Les Lumières, l'esclavage et la colonisation* (Paris: Editions la Découverte, 2005), 109-110.

mean *African*. People from India, for example, could also be called *nègre*.⁸³ According to Fleury's memoirs, however, de Gouges, though she may have used the words *nègre* and *indien* interchangeably in her play (a practice not uncommon for its time), sought to dismantle this confusion and speak specifically about enslaved *Africans* in the French colonies. She was angered that the *comédiens* wanted to portray "sauvages" instead of "nègres" specifically because she wanted her play to differ from *Alzire* through color. Fleury explains de Gouges's reaction: "Des sauvages! Mettre du rouge et du blanc comme dans *Alzire* ! La pauvre dame était aux champs..."⁸⁴

De Gouges likely formulated her argument for her play's uniqueness based on a critique of *Alzire* because it was one of the most performed plays of the eighteenth century; she would have been quite familiar with the play not only because of its popularity, but also because the Marquis de Pompignan, her alleged illegitimate father, wrote a play entitled *Didon* that was inspired by Voltaire's.⁸⁵ Additionally, both Voltaire's and de Gouges's plays present a character named Zamore. Zamore was a popular slave name during the period; Madame du Barry owned a slave in Paris named

⁸³ Miller explains, for example, that "although he was, by all accounts, from India, [the] Zamor [of Madame du Barry] was widely referred to as "le nègre de la du Barry" (123).

⁸⁴ Miller, 123.

⁸⁵ *Didon* takes place in Carthage and is not overtly about the transatlantic trade in Africans. De Gouges claimed that the Marquis de Pompignan and not her mother's husband was her father. Her biographer Olivier Blanc has shown that this is quite possible. Pompignan never recognized her as his daughter.

Zamore who testified against her during the Terror.⁸⁶ Four men whose names were either Zamor or Zamore enlisted in the legion of men of color that was assembled in 1791 and led by the Chevalier de Saint George.⁸⁷ In her play's portrayal of colonial society, de Gouges was inspired by the literature and the people who surrounded her, but she wished to go further than previous playwrights. She insisted that her play differ from Voltaire's through color and that the *comédiens* should perform in blackface.

De Gouges's insistence on the color *noir* as opposed to *rouge* makes clear her intent to portray the enslavement of Africans and to defy her period's common double definition of *nègre* as both dark-skinned and enslaved.⁸⁸ Her last title change to *L'Esclavage des noirs* and her use of the term *philanthropique* to describe her work also speak to her identification with abolitionist movements of the period.⁸⁹ It was not uncommon for plays to be performed in blackface, especially in Saint-Domingue, but we do know that the *comédiens* opposed using it, perhaps because of the complaints of colonialist theatergoers who understood de Gouges's use of color to add to her

⁸⁶ De Gouges likely knew of Zamore and could have met him. According to her biographer, de Gouges knew people who knew Madame du Barry (Blanc, 46).

⁸⁷ Pierre Bardin, *Joseph, sieur de Saint-George: le chevalier noir* (Paris: Guenegaud, 2006), 190-199.

⁸⁸ Sue Peabody, *There are No Slaves in France: the political culture of race and slavery in the Ancien Régime* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 61.

⁸⁹ Olympe de Gouges, preface to *L'Esclavage des noirs*, 3-4.

The word 'philanthropique' was used relatively often to describe abolitionists. See Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot's *La Société des amis des noirs, 1788-1799* (Paris: Editions UNESCO, 1998), 29. For more information about the use of the word *noir* among abolitionists see Laurent Dubois, "Inscribing Race in the Revolutionary French Antilles," in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 98-99.

statement against slavery. (It is unclear whether, when it was performed, the actors actually did use blackface. Given de Gouges's critique of their performance, we can assume they did not.)

If blackface was not used, this was certainly a defeat for de Gouges and an example of the power of the pro-slavery lobby. De Gouges was not alone, however, in her opposition to slavery proponents such as the members of the Club Massiac. Her arguments with Mosneron were read by the Société des Amis des Noirs, who thanked her for her work.⁹⁰ Having circulated among the aristocracy of Paris since the 1770s, de Gouges had powerful friends. She was friends with Mercier (the author who foretold an "avenger of the New World"), who, in a letter to the *Journal de Paris* printed on February 17, 1793, defended de Gouges as a playwright, saying that her plays follow a "Shakespearian" model. As late as 1792, she was also in touch with Jacques-Pierre Brissot, founder of the abolitionist Société des Amis des Noirs. Though no one knows for sure, Olivier Blanc theorizes that, because of the people she frequented, she could have even met Mary Wollstonecraft, who published her famous text on women's rights one year after de Gouges published hers.⁹¹ De Gouges was therefore surrounded by like-minded individuals. Never choosing one political party over another, however, she

⁹⁰ See Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot's *La Société des amis des noirs, 1788-1799*, 265 and 283.

⁹¹ Blanc, 130-131.

insisted that she spoke for herself, not on behalf of any organized group. This insistence, I believe, has led some to question her relationship with the Société des Amis des Noirs and therefore her abolitionism.

Though she shared many of the abolitionist ideas of her contemporaries, de Gouges was reluctant to associate herself too strongly with any one group. In his scathing remarks to de Gouges, Mosneron threatens her and accuses her of speaking on behalf of Brissot's Society:

Nous proposons donc à MM. Les Amis des Noirs, & ce par vous, Madame, qui vous mettez si *honorablement* en avant pour eux, & par le journal qui vous a fait connoître, & à défaut de publicité de votre part par la voie de l'impression, c'est-à-dire, bien publiquement, de le rendre à la plaine de Grenelle ou à celle des Sablons, d'y faire faire des fosses, & de nous y battre à mort.⁹²

Even in reaction to such a violent threat as this, de Gouges did not back down. She responded to Mosneron by explaining that she did not speak for the Society, but rather on her own behalf: "Ce n'est pas la cause des philosophes, des amis des noirs, que j'entreprends de défendre ; c'est la mienne propre."⁹³ This reluctance to associate herself with the Society stems from her tendency to promote a nonviolent middle-of-the-road path toward progress and from her support of women's rights, which was not always on the agenda of abolitionists like Brissot.

⁹² Published in the *Chronique de Paris*, No . CXVIII. December 25, 1789.

⁹³ De Gouges, *Réponse au champion américain*, 2.

There has been some question about de Gouges's precise relationship with the well-known Société des Amis des Noirs, founded by Brissot in 1788. Brown writes that she was not a member.⁹⁴ Blanc insists that she was. Miller, in his chapter on de Gouges's abolitionism, does not make a statement on this issue.⁹⁵ I wish to definitively conclude that de Gouges did join the Society. Brissot clearly names her as a member in his *Mémoires*.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, according to reprinted minutes of the Society's meetings in Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot's *La Société des amis des noirs, 1788-1799*, de Gouges is not listed as in attendance at any early meetings. Her absence from the records does not mean that she did not become a member. The meetings were notoriously poorly attended. Moreover, the Society's records become less detailed after June 1791, indicating that de Gouges possibly joined the group between mid-1791 and her play's last publication in March of 1792. Revolutionary publications denouncing members of the Society confirm a late date of her admittance into the Society. One such pamphlet, published in 1790, *Découverte d'une conspiration contre les intérêts de la France*, names 99 members of the Société des Amis des Noirs, but not de Gouges.⁹⁷ Many pro-slavery activists appear to have been uninterested in de Gouges as an abolitionist—except during the very public performance of her play in December 1789. Yet, in a letter dated

⁹⁴ Brown, "Self-Fashionings," 392.

⁹⁵ Miller, 111.

⁹⁶ AN, 446 AP 15. Excerpt from the *Papiers inédits* of Brissot.

⁹⁷ Anonymous, *Découverte d'une conspiration contre les intérêts de la France* (Paris: 1790).

November 20, 1792, de Gouges wrote to Brissot requesting to meet him in person because she had received anonymous threats “d’une nature à déconcerter une âme forte.”⁹⁸ Though it is unclear exactly why de Gouges was threatened, it is possible that she turned to the Society because she received increasingly threatening letters after the last publication of her play. (It is also likely that these threats had much to do with her position against the king’s execution.)⁹⁹

De Gouges could have had multiple reasons for her initial reluctance to associate herself with the Society. Her statement to Mosneron, instead of proving her distance from the group, could also indicate a fear of associating herself too publicly with them — especially after violent reactions like his. She was often opposed to the increasingly extreme political positions of the time and imagined that her writings offered a moderate, less violent path.¹⁰⁰ She may have considered the group’s views too extreme for her to join or at least too extreme to publicly admit membership. Moreover, her reluctance to associate herself with them might have originated in philosophical disagreements about women and society — disagreements that surface in later writings by Brissot and de Gouges. Brissot’s newspaper, *Le Patriote français*, printed an article

⁹⁸ AN, 446 AP 15.

⁹⁹ See her letter read on the floor of the National Assembly published in *Le Moniteur Universel* on December 15, 1792.

¹⁰⁰ De Gouges declared in *Pour sauver la patrie il faut respecter les trois ordres* that “la modération peut seule ramener le calme,” 8.

against the education of women in September 1791 just as de Gouges was publishing her *Declaration*, hoping that her “Législateurs penseront sainement sur l’éducation des femmes.”¹⁰¹ The article in *Le Patriote français* posits that women were born for “une vie domestique et sédentaire.” Non-sedentary de Gouges might have wished to distance herself from this sexist line of thinking. Additionally, she declared in 1792 that she did not agree entirely with Brissot on his theory of social organization, claiming that his theories were “impracticable” among men.¹⁰² De Gouges was definitively a member of the Société des Amis des Noirs, but she had some disagreements with its most prominent members. These disagreements along with the increasing danger of political action in the early years of the Revolution influenced how she associated with the group. Her late association with the Society might also explain why later versions of her play were more explicit in their portrayal of slavery and the slave trade.

De Gouges’s play—thanks to her association with the Society and/or the ease of censorship regulations on plays after 1791—portrays the transatlantic trade in African people more overtly over time. The play takes place on an island that is first in “les indes orientales” and then simply in “les indes”; de Gouges moves from east to west, making a direct reference to the French West Indies in the play’s 1792 version possible.

¹⁰¹ De Gouges, *La Déclaration des droits de la femme*, 13.

¹⁰² Preface to *L’Esclavage des noirs*. 7-8

Furthermore, de Gouges adds a direct reference to the Middle Passage in the 1792 version.¹⁰³ Though she suggests that her play incited the formation of the Society, it is more likely that de Gouges received important information about the African slave trade from the Society that in turn influenced later versions of her play. By the time de Gouges's play was performed, the Society was circulating images of slave ships provided by English abolitionists.¹⁰⁴ In accordance with the claims that de Gouges made in 1788 about wanting to portray "nègres" instead of "sauvages," her play, though still ambiguous in its use of markers of racial difference, became increasingly specific about the connections between France, Africa and the Caribbean as other French revolutionaries did. As stated in the ballet description at the end of the 1788 version, de Gouges's goal was to create "un effet neuf au théâtre" — an effect she hoped to make new through her play's controversial portrayal of powerful female characters and dark-skinned slaves on stage speaking on their own behalf.

Saint-Domingue Reacts

In this chapter, I hope to have shown that de Gouges's abolitionist beliefs must be understood in connection with a variety of influencing factors, including theatre regulations on authorship, expectations of behavior for authors, the monarchy's

¹⁰³ The character Azor remembers being bought off the coast of Guinea with his father.

¹⁰⁴ "Exemplaire du dessin & de la description d'un Navir chargé d'Esclaves" included in the Society's publication *Réplique à Necker*, July 1789.

diminishing ability to censor theatre, her own personal experiences, her belief in the power of theatre, emerging abolitionist movements, the chaotic, rapidly changing political world of the early Revolution, and the consistent sexism of an evolving system that wished to exclude her from public participation. This is not to mention the influence of the slaves in Saint-Domingue who began revolting in August of 1791. News of the revolts reached France a few months before de Gouges's republication of her play in March of 1792.¹⁰⁵ Disappointed that her middle-of-the-road nonviolent solution to colonial tensions seemed impossible in the face of the current strife in France's most prized colony, de Gouges articulated her most reactionary statement against abolition.

In the preface, she writes:

C'est à vous, actuellement, esclaves, hommes de couleur, à qui je vais parler; j'ai peut-être des droits incontestables pour blâmer votre férocité: cruels, en imitant les tyrans, vous les justifiez. La plupart de vos Maîtres étoient humains & bienfaisans, & dans votre aveugle rage vous ne distinguez pas les victimes innocentes de vos persécuteurs. Les hommes n'étoient pas nés pour les fers, & vous prouvez qu'ils sont nécessaires.¹⁰⁶

This statement, to put it mildly, makes de Gouges's abolitionism seem much less than radical. She certainly added this to the preface in an effort to promote her moderate agenda of opposing *any* kind of violence (which, as the Revolution progressed, became a more and more radical position). Yet, one could argue that she mainly added this

¹⁰⁵ Jeremy Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 44.

¹⁰⁶ Preface to *L'Esclavage des Noirs*, 5.

statement to the preface out of fear of people like Mosneron because de Gouges does not change Zamore's direct accusation that most slave masters were cruel *instead of* "humains et bienfaisans." Zamore, even in the first scene of the play's last version, negates de Gouges's words by claiming that "La plupart de ces maîtres barbares nous traitent avec une cruauté qui fait frémir la Nature." This contradiction proves the author's ambivalence about freedom achieved through violence and leaves open the possibility that de Gouges defended slave owners in her preface for reasons related to her own safety and survival in a rapidly changing revolutionary world that would, in the end, punish her for her political beliefs and her ardent desire to express them.

2: Reconditioning Violence in Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's *Sarah* and Sophie Doin's *La Famille noire*, *Le Négrier*, *Blanche et noir*, and *Noire et blanc*

After 1804, abolitionist activism in France experienced a serious decline because pro-colonial and pro-slavery lobbyists, who were often former colonists, used the violence of slave revolts as an excuse to justify slavery and to prove the supposed incapacity of black people to rule themselves. In his 1802 *Le Génie du Christianisme*, Chateaubriand implied that abolitionism was—or should be—dead: “Qui oserait encore plaider la cause des noirs après les crimes qu’ils ont commis?”¹ With this one question, he turns slaves’ reaction to their enslavement into a “crime” and forgets all horrors perpetrated by the French military, such as General Rochambeau’s rule of “racist delirium.”² This opposition to abolitionism, accompanied by a consistent nostalgia for Saint-Domingue, continued into the 1820s. Drawing on the title of the 1822 French translation of Thomas Clarkson’s abolitionist *Le Cri des Africains*, former colonists from Saint-Domingue published a pro-colonial text, *Le Cri des Colons*, the same year. *Le Cri des Colons* argues that “les blancs” are not “tyrans,” but rather the only people who can

¹ François René de Chateaubriand, *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1843), Tome 3: 235.

² I borrow this term from Laurent Dubois, who calls Rochambeau’s rule one of “racist delirium” (*Avengers*, 293). Rochambeau, who replaced Leclerc in Napoleon’s campaign to win back Saint-Domingue, was especially brutal. Emeric Bergeaud describes Rochambeau’s rule thus: “la situation de la colonie, sous son gouvernement, pouvait être comparé à celle d’un navire en détresse sous la conduite d’un pilote ivre” (*Stella*, 185).

establish a decent, profitable, and safe society in Haiti, which the authors still called Saint-Domingue.³ Even though former colonists did not all agree on how best to retake Saint-Domingue, they did agree that the violent actions of recent events in the Caribbean were the fault of the formerly enslaved and abolitionists “qui ont mis le poignard à la main [des esclaves].”⁴ White colonists were, they wrote, simply responsible for keeping order and ensuring economic prosperity.

These depictions of colonialism and slavery denied the agency of slaves and entirely precluded any understanding of slave revolt as the consequence of provocation. Often in reaction to this hostility against the enslaved who had revolted, abolitionists of the early nineteenth century, such as Germaine de Staël, her son Auguste, and her son-in-law the Duc de Broglie, focused on more minor objectives, such as ending the slave trade as England had in 1807. After his mother’s death in 1817, Auguste de Staël was extremely active in the Société de la Morale Chrétienne, founded in 1821, which had an abolitionist branch that promoted charity, the amelioration of the condition of slaves, and the end of the slave trade in particular. The Société played a significant role in a rebirth of abolitionist activism that began in France in the 1820s. This rebirth was marked by events such as the Congress of Vienna’s 1815 condemnation of the slave

³ Thomas Clarkson, *Le Cri des Africains contre les Européens, leurs oppresseurs* (Paris: Cellot, 1822). *Le Cri des Colons* (Paris: Goujon, 1822).

⁴ *Le Cri des Colons contre un ouvrage de M. l’Evêque et Sénateur Grégoire ayant pour titre de la Littérature des Nègres* (Paris : Chez les Marchands de Nouveautés, 1810), 213.

trade, the Académie Française's 1823 poetry contest on the theme of the abolition of the slave trade, and France's 1825 recognition of Haiti.⁵ Yet, because of this period's pervasive portrayal of slaves as the source of violence in the colonial system, anti-slavery arguments had to specifically challenge a common tendency to ignore the violence of the state of enslavement in order to oppose the institution of slavery.

In this chapter, I analyze the way in which two works written in the 1820s, Sophie Doin's *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles blanches et noires* (1825-1826) and Desbordes-Valmore's novella *Sarah* (1821), portray individual emotional suffering in an effort to make the violence of the colonial slave society visible.⁶ For the purposes of this study, I define violence as an act of either physical or verbal aggression resulting in either physical or emotional suffering or an act culminating in rupture, loss, or absence. *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles*, a collection of didactic short stories, explicitly opposes slavery and the slave trade from a Christian perspective. *Sarah*, though less didactically abolitionist than *La Famille noire*, tells the story of an orphaned white girl and her father's loyal freed slave Arsène; the novella opposes racial barriers by making

⁵ For more information about these events, see Doris Kadish's introduction to Sophie Doin's *La Famille noire* (cited below) and Christopher Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle*.

⁶ *La Famille noire*, *Blanche et noir*, *Noire et blanc*, and *Le Négrier* were all originally published in either 1825 or 1826. In my analysis, I quote from Doris Kadish's 2002 reprint of the four texts, which is entitled *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles blanches et noires*. For short, I call this 2002 collection *La Famille noire*. Below, I abbreviate this text as Doin. *Le Négrier* was republished in 1838; unless specifically noted, my analysis is based on the 1826 version republished in 2002.

Sarah and Arsène family members and often doubles. Both texts acknowledge the original violence of masters rather than slaves. In *Sarah*, Arsène declares that violent masters “augmented [slaves’] love of liberty.”⁷ Doin, in a statement that extraordinarily recalls descriptions of the Bwa Kayman ceremony that initiated the Haitian Revolution, openly forgives slaves and blames their masters: “Ce Dieu que j’adore, ce Dieu plein de clémence et de justice, fit grâce à leurs égaremens, parce que sans doute il pensa que les blancs seuls devaient être responsables d’une fureur que les cruautés avaient si longtemps nourrie.”⁸

In the final section of this chapter, I place *Sarah* and *La Famille noire* in conversation with Claire de Duras’s much better known novel *Ourika* (1823). These three texts pay special attention to maternity and motherhood within the colonial system, which inevitably brings up issues of race and sexuality. As Alys Weinbaum explains,

⁷ Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Deborah Jenson, and Doris Y. Kadish, *Sarah: the original French text* (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2008), 75. My translation. This text will be abbreviated below as *Sarah*.

⁸ Sophie Doin, *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles blanches et noires*, ed. Doris Kadish (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002), 62.

In *Voyage au Nord d’Haïti*, Haitian historian Hérard Dumesle described the words of the revolting slaves thus: “Bondye ki fè solèy ki klere nou anwo,/Ki soulve lanmè, ki fè gwonde loraj,/Bondye la zòt tandem kache nan yon nyaj,/E la li gade nou, li wè tou sa Blan fè./Bondye Blan mande krim, e pa nou vle byenfè/Men dye la ki si bon, òdonen nou vajans.” [God who makes the sun that lightens us from above, who makes the waves of the ocean and who makes the storms thunder, this God—listen—is hidden in a cloud, from there he watches us. He sees all that the Whites do. The white God asks for crime and ours wishes us good. But our God who is so good orders us to vengeance.] Hérard Dumesle, *Voyage dans le Nord d’Haïti* (Les Cayes: Impr. du gouvernement, 1824).

“reproduction is a racializing force.”⁹ For all three authors, the notion of respect for motherhood works to counter the violence of the colonial system; yet, only Doin and Desbordes-Valmore understand maternity as a form of anti-violence that bolsters their abolitionist position.

Slavery in *Sarah*

Sarah, a novella originally published in *Les Veillées des Antilles* in 1821 and republished in *Huit Femmes* in 1845, tells the story of a young white girl who, after her mother’s death, is brought to the Primrose plantation by her absent father’s loyal freed slave, Arsène. Throughout the novella, Sarah and Arsène mirror each other; both are subject to enslavement and both have lost their mothers. Violence *is* loss; it has made a victim of both the daughter of absent European colonists and a (formerly) enslaved African man. *Sarah* critiques slavery through its inattention to the connection between race and enslavement and its emphasis on the commonality of human loss.¹⁰ Violence in *Sarah*, therefore, exists as a human experience which becomes useful when it reveals the commonalities between differently raced people. On the other hand, *Sarah* opposes the

⁹ Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 37.

¹⁰ Both Paliyenko and Kadish have focused on how Arsène is humanized through Desbordes-Valmore’s portrayal of him as a moral and “perceiving subject.” See Adrianna Paliyenko, “Returns of Marceline Desbordes-Valmore’s Repressed Colonial Memory: ‘Sarah’ and Critical Belatedness,” *Esprit Créateur* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 75 and Kadish, “‘Sarah’ and Antislavery,” *Esprit Créateur* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 96.

violence that resides in the act of enslaving people who fall victim to the unjust racial hierarchy of the colonial system.

Sarah exposes the injustice of the colonial system's racial hierarchy through its connection between the characters of Sarah and Arsène. Sarah's freedom is as precarious as that of the former slave who is her protector. Like Arsène, Sarah has no family; but, in contrast with Arsène, she does not know her origins. This ignorance, instead of her skin color, makes Sarah believe that perhaps she is in fact a slave. Silvain, the novella's evil overseer who is also Sarah's potential husband, convinces Sarah that she, too, is a slave when he notes that she has no parents, country, or belongings: "Où sont vos parents ? Où est votre patrie ? Où sont vos biens?"¹¹ When Silvain asks these questions, Sarah feels physically marked by the word *slave*: "son front brûlant de honte; il lui semblait que le nom d'esclave y fût écrit."¹² Sarah's situation disturbs the firm association between people of African origin and slavery. The physical marker of enslavement can transcend race, which makes blackness an unstable marker of inferiority and whiteness an unstable marker of superiority.

This connection between Sarah and Arsène, however, has the potential to repeat a form of colonial violence by ignoring the real horrors of chattel slavery and the specific

¹¹ *Sarah*, 36.

¹² *Sarah*, 46.

concerns of black female slaves or black married women.¹³ Boutin remarks that this identification in *Sarah* “raises questions about whether [Desbordes-Valmore] was appropriating [slaves’] status without recognizing its different position or genuinely empathizing with their subjugation.”¹⁴ I argue, however, that the similarities of Sarah’s and Arsène’s situation make violence an experience common to all humans; Desbordes-Valmore’s appropriation of the status of slave for a young white woman therefore promotes the abolitionist cause because of the way it functions to oppose racial barriers. Indeed, *Sarah* suggests that white women can be marked as slaves and, therefore, identify with black slaves. Sarah and slave, for example, become synonymous in Silvain’s mind. When considering marriage to Sarah, Silvain cannot keep from thinking of the slaves he would acquire: “Ces pensées ne le quittent plus ... et le rendent plus actif encore, à châtier et à compter les esclaves, qui peuvent devenir en partie les siens.”¹⁵ When Silvain finds Sarah with her love Edwin, the son of the kind plantation owner, M. Primrose, he punishes Arsène in a jealous rage. Already enslaved, Arsène suffers what Sarah *would* suffer as Silvain’s wife/slave.

¹³ Boutin, *Esprit Créateur*, 61. In addition to Aimée Boutin’s work on this topic, see Deborah Jenson, *Trauma and Its Representations: the Social Life of Mimesis in Post-Revolutionary France* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), 205.

¹⁴ Aimée Boutin, “Colonial Memory, Narrative, and Sentimentalism in Desbordes-Valmore’s *Les Veillées des Antilles*,” *Esprit Créateur* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 61.

¹⁵ *Sarah*, 27.

Desbordes-Valmore's depiction of a potentially "enslaved" soon-to-be married woman does resemble the problematic appropriation of the term *slave* for married white women that was so common in other texts about women's social status from the early nineteenth century. The image of Sarah's forehead, stained with the word *slave*, for example, calls to mind the image of George Sand's protagonist in *Indiana* (1832), who escapes her husband with his boot print on her forehead. Each woman bears a mark of forced submission to a (future) husband. By using the word *esclave*—the very same term used for chattel slaves in the colonies—in order to describe the predicament of being married to a man one does not love, did not choose and cannot leave, *Indiana* participates in a tradition of what Srinivas Aravamudan describes as "obliviousness to racial exclusion."¹⁶ Desbordes-Valmore, in contrast with Sand, Reybaud, and other early nineteenth-century writers, however, manipulates her period's emblematic connection between white married women and slaves in a way that both acknowledges "racial exclusion" and emphasizes the common human experience of loss. Her position on the relationship between married white women and slavery is more powerful than that of her contemporaries and more effective at opposing the violence of colonial racial hierarchy because it is the commonality of the loss of the mother that binds Sarah and

¹⁶ Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 106.

Arsène, *not* the conflation of marriage and enslavement. *Sarah* reveals the violence of loss as a common and unifying human experience; this violence becomes a useful tool for exposing of the violence of the act of denying the commonality of human suffering. Sarah's association with Arsène at the moment she is supposed to marry Silvain differs in that it is not because she is married that she is a slave, but because she has no family that she is subject to enslavement.

The basis of the shared suffering of Arsène and Sarah rests on the common experience of losing one's mother; this commonality forms the novella's most poignant argument against the slave trade. Arsène was violently separated from his mother on the coast of Africa. He shares this grief with Sarah when he explains how his hands were bound by white men who laughed at him and the other children when they cried: "Nous nous mîmes tous à crier après nos mères, que nous voulions revoir; mais les hommes blancs ... se mirent à rire et lièrent nos mains."¹⁷ When Arsène tells Sarah that her mother is in heaven and that she will see her again, he simultaneously evokes an image of his own mother "peut-être encore malheureuse," searching the shores of Africa for her son.¹⁸ In other words, the slave trade has created an entire population of grieving

¹⁷ *Sarah*, 18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47. In Caribbean literature, Africa is often evoked as a place where people go when they die. Arsène also refers to this connection when he sings that in death he will return to Africa: "Ton âme libre ira sur un nuage/ Où ta naissance avait fixé ton sort" (15-16). This allusion further solidifies the connections between Sarah's mother in heaven and Arsène's mother in Africa.

mothers. Slaves, like white orphans, continually suffer this unfair loss. It is in the description of this common loss of family that Desbordes-Valmore articulates her strongest abolitionist argument. She emphasizes the importance of family as a support network and creates new families that deny the fixed nature of racial barriers. Because Arsène serves as a replacement mother for Sarah, he has modeled, through his willingness to sacrifice his freedom for her “asile,” how Sarah should sacrifice for those she loves. When Edwin and his father fear that they have lost everything due to Silvain’s betrayal, Sarah immediately asks to become the slave of the rich stranger (who turns out to be her father) who washed ashore in a recent storm. Sarah recognizes Edwin’s suffering and seeks to alleviate it through her own sacrifice. The violence of loss produces grief, which is shown to be a human experience that transcends race; this loss unites members of a human community who form families that work to alleviate the suffering that this original violence produced.

Sympathy, suffering, and sacrifice are inseparable and all the characters of *Sarah*, except the evil overseer Silvain, are capable of the morality that comes through this emotion. As David Denby explains, in sentimental narratives like *Sarah*:

It is when the sufferings and joys of a human subject are *recognised* by other members of the human community that the values of sensibility are most effectively proclaimed, and that the possibilities of a broader community based

on such recognition are foreshadowed.¹⁹

Both Sarah and Arsène are part of a human community whose brighter future depends on a common recognition of suffering which, for Desbordes-Valmore, results from the violence of loss. Desbordes-Valmore appeals to a broader community of readers who recognize the suffering of a childless mother and a motherless child. This is the foundation of her argument against the slave trade and the basis of her anti-racist portrayal of a shared humanity between differently raced people. The violence of loss initiates the recognition of suffering on which a broader human community depends; this community exposes the fallacy of the racial hierarchy on which the violent institution of slavery depends.

Opposing Violence through Christianity in *La Famille noire suivie de trois nouvelles blanches et noires*

Doin considers her abolitionist writing “un devoir sacré”; it deliberately opposes violence by establishing that slavery is a departure from Christian behavior, which is, in itself, assumed to be wholly nonviolent. Even though Doin, a woman who was raised Catholic and converted to Protestantism upon marrying her husband, occupies a unique position as a French abolitionist, her Christianity has been the subject of little scholarly

¹⁹ David Denby, *Sentimental narrative and the social order in France, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16.

analysis.²⁰ Kadish accurately observes that Doin “semble néanmoins croire avec sincérité aux bienfaits moraux et consolateurs de la religion” but she does not explicitly detail the importance of religion to Doin’s abolitionism.²¹ In this section, I read Doin as an author whose abolitionism is inseparable from her Christianity, which, as a theoretical system, provides her with an effective tool to oppose the violence of the institution of slavery.

Doin understands suffering, its causes and its consequences, through her profound religious belief. By situating violence in opposition to Christian behavior, she proposes that the original violence that forms the symbolic nexus of the Christian religion—the crucifixion—made all other violence immoral and unnecessary. The goal of all the stories of *La Famille noire* is to show how slavery is the “ennemi déclaré de la loi de Jésus-Christ.”²² René Girard suggests that violence “is not to be denied, but it can be diverted to another object, something that it can sink its teeth into.” According to him, “society is seeking to deflect upon a relatively indifferent victim, a ‘sacrificeable’ victim, the violence that would otherwise be vented on its own members, the people it most

²⁰ The 1825 edition of her work *La Famille noire ou la traite et l’esclavage*, which varies slightly from the edition republished by Kadish in 2002, was published with the same *libraire* as a French translation of the Quaker abolitionist text *Adresse aux Nations de l’Europe, sur le commerce homicide appelé Traite des Noirs*. Doin’s audience was therefore likely interested specifically in the relationship between Christianity and abolition.

²¹ Kadish, introduction to *La Famille noire*, xxii. In her *Yale French Studies* article, Kadish does note that Doin focuses on the “social benefits of a non-doctrinaire, ecumenically conceived Christian religion.” See Kadish, “Haiti and Abolitionism in 1825: The Example of Sophie Doin,” *Yale French Studies* 107 (2005), 109.

²² Doin, 8.

desires to protect.”²³ If we understand the enslaved to be the “sacrificeable” victim of the colonial system, then Doin’s Christianity seeks to counter the assumed “sacrificeable” nature of the enslaved by diverting violence to Christ’s crucifixion. According to Christian belief, Christ survived and triumphed over the violence of his crucifixion; in a similar manner, Doin sees Christianity as the most effective way to oppose an institution that she finds to be inherently and continually violent—a way to bring the enslaving and the enslaved together in one society so that no one is “sacrificeable.” As theologian David Bentley Hart explains, “the church has always explicitly maintained that the world lies under the authority of ... powers whose rule is *violence*, falsehood, and death, over which Christ and Christ alone has triumphed.”²⁴ For Doin, Christ is the sacrificed victim and he prevailed over this violence; similarly, overcoming the violence of slavery and the slave trade is, for her, achievable only through Christianity. Her abolitionism thus cannot be separated from her Christianity.

In *La Famille noire*, the stories that Doin tells are not separated from her interpretation of them; the literary and the nonliterary combine to create a larger description of slavery as a violent institution fundamentally antithetical to Christian doctrine. Because of the unified message that Doin’s text works to portray, in this

²³ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, translated by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 4.

²⁴ David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 2, my emphasis.

section, I read Doin's preface to *La Famille noire* and the stories of *La Famille noire*, *Noire et blanc*, *Blanche et noir*, and *Le Négrier* in combination as essential parts of this larger description. As Kadish remarks, Doin "[refuses] to see the literary and nonliterary as dichotomous forms of writing."²⁵ For Doin, the imagined stories of slavery's victims aid in teaching her readers. She explains, "l'histoire d'une famille noire suffira pour instruire pleinement tout lecteur impartial, tout ami de l'humanité, pour qui la justice et la religion ne sont pas des mots vides de sens..."²⁶ Doin believes abolishing slavery will lead to justice; she does not separate justice from religion, just as she does not separate her stories from her interpretation of them, articulated by an exegetical narrator.

For Doin, a recognition of suffering lays at the foundation of Christian ideology; all men are "brothers" and therefore suffer the "crimes" of their brothers.²⁷ By connecting all humans, those who cause suffering and those who suffer, Doin tells the story of the trade and enslavement of Africans through a Christian lens that allows her to render the victims of the institution of slavery—as well as the effects of those victims' suffering on humanity at large—*visible*. Throughout her writing, including a later 1838 version of her short story *Le Négrier*, Doin explicitly refers to the importance of a project

²⁵ Doris Kadish, *Yale French Studies* 107 (2005), 129.

²⁶ Doin, 22.

²⁷ Ibid, 53.

that has the power to “faire apparaître” the victims of an atrocity such as slavery.²⁸

Similarly, she also attempts to make the greed and immorality of those who traffic in people visible by portraying slave traders as entirely alienated from a Christian human community, as people who have no interest in anything but their own personal gain:

... en faisant la traite [les gens qui croyaient à l'infériorité des noirs] ne songeaient qu'à leur intérêt personnel. Pour eux la religion n'était qu'un heureux prétexte, c'était le plus souvent ou des hypocrites ou des incrédules.²⁹

Slave traders focus on their potential gains in this world, thereby privileging their personal interest above the moral obligations of a Christian life. Perhaps the most radical sections of Doin's abolitionist writings involve these kinds of accusations against Europeans. Doin, in direct opposition to the pro-slavery tendency to label *slaves'* actions “criminal,” works to make slave traders' departure from Christianity understood as a “crime” that incites violence: “Blancs, vous avez rendu les noirs méchants et insensés, et vous les punissez, par des coups, de *votre crime*.”³⁰ Nelzi, in *Noire et blanc*, reinforces Doin's claim when she asks rhetorically: “sont-ils chrétiens ceux qui ont enlevé mes frères à leurs familles...? ceux qui récompensent leur travail opiniâtre par des coups de fouet?”³¹ From as early as the fifteenth century, Europeans excused their treatment of

²⁸ Doin, “Le Négrier” http://uga.edu/slavery/texts/literary_works/NegrierChristianisme.pdf (accessed March 23, 2011).

²⁹ Doin, 45.

³⁰ Ibid, 47. My emphasis.

³¹ Ibid, 102.

Africans by claiming that their goal was to convert them to Christianity.³² Doin inverts this excuse by claiming that it was originally slave traders' departure from Christianity that led them to enslave Africans.

Doin believes that the violence of "les négriers" against slaves has also done violence to the Christian religion in that it denies the enslaved any incentive to believe in the religion that their European enslavers claim to support:

...non seulement leur projet annoncé de convertir l'Afrique idolâtre ne pouvait être que dérisoire, mais encore ils ont arraché au nègre malheureux toutes consolations religieuses, toute idée de divinités bienfaisantes.³³

In other words, Doin states that slavery and the slave trade work against the spread of Christianity, which, she believes, would lead to peace and harmony. She is disappointed to find that Christianity's so-called adherents have spread hatred, death and destruction and calls their project to convert Africa "derisory."

As Miller has shown, other French abolitionists of the early nineteenth century, including Germaine de Staël and the Duc de Broglie, also argued that ending the slave trade would actually help spread Christianity. De Staël asks : "Ne peut-on pas

³² See Miller, "Louis XIII and the 'Origin' of the French Slave Trade," *The French Atlantic Triangle*, 18-20, for information about Christianity and colonization beginning in the seventeenth century. For information about Catholic discrimination against Africans in the fifteenth century, see Pope Nicholas V's bull *Romanus Pontifex* of January 8, 1455 in which he praises the "Catholic kings and princes who...not only restrain the savage excesses of the Saracens and of other infidels, enemies of the Christian name, but also for the defense and increase of the faith vanquish them and their kingdoms and habitations...and subject them to their own temporal dominion." I thank Cord Whitaker for this information.

³³ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 25.

demander au roi de France, à ce pieux héritier de Saint-Louis et de Louis XVI, d'accéder à l'abolition de la traite des nègres, afin que cet acte d'humanité persuade le cœur de ceux à qui l'on va prêcher l'Évangile?"³⁴ De Staël connects slave-trade abolition with the ability to convert others who might see Christian morals in such an "act of humanity." Miller argues that this focus on spreading Christianity would eventually be used to justify the colonization of Africa.³⁵ Doin differs from her contemporaries, however, in that she does not call for an outright attempt to convert Africans; she instead suggests leaving them alone.

Doin's idea that Africans might come to adopt what she believed to be the merits of Christianity without the intervention of Europeans makes her abolitionism radically anti-violent. Doin believes that, on his own in Africa, the African man would have lived happily and eventually, thanks to "le bonheur," would have come to live by the inherent virtues of Christian doctrine:

...que ne le laissez-vous au milieu de ses déserts, cet enfant de l'Afrique ! Il eût vécu simple, innocent, hospitalier; il eût cultivé ses terres; *le bonheur* eût amené chez lui l'industrie, les arts, les lumières; *le bonheur* eût fait des chrétiens, et vous, vous avez fait des monstres!³⁶

³⁴ Germaine de Staël, "Appel aux souverains réunis à Paris pour en obtenir l'abolition de la traite des nègres," in *Œuvres inédites de Madame la Baronne de Staël publiées par son fils*, Tome 3 (London: Trettel and Würtz, 1822), 276.

³⁵ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 201.

³⁶ Doin, 98, my emphasis.

Doin's insistence on "le bonheur" as a force of conversion implies a preference for divine intervention over a calculated "derisory" European effort at conversion. The precise meaning of "le bonheur" is certainly open to interpretation. Doin defines it as, ideally, "la récompense de la vertu."³⁷ She suggests that Africans, if they observed Europeans behaving in a proper Christian manner, would be inclined to convert, as Nelzi does when taught by Charles. Yet, "le bonheur," in her mind, would bring industry, the arts, *and* Christianity to Africa. She implies here, however condescendingly, that Africans might evolve to resemble Europeans if simply left alone. De Staël's reference to "ceux à qui l'on va preacher l'Évangile" [those to whom the Gospel will be preached], though in passive voice, implies an actor—someone who will *preach* the Gospel. Doin's statement, however, involves no active preacher. Instead, simply "good fortune," or perhaps the happiness that comes with being free to live one's life, would eventually lead Africans to convert. Doin suggests that Europeans cannot be Christian while also *forcing* others to convert and also hints that the process of conversion might best be left to divine intervention. She defines Christian behavior as nonviolent and conversion as the result of the observation of others' nonviolent behavior. Doin thus opposes the force and the hierarchy that she understands to be inherent in the colonial system; this approach makes Doin one of the more radical abolitionists of her time.

³⁷ Ibid., 23.

When Doin opposes violence, she defines exclusion as a violent practice. She includes enslaved Africans and their descendants in a community of people that require a kind of treatment that conforms to what she understands to be “la loi de Jésus-Christ”; this inclusion, for Doin, relies upon the notion that God created all people in the same manner, regardless of race. This philosophy stems from her profound belief that Africans are included in the community of fellow man envisioned by Judeo-Christian doctrine; they must, she argues, be treated according to this doctrine. Doin begins the preface to *La Famille noire* by citing the Golden Rule and repeats it often as justification for her argument. Citing this tenet is, of course, not unique to Doin. Not only is it a biblical statement, the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man* references it and the 1795 Constitution includes a section explaining how citizens should behave based on this rule:

Tous les devoirs de l’homme et du citoyen dérivent de ces deux principes, gravés par la nature dans tous les cœurs : - Ne faites pas à autrui ce que vous ne voudriez pas qu’on vous fit. - Faites constamment aux autres le bien que vous voudriez en recevoir.

Publications of the Société de la Morale Chrétienne, including their *Faits relatifs à la traite des noirs*, published a year after *La Famille noire*, also insist on the importance of treating others in a way that one might wish to be treated. As Doin was connected to the Société through her husband, we might imagine that the passage in Leviticus 19:18 that states that God wishes all people to “aime ton prochain comme toi-même” was bandied about

rather often in her presence. That Doin uses this as a basis for her argument is not surprising; yet, in order for this argument to have impact, Doin had to convince her readers that Africans were the equals of Europeans, that they were the “neighbors” who, according to Christian doctrine, must be treated with respect.

Doin exposes the denial of the humanity of these *neighboring* people—which she bases on the presence of a human soul—as yet another form of colonial violence. She explains that slave trading began with the idea that “les noirs” had no soul, that they were different and therefore inferior: “Quelques gens pensaient autrefois que les noirs ne peuvent avoir une âme et ne sont point des hommes comme nous, parce que leurs cheveux, leurs lèvres, leur nez, diffèrent un peu de ceux des blancs.”³⁸ These people who denied the unity of a divine human family began the slave trade, says Doin, out of personal interest. Racial prejudice justified spiritual exclusion. Instead, she minimizes difference and insists that “les noirs sont conformés comme les blancs.”³⁹ Africans, Doin explains, are therefore part of the biblical definition of *prochain*: “[quand] des chrétiens abordent aux côtes de l’Africain paisible, c’est de leur *prochain* qu’ils s’approchent.”⁴⁰ Violence among these neighboring humans, these brothers and children of God, Doin argues, amounts to a fundamental disavowal of proper Christian behavior.

³⁸ Ibid, 45.

³⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 11. My emphasis.

Sexuality, Maternity, and Violence in *La Famille noire*, *Sarah*, and *Ourika*

La Famille noire also encourages the recognition of the humanity of black people through respect for maternity and motherhood, which connects it to other writings about race, colonialism, and slavery by women in the 1820s. *Sarah*, *La Famille noire*, and *Ourika* all demonstrate a reverence for motherhood, but only in *Sarah* and *La Famille noire* does respecting mothers become a way of promoting an abolitionist agenda. Furthermore, in their efforts to emphasize motherhood as a unifying commonality between black and white people, Desbordes-Valmore and Doin confront frequent correlations between sexuality and violence. For Desbordes-Valmore, highlighting Arsène's morality through his maternal relationship with Sarah protects him from the violence commonly associated with black male virility. For Doin, maternity, in the same way as sexuality, evokes common emotions in black and white people and therefore accentuates their shared humanity. These portrayals of maternity and sexuality run counter to those of Duras's *Ourika*, whose protagonist's demise originates in the interminability of her sexual desire. For Duras, violence resides in Ourika's removal from slavery because only as a slave could she have been a mother. For these three authors of the 1820s, therefore, exposing violence related to the colonial system involves an exploration of maternity and motherhood, one that inevitably poses questions of (interracial) sexual desire.

For Desbordes-Valmore, grieving for one's mother is personal, which might explain her decision to emphasize the importance of maternity in *Sarah*. She traveled with her mother to the French colonies at the moment of Napoleon's attempted reestablishment of slavery in Saint-Domingue and his successful reestablishment of slavery in Guadeloupe in 1802. She returned months later after losing her mother to yellow fever. Her return to France, as Jenson has noted, likely "retraced precisely the legendary trajectory of Toussaint" Louverture—just weeks later.⁴¹ Once in France, she continued her career as an actress; certain theatres advertised that she had recently returned from Guadeloupe, promoting her as an escapee of the violence in the colony.⁴² We do not know how much of the slave revolts Desbordes-Valmore might have witnessed, but her writings on the colonies demonstrate that, instead of associating the colonies with the violence of slaves, she most strongly connected the colonies with the loss of her mother.

Despite her personal experience, however, Desbordes-Valmore did not write much about slavery or the colonies until almost two decades later. Though *Sarah's* 1821 version lacks the more explicitly biographical "Mon Retour en Europe" introduction to

⁴¹ Deborah Jenson, "Myth, History, and Witnessing in Marceline Desbordes-Valmore's Caribbean Poetics," *Esprit Créateur* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2007), 89.

⁴² See Aimée Boutin's introduction to Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, *Les Veillées des Antilles* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006) for information concerning theatre advertisements and reactions to her relative silence about her colonial experience.

the 1845 version in which the narrator mentions losing her mother, both the 1821 and 1845 versions of the novella inextricably associate the colonies with the death of the maternal figure. Boutin proposes that Desbordes-Valmore's two-decade-long silence about her trip might be due to "willed amnesia."⁴³ The author's inseparable association between the colonies and an absent mother figure certainly supports this theory. In *Sarah*, the author returns to her grief for her mother in the context of the debates of the 1820s surrounding the abolition of the slave trade in order to argue for its end.

Though her investment is less personal, Doin also emphasizes the injustice of the transatlantic slave system by describing the admirable love for mothers that Africans and their descendants promote. Phénor, for example, passes out when he sees the murder of an older mother. When he is told of his own mother's illness, he regretfully leaves his brother in order to take care of his mother. Doin adds a footnote at this point in the story to explain to her readers that the way that "les nègres" worship their parents, particularly their mothers, could not be more "touchant."⁴⁴ She approaches this respect for mothers with the same reverence as Desbordes-Valmore; Doin understands the love for one's mother and the grief that one experiences upon losing one's mother to be a human experience shared universally.

⁴³ Boutin, *Esprit Créateur*, 63.

⁴⁴ See Doin, 28, 38, and 46.

In contrast, Claire de Duras's *Ourika* presents the desire to become a mother as a feeling common across the spectrum of racial identities, but one that cannot succeed if it contradicts the rigid divisions of racial hierarchy. Duras, a young woman with property in the colonies, told her story of Ourika, a real-life child from Senegal bought by Monsieur de B. and adopted and raised by his aunt Madame de B. Delighted by the story, Duras's friends at her salon encouraged her to publish it, which she first did anonymously in 1823. *Ourika*, the story of a young woman who falls in love with her adoptive brother Charles whom she cannot marry because of her racialized difference, quickly became a bestseller. The plot, in many ways, is motivated by motherhood's failure or absence: because interracial marriage is impossible, Ourika's adoptive mother cannot save her from her misery. Ourika, in turn, has no chance of becoming a mother in France. This short novel was revolutionary for its time in that it tells the story of a black character in the first person. Yet, because racial barriers are understood to be fixed and unalterable, Ourika can only recount her downfall.

As a mother to Ourika, Madame de B. cannot provide a solution to her adopted child's unsuitability for marriage. Ourika, raised as a French woman, first comes to recognize the problems her blackness poses when she overhears a conversation between Madame de B. and her friend about the impossibility of her marriage. Madame de B. laments that there is no solution for Ourika's situation: "je la vois seule, pour toujours

seule dans la vie!"⁴⁵ When Charles marries and has children with an aristocratic white woman, Ourika begins her rapid decline and eventually dies alone in a convent.

Marriage is the only solution for Ourika, even though it is impossible because her immutable blackness justifies her exclusion. As Pratima Prasad explains, "a paradoxical concatenation of 'blackness,' 'femaleness,' and 'aristocracy' prevent Ourika's integration into society."⁴⁶ Ourika is trapped in a vicious cycle of exclusion: she cannot marry because she is black; she cannot *not* marry because she is female; and she cannot marry a man of a lower class because she is an aristocrat.

When thinking of a possible solution to her situation, Ourika grieves for the loss of her *potential* motherhood. As she understands it, being a mother would be possible only *in slavery*; only living as a slave in the colonies would bring her "les affections pour lesquelles seules [son] cœur est créé !" ⁴⁷ Ourika thus actually mourns the loss of her life as a slave in the colonies:

Eh bien! je serais la négresse esclave de quelque riche colon; brûlée par le soleil, je cultiverais la terre d'un autre: mais j'aurais mon humble cabane pour me retirer le soir; j'aurais un compagnon de ma vie, et des enfants de ma couleur: *Ma mère!* Ils appuieraient sans dégoût leur petite bouche sur mon front ; ils reposeraient leur tête sur mon cou, et s'endormiraient dans mes bras !⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Claire de Duras, *Ourika*, ed. Joan DeJean (NY: MLA, 1994), 12.

⁴⁶ Pratima Prasad, *Colonialism, Race, and the French Romantic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 109.

⁴⁷ Duras, *Ourika*, 38, my emphasis.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Slave life in this passage is harmless. The only difficulty a slave experiences is working someone else's land in the hot sun; the enslaved still have families and their own living quarters. As Miller sarcastically notes, this account of slave life is "replete with family values."⁴⁹ The Middle Passage from which Ourika was spared when she was brought to France is entirely absent here.⁵⁰ Violence is consequently removed from the slave trade as well as from the institution of slavery.

Motherhood in *Ourika* thus exists in absentia, fails, or never comes to fruition. The novel locates violence in this lack. *Ourika* stands in stark contrast to *Sarah* in that the loss of Ourika's family (the African relatives that she leaves behind when departing for France and the partner and children that she imagines she would have had as a slave) removes her from slavery whereas Sarah's familial loss makes slavery a possibility for her. This distinction highlights *Sarah's* antislavery stance and the absence of antislavery commentary in *Ourika*. In *Sarah*, the injustice of slavery can happen to anyone; in *Ourika*, slavery's injustice is ignored as the novel locates injustice in Ourika's exclusion from motherhood. While Arsène grieves for his mother in Africa, Ourika makes no reference to the biological mother she lost when taken to France. This erasure, as Sadiya Hartman

⁴⁹ Miller, "Duras, Biography, and Slavery" in *Approaches to Teaching Ourika*, 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

has explained, was part of a practice of eliminating the past in order to produce effective, docile slaves:

In every slave society, slave owners attempted to eradicate the slave's memory, that is, to erase all the evidence of an existence before slavery. ... A slave without a past had no life to avenge. ... No time was wasted yearning for home, no recollections of a distant country slowed her down as she tilled the soil, *no image of her mother came to mind when she looked into the face of her child*.⁵¹

In addition to denying this rupture from a past familial life, *Ourika* also ignores the rumored and controversial phenomenon of enslaved women's denial of motherhood. As the early-nineteenth-century Haitian writer the Baron de Vastey explains, this denial involved their resolve to abort rather than give birth to enslaved children. For Vastey, this decision was motivated "par une cruelle pitié [pour] les chers et tristes fruits de leurs amours."⁵² *Ourika* overlooks this violent reality and instead reinforces the importance of racial distinctions by saying that only children of the same "couleur" as *Ourika* would touch her without "dégoût." A loss of motherhood separates *Ourika* from slavery, but it also separates her from her only chance at belonging.

In *Ourika*, French intervention is thus cast as well-intentioned, but ultimately harmful. The novel locates violence in the act of *saving* *Ourika* rather than in the act of *enslaving* her. This portrayal of slavery as a benign institution ignores the existence of

⁵¹ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 155, my emphasis.

⁵² Baron de Vastey, *Le Système colonial dévoilé* (Cap-Henry: P. Roux, Imprimeur du Roi, 1814), 71.

Haitian independence. The timing of Ourika's story makes the notion that her only other option was enslavement particularly curious. Even though, as Jenson has noted, the story most likely takes place "sometime during or after 1804," the text never mentions Haiti.⁵³ The brief hope Ourika feels when hearing about the French Revolution fades with the news of violent outbreaks in the colonies. When slave revolts are referenced, they only justify Ourika's growing self-hatred:

[J]usqu'ici je m'étais affligée d'appartenir à une race proscrite; maintenant j'avais honte d'appartenir à une race de barbares et d'assassins.⁵⁴

When Ourika complains about the violence of her fellow Africans, she begins to privilege her racial affiliation over her cultural heritage. Ourika does recognize the privilege of being saved from slavery: "Me sauver de l'esclavage, me choisir pour bienfaitrice Mme de B., c'était me donner deux fois la vie."⁵⁵ As Chantal Bertrand-Jennings notes, Ourika "completely identifies with the aristocratic class in which she has been brought up..."⁵⁶ In the end, however, this identification only leads to Ourika's demise. The more that the impossibility of her situation becomes obvious, the less that this saving from slavery is understood to be something that *gives* Ourika life. As Mme de B.'s friend explains:

⁵³ Jenson, "Mirror Insurrections: Haitian and French Revolutions in *Ourika*," 46.

⁵⁴ *Ourika*, 20.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

⁵⁶ Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, "Ourika and Women's Literary Tradition in France" in *Approaches to Teaching Ourika*, 75.

... la philosophie nous place au-dessus des maux de la fortune, mais elle ne peut rien contre les maux qui viennent d'avoir brisé l'ordre de la nature. Ourika n'a pas rempli sa destinée: elle s'est placée dans la société sans sa permission ; la société se vengera.⁵⁷

"Society" is an unchangeable entity that cannot accept the alterity of Ourika—namely because she has sexual desire that cannot be fulfilled; whiteness is understood to form a closed and impenetrable community. Ourika is not truly part of her French family because racial hierarchy trumps familial connections. By not envisioning a solution to Ourika's predicament and positing that French attempts to remove Ourika from her destined life as a slave were actually detrimental, *Ourika* promotes a colonialist understanding of racial hierarchy.

In *Sarah*, *La Famille noire*, and *Ourika*, motherhood is a common human experience that elicits respect. Yet, for *Ourika* in particular, motherhood cannot come into existence when racial barriers make sexuality impossible. The absence of Ourika's motherhood quells any white anxiety about interracial romance. Desbordes-Valmore's novella also calms these same anxieties by emasculating and desexualizing Arsène in its attempt to make him nonviolent. Alternatively, however, *Sarah* uses motherhood as a way to deny sexuality *and* violence. Arsène, like Sarah, loses his mother, but he also gains the status of mother for Sarah. Sarah tells Arsène "je t'appellerai donc ma mère"

⁵⁷ *Ourika*, 13.

when he describes to her what a mother is.⁵⁸ Arsène cares for Sarah, for the Primrose family, and stays on at their plantation because of his dedication to them. As a male mother, Arsène has no sexual desire of his own; this absence precludes any discussion of (interracial) sexual relationships. Desbordes-Valmore protects Arsène from the colonist's image of the slave with the phallic "poignard à la main"; motherhood, in *Sarah*, is not only a way to show the common humanity of differently raced characters, it is also a way to oppose derogatory depictions of violent slaves.⁵⁹

Doin, on the other hand, connects maternity and sexuality only through their mutual ability to evoke the common, shared humanity of differently raced people. She, through her belief in the role that sexuality plays in the opposition to violence, does not portray interracial romantic relationships as taboo or even contrary to colonial harmony. There is, however, some question of the symbolic nature of Doin's interracial relationships, including the love stories between Nelzi and Charles (*Noire et blanc*) and Pauline and Domingo (*Blanche et noir*), because these interracial sexual relationships do not always bring up the question of maternity, as they inevitably do in *Ourika*. Kadish notes that it would be unlikely, in 1825 and 1826, at a moment of "censure répressive," that Doin would have been describing real interracial relationships.⁶⁰ Indeed, her

⁵⁸ *Sarah*, 17.

⁵⁹ *Cri des Colons contre Grégoire*, 213.

⁶⁰ Kadish, introduction, xxxii.

couples do not have children (unlike Madame Reybaud's Cécile and Donatien in *Les Epaves*), which indicates that their relationships were possibly understood to be more symbolic than literal.

It was not unheard of, however, to promote interracial marriage at the time, especially in Christian abolitionist circles where marriage was prized as a sacred family model. The Abbé Grégoire, for example, wrote in his *Considérations sur le mariage et le divorce adressées aux citoyens d'Haïti* (1823) that "les races croisées" were a biological and even "moral" advantage.⁶¹ Marriage, which, for Grégoire, was "institué par le Créateur," was meant to bring all the "habitants du globe" together.⁶² Though Grégoire's exact relationship with the Société de la Morale Chrétienne has not been established, it is possible that Doin would have heard of or read some of his later works thanks to her associations with the Society.⁶³ If so, Doin's promotion of interracial romance could form part of her Christian abolitionist philosophy.

Even if *La Famille noire*'s interracial relationships were meant to symbolize a harmonious relationship between France and Haiti rather than an actual sexual relationship between two individuals, Doin's acceptance of them opposes Desbordes-

⁶¹ Henri Grégoire, *Considérations sur le mariage et sur le divorce adressées aux citoyens d'Haïti* (Paris: Badouin Frères, 1823), 14.

⁶² Ibid, 5.

⁶³ For more information on Grégoire's possible relationship with the Society in his later years, see Marcel Doringy, "The Abbé Grégoire and the Société des Amis des Noirs" in *The Abbé Grégoire and his world*, ed. Jeremy and Richard Popkin (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 28.

Valmore's depiction of a de-sexualized Arsène and Duras's strict taboo on interracial romance. Once Charles and Nelzi, the main characters of *Noire et blanc*, arrive in New York, they are described as living as brother and sister. Yet sexual attraction does exist between the two. Their romantic love for each other becomes apparent when Charles must decide between marriage to another woman and his life with Nelzi. Charles recognizes his love for Nelzi and the wrongs of slavery at the same time that he contemplates her beauty and his attraction to her. The description of his recognition indicates his strong sexual desire for Nelzi:

Mais n'a-t-elle donc pas aussi sa beauté ? Ses yeux ne sont-ils pas beaux, grands, expressifs? Ses dents ne sont-elles pas admirables? Et son sourire, qu'il a d'expression! Et sa voix chérie, qu'elle est douce à mon oreille! Son teint même, il a son brillant, ses nuances; je le vois se ternir lorsque ma bouche fait un reproche, il est éclatant lorsque j'ai souri. Cette taille est parfaite, ses contours sont gracieux; il règne dans toute sa personne une aisance, un attrait piquant... O Nelzi, Nelzi, toi aussi la nature t'a parée de mille charmes!⁶⁴

Both Ourika and Nelzi are in love with a man named Charles. Doin's *Noire et blanc* could, as Kadish has noted, have been conceived in reaction to Duras's *Ourika*, written two years earlier. In contrast with Ourika's hands "of an ape," Nelzi's "perfect figure" and "gracious curves" bring her into a human community by making her the object of masculine desire in the same way that white women are.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Doin, 101.

⁶⁵ Doin's portrayal of Nelzi brings to mind Sojourner Truth's famous speech over three decades later.

The recognition of sexual attractiveness is less important to Doin's portrayal of white women; the references to romantic love between the white Pauline and the black Domingo are less sexually explicit. Pauline asks Domingo, for example: "consentez à vivre pour moi seule, et je suis à vous."⁶⁶ Pauline was to be married to Léopold, but leaves him for her love Domingo. Her sexual attractiveness does not need to be proven in the same manner that Nelzi's does; she was always meant to marry. Doin's portrayal of women's humanity through their ability to attract men, be they white or black, witnesses to her understanding of women as initiators of sexual desire. Kadish notes that Doin believes in "des rôles complémentaires pour les hommes et les femmes."⁶⁷ For Doin, women, regardless of their racial identity, fulfill their social role through heterosexual relationships, be they interracial or not. The human community that she wishes to unify through the Christian religion therefore requires respecting and allowing for heterosexual relationships between any two members of this community.

Furthermore, Doin's portrayal of Nelzi as a woman worthy and capable of taking part in a monogamous relationship differs tremendously from her contemporaries' depictions of overly sexualized black characters. Gaspard de Pons's 1823 rewriting of Duras's text, *Ourika, l'Africaine*, portrays the African woman as a conniving and sexually

⁶⁶ Ibid, 94.

⁶⁷ Kadish, introduction, xiii and xiv.

licitious woman. *His* Ourika asks Charles: “Connais-tu nos faveurs que ton orgueil refuse?”⁶⁸ Nelzi, to the contrary, does *not* possess manipulative sexual powers. The “monstrous female sexuality” that Doris Garraway describes as “a way for colonists to resolve the paradox of transracial desire and racial paranoia” is lacking in Doin’s description of Charles’ attraction to Nelzi.⁶⁹ Doin’s efforts to promote monogamous heterosexual relationships more closely resemble the arguments of American Christian abolitionists such as Lydia Maria Francis Child. Child wrote in 1833 that slavery was particularly immoral because it denied enslaved women the right to sexual modesty:

The negro woman is unprotected either by law or public opinion. She is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property. They are allowed to have no conscientious scruples, no sense of shame...⁷⁰

Doin solves the problem of the denial of an enslaved woman’s chastity by establishing an equal, monogamous, and mutually respectful relationship between Charles and the no longer enslaved Nelzi. Charles explains to Nelzi: “tu ne m’appartiens pas, tu n’appartiens qu’à toi.”⁷¹ Nelzi gains the ability to ensure her own dignity through her sexual relationship with Charles. Though one might assume that Charles and Nelzi will indeed marry at the story’s end, maternity and sexuality remain separate in Doin’s

⁶⁸ “Ourika, l’Africaine,” http://uga.edu/slavery/texts/abolition_poetry/ponsourika.pdf (accessed March, 2011).

⁶⁹ Doris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 232.

⁷⁰ Lydia Maria Francis Child, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans called Africans* (Boston: Allen and Ticknor, 1833), 19.

⁷¹ Doin, 100.

work. Like Duras's and Desbordes-Valmore's efforts to calm white anxieties about interracial sex, Doin's separation between maternity and sexuality also avoids this tension, even as it teeters on the brink of recommending a kind of interracial harmony as radical as the suggestions of the Abbé Grégoire. Whether or not Charles' and Nelzi's relationship leads to motherhood, however, Doin finds violence in the act of opposing it and suggests that allowing for interracial sexuality would challenge the violence of racial hierarchy.

Kadish suggests that reading *Ourika* alongside *Sarah* and *Noire et blanc* "liberates Duras's novel from the heavy burden it has often been made to bear as the only representation of blacks by a women writer in early-nineteenth-century France."⁷² To elaborate on Kadish's assertion, reading Doin's and Desbordes-Valmore's stories alongside Duras's also allows for a more profound analysis of the abolitionist arguments of French authors of the 1820s. Duras clearly promoted a conservative view of the institution of slavery and the racial hierarchy on which this institution depended. Her work thus represents a colonialist perspective with which those who opposed slavery had to contend.

⁷² Kadish, "Black Faces, White Voices in Women's Writing from the 1820s," in *Approaches to Teaching Ourika*, 72.

The re-emerging abolitionist movement in the France of the 1820s reacted against the shock that Haitian independence had initiated among colonists by exposing the violence of the colonial slave society. The sentimental writing of Desbordes-Valmore, through its attention to a “broader human community,” sought to achieve this exposure through the portrayal of individual, emotional suffering that was meant to promote sympathy. Doin, in her didactic text, builds upon this sentimental tradition by combining it with the realistic and frank abolitionist tactics of authors like Clarkson and Brissot.⁷³ This insistence on depicting the horrors of slavery opposes Duras’s complete erasure of this violence. Within this attempt to reveal the injustice of slavery, an emphasis on shared humanity inevitably brought up questions of maternity, family, and sexuality. Abolitionists who sought to highlight the familial connections of white and black people, however, had to respond to anxieties about interracial sexuality. Doin’s and Desbordes-Valmore’s attention to women’s maternal social roles in their abolitionist work calms these anxieties and gives maternity the power to oppose slavery, thereby offering women a way to intervene politically within the colonial system.

⁷³ Doin maintained that her words were a truthful portrayal of colonial slave societies. In the preface to *La Famille noire*, Doin reminds her readers that her story “n’est pas un roman,” but rather “une histoire scrupuleusement fidèle” to the realities of slavery (5).

Brissot’s “Exemplaire du dessin & de la description d’un Navir chargé d’Esclaves” included in the Society’s publication *Réplique à Necker* in July 1789 insisted on accurately portraying the inside of a slave ship. In the French version of Clarkson’s *Le Cri des Africains*, which Kadish has shown that Doin read, Clarkson begins his work with these words: “nous regrettons de n’avoir à peindre que des crimes atroces et des traitemens barbares” (i). He insists on the truthfulness of the horrors he is about to portray by saying that he has relied upon the works of Scottish explorer Mungo Park.

3: Conceptualizing Race and Romance in the Colonial Novels of Fanny Reybaud

In the late seventeenth century, a demure yet strongly moral woman rules over the French colony of Martinique. As a colonial leader, she ensures the proper treatment of slaves and finds romantic happiness with a man she saves from slavery. In eighteenth-century Martinique, a young French woman opposes the racist behavior of an evil slave master by saving a man from potential enslavement through marriage. In nineteenth-century Haiti, however, this idealized feminine leader loses her ability to ensure the morality of French colonial leadership, which also leads to the end of the possibility of a happy romantic relationship for her.

These three stories, told in Madame Charles [Fanny] Reybaud's novels *Marie d'Enambuc* (1840), *Les Epaves* (1838), and *Madame de Rieux* (1840), recount an allegory of the birth of colonialism that imagines the positive potential of a colonial leadership headed by the idealized moral French woman. In the process, Reybaud understands this act of moral leadership to allow for equal and satisfying romantic relationships for women who, as colonial leaders, are able to save their male partners from slavery. The existence of Haiti, which, for Reybaud, spells the demise of a feminized French humanitarianism in the colonies, amounts to the end of Reybaud's feminist fantasy of a re-defined heterosexual relationship.

Even though Fanny Reybaud's colonial novels speak to a fascinating reworking of the notions of race and gender within the framework of the colony-as-utopia, she has received little scholarly attention since her death in 1870. In this chapter, I examine some of the reasons for her exclusion from literary study and present a case for why Reybaud should be more central to nineteenth-century studies of race, gender, and colonialism. In the process of feminizing French colonialism, Reybaud creates an alternative national-racial identity for the French that removes them from the responsibility of the horrors perpetrated by colonial leaders. Within the structure of this new racial identity, she finds a way for the French woman to succeed as a leader and an equal to her male partner.

This chapter begins by examining Reybaud within her literary context in order to understand certain factors influencing the author's general absence from studies of nineteenth-century literature.¹ In addition to scholars' inattention to Romantic literature about race and colonialism, Reybaud might also have been forgotten because of the lack of autobiographical information that she left behind.² So far, I have found only two of

¹ To date, I have only found four American scholars who study or have studied Reybaud's novels. These scholars are Werner Sollors, Barbara T. Cooper, MollyENZ and Elizabeth Wilding. Reybaud's novels are still difficult to find, but the BNF has made many of them available online in recent months.

² See Pratima Prasad, *Colonialism, Race, and the French Romantic Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Prasad notes that "outside of Léon-François Hoffman's classic compendium of black characters in French literature from the Middle Ages to the Romantic period (*Le Nègre romantique*, 1973), there is no book-length monograph devoted to race and colonialism in the French Romantic novel" (15).

her personal letters, neither of which gives detailed information about her literary career. Two biographical texts from the early twentieth century indicate that more letters might exist, but they also imply that these letters contain more references to Reybaud's personal than intellectual life.³ Reybaud, therefore, in contrast with writers like George Sand, did not leave much information about her thoughts on the art of literature. She wrote popular literature that appealed mainly to her contemporaries; her 1855 novel *Mademoiselle de Malepeire*, for example, was published in the *Chemins de fer* series, making it accessible to train travelers across the country. Her novels were translated into several languages. No less than three plays, including *Mulatten* (1840) by Hans Christian Anderson, were adaptations of her 1838 *Les Epaves*.⁴ It does not appear, however, that Reybaud received credit or financial payment for most of these adaptations.⁵ Perhaps because she was not in financial need and claimed to have "no ambition," Reybaud makes no indication that this lack of credit bothered her. She was consistently modest about the literary value of her work; indeed, most reviews of her work praise the author for writing enjoyable novels in a style expected of women writers, one that lacked

³ These biographies include: Charles Delanglade, "Fanny Arnaud (Madame Charles Reybaud)" in *Cahiers d'Aix* (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie Paul Roubaud, 1924) and Paul Guérin-Long, *Madame Charles Reybaud: Romancière Aixoise* (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie Makaire, 1922). Original versions are located at the ABR.

⁴ According to Théodore Vauclaire, several of Reybaud's works were adapted for the theatre. See "Théâtres de Paris. Premières Représentations. Revue dramatique." *Le Monde dramatique* (1839), 44-46.

⁵ Barbara Cooper, "Purloined Property: A Study of Madame Reybaud's *Les Epaves* and its Theatrical Adaptation, *Le Marché de Saint-Pierre*" in *French Literature Series*. ed. James T. Day (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Eds. Rodopi, 2010), Vol. 37 : 73-88.

“high” literary value. She was clearly an accepted and successful novelist, but her popularity never translated into any significant literary legacy after her death.

The second section of this chapter turns to an analysis of Reybaud’s colonial writings as texts that pay special attention to the connection between race, gender, nation, and the colonial in an effort to envision, according to Saint-Simonian philosophy, a feminized and therefore moral colonialism. In a striking role reversal, Reybaud’s empowering of the white heroine feminizes French control of the colonies, making the colony a male-dominated enterprise in need of feminine correction. In Reybaud’s colony, the lines of demarcation between blackness and Frenchness are blurred, leaving the door open for assimilated non-whites to become members of a French nation whose empowered women ensure its supposed disregard for racial discrimination.

Removing the Political

Born in Aix-en-Provence in 1802 to a former doctor in Napoleon’s army and his wife, Henriette-Etienne-Fanny Arnaud grew up in a well-known and well-respected family. By most accounts, her mother was absent and she was raised mainly by her father, which might explain the consistent absence of mothers in her novels. In 1822, she married a man of her choosing, Charles Reybaud, brother of the famous socialist writer Louis Reybaud. Not long after getting married, the couple separated for a few years, supposedly due to infidelities. Unable to divorce, Reybaud had little choice but to return

to her family home with her young son. In Aix, she began a literary career during which she would produce seven colonial novels.⁶

Reybaud did not claim to be the “femme de lettres” that revolutionary feminists, such as de Gouges, had claimed to be. Instead, she maintained that she had “aucun motif d’ambition,” stating that “une femme doit être pure et réservée, non seulement dans ses actes, et ses paroles, mais encore dans ses pensées.”⁷ Besides, Reybaud wrote, women who did write could only be justified in doing so by “un grand talent.”⁸ Alternatively, she saw no conflict between insisting on women’s proper role in society and imagining what I call her “feminized colony” through her novels. By the time that she was reconciled with her husband and moved to Paris in the 1830s, Reybaud, influenced by the Saint-Simonian notion of women’s innate superior morality, began to understand this feminine morality as justification for the empowerment of women in the colonies.

In addition to what the colonial setting provided Reybaud in terms of her thoughts on French women’s role in society, she might also have been so positive about

⁶ Her colonial novels and short stories are: *Pierre* (1836), *Les Epaves* (published in the *Revue de Paris* in 1838), *Mézélie* (1839), *Marie d’Enambuc* (published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in 1840), *Madame de Rieux* (1840), *Mademoiselle de Chazeuil* (1844), and *Sydonie* (1852). Madame Charles Reybaud originally published under the androgynous name H. Arnaud. According to an 1839 review of *Mézélie* in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, her “pseudonyme ... n’a pas tardé à devenir transparent.”

⁷ Charles Delanglade, “Fanny Arnaud (Madame Charles Reybaud)” in *Cahiers d’Aix* (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie Paul Roubaud, 1924), 6-51, 21.

⁸ Delanglade, 31-32.

France's presence in its colonies because of her own colonial connections. According to Charles Delanglade's 1924 biography of the author, Charles's and Louis's father was known to have "des fructueux commerces avec les colonies," primarily on Reunion Island.⁹ These associations, along with her own father's political ties to Napoleon, most certainly influenced Reybaud's positive perception of French presence in the colonies. Furthermore, Reybaud became a writer with the help of contacts that her husband developed as director of the newspaper *Le Constitutionnel*, which means that she was surrounded by liberal intellectuals who supported the revolution of 1830.¹⁰ Yet, given that people on the right and the left in France supported the nation's increasing colonial expansion, it is not surprising that Reybaud also espoused consistently positive views about France's presence in the Caribbean. As David Todd indicates, the July Monarchy proved to be "content with ensuring the survival of the old colonial system" that the Restoration government had sought to "resuscitate."¹¹

Part of this "resuscitation" involved seeking payment from Haiti. Administrators of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, where Reybaud published *Marie d'Enambuc*, were blatantly supportive of Saint-Domingue's former colonists' attempts to receive payment.

⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹⁰ A letter dated June 5, 1837 to the author Virginie Ancelot confirms Reybaud's involvement in the administration of her husband's newspaper. In it, she promises to speak to her husband on behalf of Ancelot. I thank Barbara Cooper for helping me find this letter in Paris. It is now located, along with her letter to Paul Lacroix, in the Duke University Special Collections library. See *References* for more information.

¹¹ David Todd, "A French Imperial Meridian, 1814-1870," *Past and Present* (Oxford, 2011) 210(1), 164.

In 1838, the year of Reybaud's first major publication *Les Epaves*, the chroniqueur of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* declared that:

Le seul intérêt qu'ait aujourd'hui la France dans ce pays [Haïti] c'est d'assurer aux anciens colons de Saint-Domingue le paiement de la misérable indemnité qui leur est attribué par le traité passé avec le président Boyer.¹²

Reybaud therefore circulated, thought, and wrote among pro-colonialist and wealthy Parisian intellectuals. This milieu influenced how she imagined a new and better way to form an idealized colony based on women's supposed innate morality and what she imagined to be France's position above racial discrimination.

Reviews of Reybaud's novels, however, indicate that her writings—even her colonial novels—were not understood to be political. This impression could result from her positive portrayal of France and the French. I maintain, however, that Reybaud wrote novels that sought to educate through their attention to virtue and that this interest in the didactic influence of the novel gave her works political weight. Just a few years before her death, Reybaud explained: "J'ai vu dans la vie que le vice est aimable et la vertu est ennuyeuse. J'ai voulu donner à la vertu tous les attraits du vice."¹³ Because vice has its charms, Reybaud understood the moral objective of her writing to be to make good *more* attractive than evil. Indeed, her writings—and her colonial novels in

¹² Cited in Philippe Zacaïre, "Représentations d'Haïti dans la presse française du dix-neuvième Siècle," *French Colonial History*, Volume 6, 2005, 109.

¹³ Emile Montégut, "Romanciers et écrivains contemporains. Mme Charles Reybaud," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Tome 35 (October 15, 1861), 895.

particular—portray virtuous characters (usually French heroines) opposed to a vicious world (often the white male dominated colonies). The social critique of Reybaud's novels lies in the moments of triumph for her heroines. In an ideal world, her virtuous heroines would be moral leaders actively involved in ameliorating the condition of the oppressed.

Sand and Reybaud shared this attention to morality in their novels. In 1852, an anonymous reviewer wrote in *The Dublin University Magazine* that "Madame Reybaud's forte is the *Roman-de-mœurs*. [... She] rarely neglects an opportunity of pointing a moral, or striking at a prejudice."¹⁴ As Robert Godwin-Jones explains, Sand, as a representative writer of the idealist novel, "imposes a moral vision on individual lives."¹⁵ As with Sand, Reybaud's desire to make virtue attractive to her readers is part of portraying the ideal, part of her "moral vision." In order to do this, Reybaud engaged with what Naomi Schor outlines in *George Sand and Idealism* as the "utopian dimension" of idealism, "the ability of an ideal to empower and to mobilize the disenfranchised."¹⁶ In *Marie d'Enambuc*, for example, a white heroine reigns in Martinique because she is unfettered by the control of a male partner. In *Les Epaves*, realist descriptions of Martinique and its cruel colonialism

¹⁴ "The Writings of Madame Charles Reybaud," *The Dublin University Magazine*, tome 40, number 236, August, 1852, 235. Emphases in original.

¹⁵ Robert Godwin-Jones, *Romantic vision: the novels of George Sand* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1995), 10.

¹⁶ Naomi Schor, *George Sand and Idealism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1993), 14.

give way to an idealized ending achieved through the work of the empowered white woman. Reybaud's characters share with Sand's Indiana an "aspiration toward an ideal world."¹⁷ It is this "utopian dimension" of idealism that promotes a notion of moral uplift. In other words, in these moments of success for her heroines, Reybaud's novels have moral and political purchase.

Schor has shown that sexism led to a devaluation of the kind of literature that Sand and Reybaud wrote. Sand knew Reybaud (or at least knew her works) and showed a sense of solidarity with her as a woman writer when she complained that certain women, including Reybaud, were ignored by people more interested in men's writing. Sand lamented that these works had made "plus de bruit et de besogne que bon nombre d'académiciens déjà oubliés dans le court espace de deux siècles" but that their popularity had never translated into literary respect.¹⁸ According to Schor, this exclusion was a result of a devaluation of idealism as a representational mode through its association with women. She maintains that this connection contributed to an understanding of idealism as realism's inferior. The now rather famous quote from Balzac to Sand in Sand's *Histoire de Ma Vie* establishes the unity of those engaged with

¹⁷ Schor, 53.

¹⁸ George Sand, *Questions d'art et de littérature* (Paris: 1878), 320-21.

the idealist aesthetic project of moral uplift while highlighting the gendering (and therefore divergence) of realist and idealist representational modes:

Vous cherchez l'homme tel qu'il devrait être; moi, je le prends tel qu'il est. Croyez-moi, nous avons raison tous deux. Ces deux chemins conduisent au même but. J'aime aussi les êtres exceptionnels ; j'en suis un. Il m'en faut d'ailleurs pour faire ressortir mes êtres vulgaires, et je ne les sacrifie jamais sans nécessité. Mais ces êtres vulgaires m'intéressent plus qu'ils ne vous intéressent. Je les grandis, je les idéalise, en sens inverse, dans leur laideur ou leur bêtise. Je donne à leurs difformités des proportions frayantes ou grotesques. Vous, vous ne sauriez pas ; vous faites bien de ne pas vouloir regarder des êtres et des choses qui vous donneraient le cauchemar. Idéalisez dans le joli et dans le beau, c'est un ouvrage de femme.¹⁹

Even though Balzac imagines that he and Sand are working toward the “same end,” taking man “as he is” became synonymous with a masculinized realism. Thus, how one sought to portray the “ideal” to which society should aspire became understood as influenced by the sex of the author. Writing about the “beautiful” or a lack of interest in the “ordinary” (a “retreat from the real”) became synonymous with woman’s work and therefore made inferior. Schor argues that this feminization of idealism led to Sand’s decanonization.²⁰

Yet Reybaud’s case differs from Sand’s in that she, though always seen as a *woman* writer, was not classified exclusively as an idealist or a realist writer. She was not understood to focus on the “beautiful” or to be incapable of describing the real. For her

¹⁹ George Sand, *Histoire de ma vie*, Tome XVII (Paris: Victor Lecou, Editeur, 1855), 70-71.

²⁰ Schor, 32.

contemporaries, she was a good storyteller who used both idealist and realist representational modes to educate her readers about the charms of virtue. This reception removed her from Balzac's and Sand's idealist aesthetic project of social critique; instead, Reybaud, her contemporaries thought, wrote well-liked novels whose political or moral message was largely ignored. As Sand's comment shows, Reybaud was popular without ever being taken seriously as a literary figure. This reputation contributed to Reybaud's literary demise after her death in 1870.

Reviewers often lauded Reybaud for having talents associated with both masculinity and femininity; on the other hand, almost every reviewer refers to the belief that certain aspects of her writing were distinctly those of a *woman* writer. As Cohen explains, nineteenth-century female writers were always "women first, writers second."²¹ The following review excerpt shows that Reybaud could be seen to *approach* more masculine styles of writing, but she could never be praised as an author, only as a *female* author:

[*Theresa*] touche au roman historique ... [il] n'en reste pas moins dans la sphère romanesque ; il est écrit de ce style énergique et brillant qui semble être devenu dans notre siècle le privilège des femmes.²²

²¹ Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 14.

²² Review of *Theresa* by Madame Charles Reybaud in *Le Siècle*, April 16, 1841.

Similarly, an 1842 review praises Reybaud as one of the best “femmes écrivains” of her era.²³ Other reviewers openly suggest that Reybaud could write as well as any man, but continue to insist that her works contain elements that could *only* be the work of a woman:

A part quelques scènes de cœur dont les femmes ont seules l'instinct, tout le reste se compose... de lignes hardies et nettes, d'effets étudiés et pleins de relief, auxquels peu d'hommes ont su atteindre.²⁴

An 1842 review of *La Petite Reine*, which was published as *Marie d'Enambuc*, praised the novelist for her supposedly feminine “sensibilité exquise” and her supposedly masculine “talent descriptif.”²⁵ Emile Montégut, chief literary critic of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in fact commended Reybaud's 1851 novel *Faustine* by calling it “une histoire [réaliste] comme on les aime aujourd'hui.”²⁶

Indeed, Reybaud's dedication to realistic descriptions of place and time, her “effets étudiés et pleins de relief,” added to her association with a realist tradition later understood as a *masculine* literary form of social critique. In an effort to describe accurately seventeenth-century Martinique in *Marie d'Enambuc*, for example, Reybaud uses the same historical detail that readers of her novel *Theresa* admired. She is

²³ From a review signed G.B. published in *Écho de la littérature et des beaux-arts en France et à l'étranger*, September 1842.

²⁴ Review of *Le Château de Saint Germain* by H. Arnaud in *Le Constitutionnel*, January 31, 1837. My emphasis.

²⁵ *Écho de la littérature et des beaux-arts en France et à l'étranger*, September 1842.

²⁶ Montégut, 886.

particularly influenced by the Père du Tertre, whom she calls an “exact et véridique auteur.” Reybaud even stops her narration to remind her readers of her story’s accuracy based on his *Histoire des Antilles*. She tries to recreate seventeenth-century Martinique for her readers. It is this historic detail that sets the stage for her idealist fantasy of the reign of Marie d’Enambuc.²⁷ Reybaud is thus not incapable of imitating a style associated with masculinity; she cannot, however, be anything other than a *femme écrivain*, a writer whose gender entirely defines the work she creates.²⁸

In fact, most complimentary reviews of Reybaud’s works end up being negative in their insistence on painting a portrait of the author as a good, even great, *woman* writer. Montégut’s words best demonstrate this positive-yet-negative reception:

Elle ne vise pas à la profondeur et à la philosophie, elle se contente d’amuser et d’émouvoir. Si la nature des passions et des sentiments qu’elle décrit est susceptible d’éveiller quelque réflexion, elle l’indique en passant et sans insister.²⁹

In other words, Reybaud writes as a woman should, without too much depth or philosophy. Later in his review, Montégut details his expectations for the proper behavior of a woman writer when he commends Reybaud for her lack of political

²⁷ It was common for writers, including Balzac, to be associated with both realism and idealism. See Bernard Weinberg, *French Realism: The Critical Reaction, 1830-1870* (New York: Modern Languages Association of America, 1937), 69.

²⁸ Reybaud was also understood as having a particular penchant for writing about warm places. In the 1842 review signed G.B., Reybaud is said to “sait encadrer avec tant de grâce ... les chauds paysages des Espagnes et des Antilles.”

²⁹ Montégut, 883.

engagement. He places Reybaud with other revolutionaries of the 1830s, but quickly praises her for the lack of “liberal” political rhetoric in her writing: “en femme sensée et finement pratique, elle a eu l’art de séparer ses opinions de ses émotions et les intérêts de son esprit de ceux de son imagination.”³⁰ For Montégut, Reybaud removed her political opinions from her writing, which meant that she maintained what was necessary for women to write well: emotion and imagination, not depth or philosophical thought. As one reviewer wrote, these emotions were charming, but faded with time: “[Après avoir lu Reybaud] il me reste des émotions qui ont du charme, et que je savoure doucement jusqu’à ce qu’elles s’éteignent tout à fait après s’être graduellement affaiblies.”³¹ Reybaud’s literary impact suffered a similar fate. It is my hope that the following analysis of Reybaud’s colonial novels will bring new attention to an author who used her portrayal of the colony to imagine new possibilities for the French colonial project as well as the marginalized French woman.

Reybaud’s Feminized Colony

Reybaud’s *Marie d’Enambuc*, published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in the spring of 1840, her feuilleton *Les Epaves*, published in the *Revue de Paris* in 1838 and reprinted in the 1839 collection *Valdepeiras*, and her novel *Madame de Rieux*, published with Jamar in

³⁰ Ibid, 890.

³¹ Gaschon de Molènes, *Revue littéraire*, originally published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and republished in *La querelle du roman-feuilleton*, edited by Lise Dumasy (Grenoble: ELLUG, 1999).

Brussels in 1840, together tell a story of what could have been for French women had they had power in the French colonies. *Marie d'Enambuc*, based on true historical information from the *Histoire des Antilles*, tells the story of a woman who controls her husband's plantation in seventeenth-century Martinique after his death. Through her capacity for compassion, Marie establishes a supposedly moral colony, has the support of the enslaved and the free alike, and loses her authority only when a non-French and therefore immoral Spanish man named M. de Loinvilliers takes revenge against her because she refuses to marry him. In *Les Epaves*, a young French woman named Cécile living in eighteenth-century Martinique saves a light-skinned man from slavery by marrying him, despite the threats of the racist Belgian plantation owner M. de la Rebelière. *Madame de Rieux* tells a more pessimistic story of loss for French women when Christine de Rieux, a young French widow, embarks on a trip with her father to regain his lost treasure in nineteenth-century Haiti. Once his treasure is restored, all hope for empowerment and romantic satisfaction for the French woman is lost.

Reybaud's allegory of the birth of colonialism accurately begins with the d'Esnambuc family, who started France's colonization of Martinique. She places Marie at the head of the earliest incarnation of French colonial control of the island, imagining a well-run colony including Caraïbe Native Americans, African slaves, and French

colonizers.³² When the French king intervenes to place Marie's brother-in-law in power, Marie leaves the struggle to maintain power against Loinvilliers to this new French leader and boards a ship for France. The grand scene of her departure is a moment of mourning for the oppressed, suggesting that France should have begun its colonial endeavors by empowering a woman leader.

Les noirs chantaient sur un air monotone et plaintif des paroles improvisées; tous aimaient cette jeune femme, dont ils n'avaient jamais aperçu que de loin le doux visage; ils la pleuraient, car ils savaient qu'elle avait souvent jeté sur leurs misères un regard de compassion, et qu'elle les protégeait contre l'oppression des blancs.³³

Marie d'Enambuc fantasizes about what could have happened if a moral and just woman had reigned. Marie has been a ray of hope for "the blacks" who are protected from "the oppression of the whites." In this moment, Marie's compassion separates her from other "whites." As a *French* white woman, she has proven to be a kind ruler who, though distanced from "les noirs," made sure that they were treated well. She is such a great leader that even those opposed to a woman in a position of authority mourn her upon her departure:

³² I thank the staff of AFF for helping me find information about the first colonists in Martinique.

³³ Madame Charles Reybaud, *Marie d'Enambuc*, published in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Tome XXII (May, 15 1840), 672-700 and (June 1, 1840), 800. Another version of this story was republished as "Marie" in *L'Écho des feuilletons*, 13^e année (1853), 5-54. I cite from the original version, which will henceforth be referred to as *Marie d'Enambuc*.

En ce moment on ne se souvenait que de la bonté, de la justice, des nobles qualités de Marie; ceux-là même que l'idée d'être gouvernés par une femme avait le plus révoltés, la pleuraient maintenant.³⁴

Reybaud implies that, as moral leaders, women like Marie can erase prejudices that deny their ability to rule and that they can also show how to win the favor of slaves while still maintaining a hierarchical relationship with them.

Yet, because the nefarious Monsieur de Loinvilliers ultimately triumphs over Marie, *Marie d'Enambuc* also conjectures that immoral leaders led to strife and destruction in the colonies. After Marie's departure, Loinvilliers waits for her in the middle of the Atlantic. He jumps onto her ship to find her dead. Once he hears that her body will be returned to a man she had married secretly, he cruelly dumps her body into the ocean, declaring: "[Il] ne la reverra ni vivante ni morte!"³⁵ Reybaud's story ends with Loinvilliers's bitter declaration. Marie is forever caught between her homeland and "cette terre où elle avait régné, où elle avait tant souffert."³⁶ She suffered in order to rule in Martinique; she had to fight Loinvilliers's attempts to take power from her in order to maintain a morally respectable colony. In the end, her body joins the bodies of so many unknown slaves, falling into oblivion along with all hope of a moral colonialism. Because the rejected Loinvilliers cannot possess Marie, cannot subsume and therefore

³⁴ *Marie d'Enambuc*, 800.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 803.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 800.

suppress her form of moral colonialism, he ensures that any record of her attempt at moral leadership vanishes with the memory of the victims of the Middle Passage. The tragic ending of *Marie d'Enambuc* expresses pessimism about the possibility of implementing a better colonial model, but not about the superiority of that model itself. By giving Marie political power, Reybaud offers a solution to the colonial question. By allowing Loinvilliers to ultimately survive her, Reybaud explains why a discriminatory, male-dominated regime remains.

Reybaud defines discrimination against Africans as what happens when they are not treated as human beings; she does not, however, maintain that freedom is fundamental to this recognition of humanity. As Santo-Christo explains in *Madame de Rieux*, the problem with colonial leaders was that they believed that “un noir n’était pas un homme.”³⁷ Reybaud understands slavery as an institution that can be made better by “moral” French intervention, an institution that, when organized and maintained properly, is relatively benign. Other nationalities bear the blame for the racism Marie observes in the colonies. Marie’s kindness toward the oppressed is, for example, opposed by Loinvilliers’s harsh indifference in nationalist terms and is meant to show that French Marie can run a colony better than non-French Loinvilliers. As the plantation prepares for an incoming storm, for example, Marie asks if the slaves are

³⁷ H. Arnaud, *Madame de Rieux* (Bruxelles: Jamar, 1840), 56.

protected. Loinvilliers—whose prejudice is said to be due to his lack of French education—indicates that slaves are property not worthy of Marie’s attention:

[La] commisération et cette humanité [de Marie] envers la race noire n'étaient point du tout dans les idées de M. de Loinvilliers ... [Un] nègre était pour lui un animal domestique; il le voyait du même œil que son chien ou son cheval.³⁸

Reybaud clearly criticizes Loinvilliers’s treatment of slaves, whose racialization and enslaved status are conflated through the simplified description of “la race noire.” Yet, she also removes the French from this negative behavior. Reybaud achieves this separation by portraying Marie as a moral leader who offers slaves humane treatment, which is interpreted as her concern for their wellbeing and comfort. The novel finds Loinvilliers to be in the wrong for ignoring slaves’ humanity, but it also emphasizes that he is entirely incapable of properly running a colony. Marie’s compassion leads to and is part of the success of her colonial leadership. Reybaud makes the French, represented by Marie, compassionate colonial leaders who bear no responsibility for the kinds of immoral and discriminatory deeds that Loinvilliers practices. Slaves, however, remain a mass of others that Marie looks upon from a distance, a mass of people who are content in their lot in life as long as some superior leader, like Marie, shows them compassion. *Marie d’Enambuc*, therefore, does not oppose racial hierarchy; it only removes the French from the responsibility for its negative effects.

³⁸ *Marie d’Enambuc*, 755.

Reybaud distinguishes Loinvilliers and Marie in nationalist terms that are defined by gender and racial affiliation. Moral femaleness is French; harsh maleness is foreign. This distinction between French and foreign becomes *racial* when applied to the difference between French and Creole. Miller notes that, despite the similarity between Europeans in France and those in the colonies, Creoles were often racialized.³⁹ This move allows Reybaud to separate the French from a supposedly foreign group of people mistreating slaves in the colonies. For this separation to occur, she questions Loinvilliers's whiteness, making him of a different, even though still "European," race. It is this race, the "Creole race," that holds responsibility for the mistreatment of slaves:

[Loinvilliers] était un homme d'environ trente ans, dont la peau avait un reflet si bronzé, qu'on aurait soupçonné en lui un mélange de sang africain, si ses cheveux, d'un noir brillant, son profil aquilin et ses lèvres finement découpées n'eussent clairement prouvé qu'il était de pure race européenne.⁴⁰

Despite his European "purity," Loinvilliers maintains "les inflexibles préjugés des créoles," *because* he is "né et élevé en Amérique."⁴¹ As explained during the scene of her departure, Marie protects "les noirs" from "l'oppression des blancs," which makes her a member of a separate "white" (i.e. French) race of individuals who bear no

³⁹ See Christopher L. Miller, *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourses in French* (University of Chicago Press: 1985), 95.

⁴⁰ *Marie d'Enambuc*, 680.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 755.

responsibility for the ill-treatment of slaves. The Creole Loinvilliers is thus excluded from a French national-racial model assumed to be morally superior.

Reybaud writes, according to Werner Sollors, as if French is “synonymous with being open-minded and humanitarian.”⁴² Writing for a *Revue* that supported Haiti’s decision to pay former colonists, Reybaud does an excellent job of removing the French from the atrocities of their colonial past. Alys Weinbaum explains that “the nation is a racial community that represents its ‘historical unity’ to itself as a function of its racial homogeneity.”⁴³ *Marie d’Enambuc* retells the history of France’s colonial presence in the Caribbean by racializing cruel colonists as Other. As a representative of the French national “race,” Marie demonstrates that “commiseration and humanity toward the black race” are part of expected French, and feminine, conduct.

The fact that, for Reybaud, women’s presence in the colonies was required for their improvement separates her understanding of gender and its connection to the colonial world from that of more well studied writers like Sand. Indiana, the protagonist of Sand’s 1832 novel *Indiana*, for example, has, like Marie, the opportunity to improve the lives of slaves. Yet she is not present in the colony *in order to* free slaves. Indiana lives in isolation with her cousin Ralph on the Ile Bourbon; her colonial presence is

⁴² Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 168.

⁴³ Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 38.

ephemeral. Only two sentences, spoken by Ralph—not Indiana—from their tiny “chaumière indienne” secluded on present-day Reunion Island, refer to the freeing of slaves: “La majeure portion de nos revenus est consacrée à racheter de pauvres Noirs infirmes. Que ne sommes-nous assez riches pour délivrer tous ceux qui vivent dans l’esclavage!”⁴⁴ The freeing of slaves is the fortunate upshot of Indiana’s escape and survival. Moreover, only after choosing, as Schor maintains, a nonsexual and therefore egalitarian relationship with Ralph can Indiana free these old and sickly slaves. Indiana has longed for a day when she can love a man who loves her; only once this day arrives can she do good for others: “Un jour viendra où tout sera changé dans ma vie, où je ferai du bien aux autres; un jour où l’on m’aimera, où je donnerai tout mon cœur à celui qui me donnera le sien.”⁴⁵ Marie, on the contrary, protects the well-being of slaves through her colonial presence. Also in contrast with Indiana, she seeks love, but does not imagine this to be a prerequisite for her moral behavior. It is in fact her refusal of Loinvilliers and her willingness to be separated from the man she loves that prove her commitment to maintaining a supposedly moral colony.

For Marie, the personal quest for love plays a secondary role to her commitment to righting the wrongs of non-French colonizers. As Cohen outlines, the sentimental

⁴⁴ George Sand, *Indiana* (Paris: Roret, 1832), Tome 2, 353.

⁴⁵ George Sand, *Indiana* (Paris: Roret, 1832), Tome 1, 95. My emphasis.

novel of the early nineteenth century set up a tension between a dedication to collective welfare and individual freedom.⁴⁶ She explains that “[a] woman’s choice of erotic object unavoidably raises questions of collective welfare and can never be simply a matter of individual feeling.”⁴⁷ Marie is first introduced as a dedicated wife and mother, which proves her morality and dedication to the collective welfare. Her assertion of her individual freedom in order to refuse a marriage to the immoral Loinvilliers also demonstrates her dedication to the welfare of the colony because she can continue to be a moral leader as a widow. In between the death of her first husband and Loinvilliers’s continual proposals, Marie does marry a man whom she trusts and loves, unbeknownst to Loinvilliers. Marie chooses Henri de Maubray, but she cannot be married to him and ensure the security of the colony. Maubray flees Martinique with Marie’s young son, leaving her in charge of opposing Loinvilliers. This decision to resolve the tension between the collective welfare and individual freedom by refusing to flee with her family reaffirms Marie’s morality. Regardless of her “individual feelings,” she always has the best interest of the colony at heart.

Though Marie’s presence is meant to improve the condition of the slaves that she controls, she is also at times compared to a slave herself. Loinvilliers’s behavior toward

⁴⁶ Cohen, 34.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 47.

Marie mimics the way in which he treats his slaves. The prospect of marrying Loinvilliers would “enslave” Marie, foreclosing any opportunity for her to reign. Comparing marriage to slavery and white married women to slaves are common themes in early nineteenth-century women’s writing, but Reybaud’s “enslavement” of Marie is unique in that, in addition to an unwanted marriage (or the threat of it) making her a “slave,” her position of power is a burden that also “enslaves” her. Marie laments: “...je subis l’esclavage du trône.”⁴⁸ This suffering, in addition to her Frenchness, add to her ability to understand the suffering of others. Her willingness to tolerate the strains placed upon her in a position of power proves that she works tirelessly for the oppressed. This simultaneous victimization and exaltation of Marie removes her from responsibility for the depravity involved in running a slave colony. Her final resting place in the middle of the Atlantic among thousands of unknown Africans reaffirms the story’s confusion of *French*, *woman*, and *slave*. Because Reybaud sees suffering as a positive, bonding, and equalizing force, this confusion opens up the opportunity for romantic relationships for women. It also, however, continually emphasizes that the French, led by its women, are, in fact, on the side of the slaves, because they, too, understand suffering. Black people (for Reybaud, specifically light-skinned black

⁴⁸ *Marie d’Enambuc*, 753, my emphasis.

people) thus join French Marie to side against the shifty, immoral, and *foreign* white master.

Romancing the Slave

In *Marie d'Enambuc*, *Les Epaves*, and *Madame de Rieux*, equal, happy and successful relationships for women, which keep them from the “enslavement” of an unhappy marriage, are only possible when shared with a man who has had a similar experience of suffering. Maubray, the man whom Marie *truly* loves, is a man whom she saves from indentured servitude. In *Les Epaves*, Cécile saves her love Donatien from slavery by marrying him, which leads to “un mariage heureux.”⁴⁹ For Christine, because, after Haitian independence, no man risks enslavement in nineteenth-century Haiti, she has no hope for a happy romantic relationship. Even if there were men to save, because Christine has no chance to practice her “moral” form of colonialism, she has no power to rescue a potential partner. Reybaud’s notion of romantic liberation for white women hinges upon their ability to free their male partners from slavery. Giving authority to female characters is part of her feminist fantasy; the freeing and amelioration of the treatment of slaves is the consequence of women’s empowerment. This empowerment affords women their choice of partner.

⁴⁹ Madame Charles Reybaud, *Valdepeiras* (Bruxelles: Jamar, 1839), 206.

The racial distinctions that Reybaud establishes in relation to heterosexual romance constitute a reformulation of whiteness. Though Loinvilliers's whiteness is questioned, he is firmly understood as one of the "oppressing whites" so widespread in the colonies. Thanks to their nationality, gender, and experience of suffering, Reybaud's French female characters share commonalities with the enslaved that allow them to oppose binary white/black racial distinctions in favor of binary French/foreign distinctions. Once on the "moral" side of the French, men who are blackened by the stain of slavery make suitable romantic partners for French women. When Marie saves Maubray, he is barely clothed, injured and marked by his enslavement: "Les pieds nus portaient encore la marque d'un anneau de fer longtemps rivé à la cheville."⁵⁰ These scars blacken Maubray, opening up the possibility of a relationship with Marie. In *Les Epaves*, Donatien, son of a Native American slave and a white man, is so French that he is only *slightly* non-white:

...ses traits, d'une régularité qui rappelait les beaux types antiques, exprimaient une fierté calme; ses cheveux, lisses et luisants, ne ressemblaient que par la couleur à ceux des nègres, son teint était clair ; mais de légères nuances bronzées s'étendaient des tempes à la région supérieure du front, et ses lèvres minces avaient une certaine pâleur brune.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Marie d'Enambuc, 777.

⁵¹ Reybaud, *Les Épaves*, *Revue de Paris*, Tome 2 (February, 1838), 35.

Due to his position as an *épave* (a person who was always at risk of enslavement because he could not prove his freedom), his oh-so-close-to-perfect whiteness, and his French mannerisms, Donatien is sexually attractive to Cécile. She enjoys the “mâle beauté de son visage” along with his “souple” and “admirable” proportions. His position on the edge of slavery parallels that of the white female characters of Reybaud’s writing, making the experience of subjugation a precursor to moral action and placing the French, once again, in the heroic position of savior rather than master. This reformulation of whiteness simultaneously avoids the controversy of portraying interracial romance and depicts France as a country impervious to racial prejudice.

The “erotic objects” of Reybaud’s feminist politics come into being when the dominant white man’s desire for possession is thwarted. Donatien’s and Maubray’s enslavement—what in the end makes them romantically available to French women—comes from the white slave master’s frustration at being unable to possess the French woman. Loinvilliers’s reaction to this frustration is to throw Marie’s body overboard. De la Rebellière, the evil Belgian slave owner from *Les Epaves*, reacts by threatening Donatien with enslavement after learning of Cécile’s and his wife Eléonor’s love for him. Marriage, as established by the French Code Noir, is the only way for Cécile to successfully prevent de la Rebellière’s attempts to buy (and kill) Donatien. Reinforcing French legal and moral presence in the colony, Cécile forces de la Rebellière to acquiesce

after explaining that French law stipulates that “tout esclave qui épouse une femme libre est libre de droit.”⁵² In fact, it does not appear that Cécile considers marriage to Donatien before realizing that it might be the only way to oppose the white slave master. When Marie and Cécile choose an equal and empathetic partner, they assert power over the foreign immoral leaders of the colony. Women’s choice of “erotic object” benefits the individual *and* the collective.

This focus on the romantic liberation of women along with the belief in women’s innate and superior morality connects Reybaud to the Saint-Simonian movement in which many of her friends and contemporaries took part. In 1831, Prosper Enfantin, leader of the Saint-Simonian movement inspired by the works of aristocrat Henri de Saint-Simon, called for a “femme-messie.” He envisioned his movement led by a couple-pope, a man to deal in the realm of reason, a woman in the realm of sentiment. The movement took many preconceived notions about women of the time and transformed them to assets, making woman a moral example for man.

At the same time, as part of a movement focused on utopian social progress, the Saint-Simoniens, like most of their contemporaries, did not oppose colonial expansion, but instead believed in its benefits. As Osama Abi-Mershed notes in his study of the Saint-Simoniens in Algeria, “few liberal thinkers or Saint-Simonian doctrinaires

⁵² Ibid, 83.

considered military conquest and pacification as less than integral to France's apostolate of civilization and modernization."⁵³ In fact, colonization was essential to Enfantin's understanding of France's progress. In his 1843 work *Colonisation de l'Algérie*, he writes: "la France n'a pas tout à enseigner en Algérie, elle a quelque chose à apprendre..."⁵⁴ Owning property communally, for example, was a practice Enfantin thought France should learn from its colonized peoples in Algeria. Similarly, Reybaud's empowered female characters benefit France at the same time that they find power and love in the colonies.

Though little is known about Reybaud's official connection to Enfantin's movement, her husband and many of her friends converted around the time of the 1830 revolution. *Marie d'Enambuc* speaks to Reybaud's association with the movement in that it evokes an image of a *femme-messie*, suggesting that what the colonies lacked was the sentimental leadership of women. This addition of woman and the way in which it allows for successful romances echoes the words of the authors of the Saint-Simonian journal *Tribune des femmes* who suggest that women should, "[refuser] pour époux tout

⁵³ Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford University Press, 2010), 11.

⁵⁴ Prosper Enfantin, *La Colonisation de l'Algérie* (Paris: Bertrand, 1843), 148.

On the Saint-Simonians in Algeria, see Abi-Mershed, 73-4 and Philippe Régnier, "Le mythe oriental des saint-simoniens," in *Les saint-simoniens et l'Orient: Vers la modernité*, ed. Magali Morsy (Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1989).

homme qui n'est pas assez généreux pour consentir à partager son pouvoir."⁵⁵

Reybaud's female characters force the white slave master to "partager" or even relinquish his power in favor of the idealized, feminized leadership only she can provide.

Saint-Simonian feminists saw essentialized definitions of masculinity and femininity as a path to sexual equality. By valorizing qualities assumed to be naturally and inescapably feminine, Saint-Simonianism *corrected* the masculine half by adding its feminine other to make one whole, thereby making the feminine significant. To modern feminists, a feminism so focused on difference and women's inherent emotional and moral qualities may not look very feminist at all. Leslie Rabine and Claire G. Moses describe the movement, however, as "recuperating the feminine from ... women's detractors." Part of this focus on women's nature could have been strategic, for, according to Rabine and Moses, "unlike the Revolutionary feminists, Saint-Simonians specifically sought to allay the fear of women's power, and to do so they drew heavily upon the romantic idealization of women."⁵⁶ Reybaud's feminization of French control also works to "allay the fear of women's power" as the romantic idealization of woman

⁵⁵ Jeanne Deroin (signed Jeanne-Victoire), No. 1, *La Femme Libre, l'Apostolat des Femmes*, 1832. This was a feminist journal published by Saint-Simonian women from 1832-1834. During these years, it had several names, but is most commonly referred to as *La Tribune des femmes*.

⁵⁶ Claire Goldberg Moses and Leslie Rabine, *Feminism, Socialism, and French Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 28-29.

turns Marie into a symbol for a colonial empire and makes Cécile simply an enforcer of French law.

Women's presence in the colonies thus reinforces and supports proper French rule because of their assumed-to-be innate differences from men. The Saint-Simonian valorization of difference accentuates unity and harmony among groups. As Moses explains, "Enfantin's feminism derived from the new socialism which rejected radical individualism in favor of a harmonious association of differentiated classes [...and] sexes."⁵⁷ This approach allows Reybaud to insert women as a crucial part of what she imagines to be a harmonious hierarchical colony. In addition to favoring this association of differentiated groups based on gender and class affiliation, Reybaud adds racial affiliation as a factor in the organizing of this new idealized colony. In her 1839 novel *Mézélie*, she describes the New World as a place where a moral community of differently colored people might happily join together:

Les gens de la nuance la plus foncée s'arrêtaient aussi bien devant [la porte du père Cyrillo] que l'aristocratie blanche du pays. ... [Un] soir.. le cercle s'agrandit peu à peu... Quelques habitants de couleur mélangée vinrent baiser la main du père Cyrillo et prirent ensuite place sur le gazon, à une distance respectueuse ; un peu plus tard l'alcade arriva et on lui apporta un siège à côté du curé. Les servantes de la maison, rangées derrière leur maîtresse, filaient du coton, et les fuseaux rapides tournaient en cadence au bruit de la conversation. *C'était comme une scène de la Bible renouvelée dans les solitudes du Nouveau-Monde.*⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Claire Goldberg Moses, "Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women: The Transformation of Feminist Thought in 1830s' France," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (June, 1982), 244.

⁵⁸ Madame Charles Reybaud, *Mézélie* (Paris: Ladvocat, 1839), 235-7. My emphasis.

In this scene, black people, white people, those of mixed ancestry, political officials, religious officials, masters and servants blend harmoniously. The political exists beside the religious. Though distanced from the white masters, slaves and non-whites are included in the community. (When slaves are excluded, Reybaud refers to them as “les ex-communiés.”⁵⁹) Each group of people feel included in the community; black people can stop to see the political and religious leaders as often as white people can. Yet, when everyone is gathered together, everyone respects the established hierarchy. The darker one’s skin, the further away from the religious and political center one is. Additionally, female servants stay next to their mistresses. There is conversation, but the only noise they make is via the completion of their assigned task: weaving. For Reybaud, this hierarchical differentiation by group affiliation is only positive. No one questions it; the order is even raised to the level of biblical. There is a divine component to a world organized in such a manner. As Michael Behrent explains, the Saint-Simonian view of reality “was predicated on a hierarchy of articulated social functions, existing over and above individual volition.”⁶⁰ Individual volition is entirely excluded from this scene; respecting one’s assigned social function creates harmony for all.

⁵⁹ Marie d’Énambuc, 789.

⁶⁰ Michael Behrent, “The Mystical Body of Society: Religion and Association in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 69 (2008), 229.

Missing Saint-Domingue, Forgetting Haiti: *Madame de Rieux*

Madame de Rieux (1840) reinforces Reybaud's belief that French colonialism, characterized by a feminized humanitarianism, offered a unique path to individual and collective harmony by portraying nineteenth-century Haiti as an example of the incongruity between a successful past and a disastrous present. If *Marie d'Enambuc* tells a story of what might have happened in the French colonies if French women had ruled in the seventeenth century, *Madame de Rieux* tells a story of profound loss for France and its women of the nineteenth century. Christine de Rozan becomes Madame de Rieux upon an arranged marriage to her cousin, an older man who was the only one in his family to escape the slave uprisings of the late eighteenth century. Christine's father, Robert de Rozan, and her husband, Max de Rieux, take Christine away from her beloved friend Amélie right after her marriage in order to find treasure and reclaim property in their native Saint-Domingue, now Haiti. Max, the only one who knew the location of the hidden treasure, dies during the transatlantic journey; his death leaves Christine, her father, and a white servant named Julien to search for money amid the ruins of the old Rozan and Rieux plantations. At the novel's end, a former slave helps Robert de Rozan find treasure. Yet Christine, who discovers that she cannot be with the man she loves, Paul Aubert, kills herself. Her father, once again rich, returns to France, leaving Christine and all hope *she* had for love and wealth buried in Haiti.

Madame de Rieux speaks to Reybaud's ambivalence about France's loss of Saint-Domingue. On the one hand, France's absence spells the loss of hope for French women's romantic happiness. Yet, Reybaud's portrayal of French men's simultaneous abandonment of Haiti *and* the French woman offers a subtle critique of France's policy toward the new nation. This critique plays out in the novel's depictions of a dichotomy between past and present. Christine, more so than any other character, works to accept the current situation in Haiti. She explains to Julien, who is irate that he must welcome the current owner of the former Rozan plantation into his home, that the world has changed and that he must accept it:

Mais à présent tout est bien changé, répondit tranquillement Christine; allons, mon pauvre Julien, il faut prendre votre parti et songer qu'à Haïti nous ne sommes plus les maîtres.⁶¹

Though she admits that the contrast between the past and the present is "terrible," Christine accepts the reality of France's demise. She is in fact unaware that her father and Julien are looking for their past treasure until halfway through the novel. Her attempts to adjust to a new life in Haiti highlight her moral nature, but her ultimate failure to find a way to contribute to social or political life in Haiti emphasizes that the actions of French men have destroyed the future of French women.

⁶¹ H. Arnaud, *Madame de Rieux* (Bruxelles: Jamar, 1840), 35.

As a representative of the same “moral” colonialism that Marie sought to encourage, Christine symbolizes a rupture with an imagined past that respected women and the enslaved. Christine has no agency in her story; she does not choose her marriage to Max de Rieux nor does she choose to return to Haiti. Her father entirely controls her destiny and she trusts him to ensure her happiness, even though he eventually abandons his daughter and Haiti. Max is not the ideal partner that Donatien and Maubray were. Christine explains: “Depuis qu’il est devenu mon mari, je le crains.”⁶² As a widow, Christine only follows her father’s whims. The only way in which she asserts her moral superiority is by refusing to discriminate against those of African descent. Her willingness to accept the Haitian senator Santo-Christo into her home and even, to everyone’s surprise, shake his hand implies that, had feminized French humanitarianism reigned in Saint-Domingue, the disparity between past and present would not be so stark. Reybaud subtly criticizes the French male effort to discriminate against people of African ancestry for economic gain. In this novel, the evil colonizer is not foreign; instead, he is a French man who values his own wealth and sense of racial superiority over the French woman’s ability to ensure moral leadership and harmony.

Christine’s death means that the harmoniously organized hierarchical society, the one that Reybaud called *biblical*, has come to an end with France’s abandonment of

⁶² Ibid, 19.

Saint-Domingue. Reybaud makes the religious symbolism of her novels obvious. Marie, the mother of Christ, is chased out of power at the beginning of French colonial expansion in the Antilles by the evil Loinvilliers. Christine, a feminine Christ figure, is dying as her father, who symbolizes France, collects his treasure. Haiti obtains its freedom, but France's departure from the former colony signals the demise of the feminized, religious French humanitarianism that began with Marie. Loinvilliers's cruelty leads not only to Marie's demise, but eventually to slave insurrections that result in a world where Christine has no power. Reybaud suggests that the *femme-messie* that the Saint-Simonians so eagerly sought lived and died in an imagined colony run by morally superior French women. When the Haitian senator Santo-Christo tells Christine's father that he will watch over her in her grave, Reybaud establishes a connection between France and Haiti by making Christine and the morality she represents an altar at which both French and Haitian people may pray.

While suggesting that France and Haiti move forward united by their respect for Christine, *Madame de Rieux* still regrets her demise. This lamentation gives life to characters who profoundly miss the slave society of Saint-Domingue. Macouba, for example, has no present and no future, only a past. A former slave who has no other name than the one she was given for properly serving tobacco to the white master, Macouba can only tell stories of colonial times:

Tous les souvenirs de la vieille négresse remontaient à une époque déjà bien éloignée et qui lui semblait encore récente ... [Elle] ne savait rien au-delà de ce qui s'était passé sur l'habitation de Rieux.⁶³

Unable to find purpose in her life after the system that defined her crumbled, Macouba lives in a make-believe past world she creates in isolation. In the end, she helps Robert de Rozan discover money hidden by a French soldier before he was killed by insurgent slaves. A supporter of an oppressive colonial rule, someone who believes in her own inferiority, Macouba gladly offers money to her former oppressors. She symbolizes the Haiti that paid France; only a woman whose words show “une incohérence qui ressemblait à la folie” gives money to the French. The money Haiti paid to France crippled its economy and did little to help the new country. As Miller explains, “Haiti [bought] the right to be forgotten by France.”⁶⁴ Macouba gladly pays her former masters; they leave; and she returns to her insanity to live in a past where her former masters are not forgotten, where they will always be the people whose superiority defines her existence.

Given that Reybaud was writing in journals such as the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that supported Haiti's payment to France, it is unlikely that she was criticizing Boyer's agreement with France through her creation of the character of Macouba. Macouba

⁶³ *Madame de Rieux*, 110.

⁶⁴ Miller, *The French Atlantic*, 247.

shows that the French somehow understood Haiti's payment as a sign that certain Haitians actually regretted the old system, that some people actually agreed with the racist assertions of the colonists who wrote *Le Cri des Colons*. Both Molly Enz and Elizabeth Wilding have read the character of Macouba as evidence of Reybaud's racist and colonialist ideology.⁶⁵ Enz argues that, through Macouba, "Reybaud implies that life was better before the slave revolts and that a return to the old order would benefit whites and blacks alike."⁶⁶ As noted above, however, Christine calmly states that the French must accept that they are no longer "les maîtres." Furthermore, the black senator who owns the plantation, Santo-Christo, is a kind man who criticizes the "domination cruelle [des anciens maîtres] et les châtiments auxquels ils condamnaient les malheureux esclaves."⁶⁷ Even after Santo-Christo learns that Christine and her father are descendants of his former masters, he does not offer to return the plantation he now controls. Despite its portrayal of Macouba's blind devotion to her former masters, *Madame de Rieux* does, therefore, criticize the slave society of Saint-Domingue and encourage the French to move on now that it has become Haiti. I therefore find it more fitting to read Macouba's dedication to a system of colonial rule juxtaposed with the powerful position of the

⁶⁵ See Elisabeth Anne Wilding, "The Novels of Madame Charles Reybaud" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1994) and Molly Krueger Enz, "(In)Between Identities: Representations of the Island and the Mulatto in Nineteenth-Century French Fiction" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 2005).

⁶⁶ Enz, 173.

⁶⁷ *Madame de Rieux*, 56.

senator Santo-Christo. Reybaud's portrayal of the past of Saint-Domingue, rather than only indicating that life was better before, attempts to come to terms with the present.

Coming to terms with the present requires forgetting the past. Macouba, who cannot forget, goes mad. Christine, who loses her past chance at establishing a supposedly moral colony, dies. She advises her father that forgetting the once wealthy Saint-Domingue would benefit him as well: "Si vous pouviez oublier que vous avez été riche!"⁶⁸ Only a rediscovery of his former wealth allows Robert de Rozan to forget the source of the opulence of his youth. In the end, this amounts to the abandonment of the land of his youth and the abandonment of his lifeless daughter. Rozan's departure symbolizes France's forgetting of Haiti.

Whiteness Revisited

In addition to this forgetting of the past, Reybaud also re-envision the past as a moment where racial distinction was separate from racial discrimination. Because she does not understand categorizing people to be negative, Reybaud portrays the relationship between Santo-Christo and Christine as unattainable, even though Christine's supposed lack of prejudice is opposed to her father's racism. This impossibility underscores the fact that the relationships between Maubray and Marie and Cécile and Donatien are only possible because the men's blackness, the trait that

⁶⁸ Ibid, 90.

makes them susceptible to slavery, can be overcome, i.e. they can become “white” (or French).

Santo-Christo’s placement beneath the virtuous Christine implies that Haiti should accept a similar position in relation to France, but that this should not be understood as negative. Christine is friendly and gracious to the black senator, but never defies a set hierarchical relationship between white and black people that she understands to be normal and not confining. Santo-Christo brings Christine newspapers from France, painting supplies, and even a *fille de compagnie*, but, wedded to the idea that no romantic relationship could ever exist between herself and someone so dark-skinned, she never imagines that he loves her:

[Bien] qu’elle n’eût point tous les préjugés de son père, il n’entraît pas dans sa pensée qu’un nègre pût l’aimer, et elle ne soupçonna rien.⁶⁹

Christine, we are told, does not hold the prejudices of her father. The taboo against her relationship with Santo-Christo is not understood as prejudice. For Christine, the end of Saint-Domingue has erased all “préjugés de caste [et] de couleur.”⁷⁰ Santo-Christo, who knows that his love for Christine will never be returned, does not share her enthusiastic belief in a society that is no longer racist. He responds to Christine’s comment with surprise: “Vous croyez!” Reybaud explains, “les noirs étaient les maîtres, et pourtant

⁶⁹ Ibid, 70.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Santo-Christo n'osa pas."⁷¹ Given that Reybaud sees respect for racial distinction in a positive light, the fact that Santo-Christo does not dare divulge the secret of his romantic love for a French woman, for her, highlights his moral superiority and his support for the idealized colony she represents. His undying dedication to his French love suggests that a brighter future for Franco-Haitian relations must be based on a mutual respect for the "good" kind of colonialism that Reybaud's female characters were meant to promote.

Christine plays a key role in the harmonious relationships that Reybaud hopes to create because she represents an articulation of French whiteness as a categorization of racially distinct (yet not racist) people; this whiteness comes to an end with France's departure from Haiti. When Christine's father questions the race of her love Paul Aubert, she responds: "je veux croire que M. Aubert est blanc comme vous et moi; c'est mieux comme cela."⁷² While touting her own "pure" whiteness, Christine indicates her wish to include Paul in a category of people known for their racial distinction and superiority, i.e. *French* white people. Yet, while this inclusion worked to create an idealized romantic relationship between Cécile and Donatien, a space that would allow

⁷¹ *Madame de Rieux*, 79. Santo-Christo's reserve supports a longstanding taboo against such behavior in the colonies. In 1802, Napoleon sent directions to his general Leclerc to repatriate any white women who "[had] prostituted themselves to negroes." (See Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 279).

⁷² *Madame de Rieux*, 107.

Christine to treat Paul as a sufficiently white French man in need of saving no longer exists.

Now that no man risks enslavement, Christine is in no position to save her romantic partner from the same forces that oppress her. Paul's exclusion from the "Creole race" that Reybaud associated with Loinvilliers does not make him subjugated. He never declares, as both Donatien and Santo-Christo do, that he would be "a slave" to his beloved. He tells Christine that she must brave "tout, tout pour être à moi!"⁷³ The loss of Saint-Domingue spells a transition away from a feminized, nationalized French whiteness that made the French female colonizer foundational to Reybaud's formulation of a "white" as opposed to a "Creole" race.

Once the French female colonizer is removed from power, only the French men are left to blame. The only man whose devotion to her would not confine Christine is a man whose skin color makes their relationship impossible in life. As Enz writes, only in death, with Santo-Christo looking over her tomb, does Christine "gain the autonomy she never had in her relationships with her father or Paul."⁷⁴ Reybaud hopes that, at least in death, the moral, female French leader will continue to be a source of unity for France and its former colony.

⁷³ Ibid, 126.

⁷⁴ Enz, 186.

Reybaud's novels do not oppose the notion of the superiority of white French people; they instead reformulate whiteness according to national boundaries. In so doing, they contribute to the false yet reassuring notion that France was a morally superior, non-racist society, but they also make gender, specifically femininity, crucial to the formation of this new French racial identity. Etienne Balibar explains that a practice of blaming the other was common among colonial powers who "[projected] the image of racism on to the colonial practices of their rivals."⁷⁵ In Reybaud's portrayal of the colony, French national identity absorbs and then stands in for white racial identity.

Yet, this new French racial categorization does not erase distinctions; it removes the French from the responsibility for colonial wrongdoings and thus makes them benevolent leaders in charge of a new kind of hierarchy—one in which group affiliation and identification are useful instead of detrimental. Reybaud does not oppose the differentiation of groups in a social hierarchy, even those based on race. As the agreeable scene from her novel *Mézélie* shows, Reybaud, like many of her socialist utopian contemporaries, engages with what Behrent calls "a fantasy of social engineering [that tries] to find the right way to make these ... differences harmonize."⁷⁶ While she may

⁷⁵ Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism," in *Race, Nation, Class*, by Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, translation by Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1991), 43.

⁷⁶ Email message to author, March 13, 2011.

have never espoused the radical abolitionist arguments of de Gouges or Doin, for example, Reybaud does offer scholars an opportunity to examine how nineteenth-century conceptions of race and gender, even when understood to be such fixed, inescapable, and defining methods of categorization, might have offered hope to French intellectuals, especially women, in search of a way to form a harmonious society of diverse people. The colonial setting allowed Reybaud to imagine that an idealized France might create a colonial world in which racial discrimination (albeit not racial categorization) was entirely foreign. Following the Saint-Simonian utopian imagining of a society comprised of well-defined, distinct, yet amicably associating groups, Reybaud sees no problem with maintaining hierarchy and finds, within the racial hierarchy of the colonies, an opportunity for the French woman to prosper.

4: Remembering Revolution and Writing Independence in Émeric Bergeaud's *Stella*

For French writers from the Revolution to the beginning of the Second Empire, even for feminists and abolitionists, colonialism and slavery were two separate institutions; French abolitionists, in general, believed that colonialism could exist without slavery and should be reformed to this end. As the pro-colonial texts of the early nineteenth century demonstrate, the French had such a difficult time accepting Haiti because its mere existence not only opposed slavery, but also the notion that colonialism could exist without it. Many Haitian writers, intellectuals, and politicians, including the famous Jean-Jacques Dessalines, did not speak of a separation between colonialism and slavery. Dessalines makes Haitian law oppose this intimate connection between the two institutions when, in his 1805 constitution, he declares that: “Aucun blanc, quelle que soit sa nation, ne mettra le pied sur ce territoire, à titre de maître ou de propriétaire et ne pourra à l'avenir y acquérir aucune propriété.” As C.L.R. James writes, “the men, women, and children who drove out” the French colonizers “had seen at last that without independence they could not maintain their liberty.”¹ The notion of racial hierarchy on which the institutions of colonialism and slavery both depended allowed for easy confusion between the status of property owner and master.

¹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 357.

In the following pages, I examine an understudied text, Haiti's first novel *Stella* (1859), written by Émeric Bergeaud (1818-1858) and published in Paris posthumously by his cousin the historian Beaubrun Ardouin (1796-1865), as a work that foregrounds the connection between colonialism and slavery in an effort to defend nineteenth-century Haiti against its many foreign detractors.² The novel was written at a time when the Haitian government of Faustin Soulouque had forced Bergeaud and his political compatriots into exile in France where they were surrounded by blatantly racist images of their country and its government. From this paradoxical position, Bergeaud sought to remind his readers, both French and Haitian, of the importance of Haiti's Revolution, the horrors and hypocrisy of France's past, and the hope for a future in which "ni noirs, ni blancs, ni jaunes, ni Africains, ni Européens, ni Asiatiques, ni Américains" would exist.³

Stella has received little scholarly attention because of its restricted availability; it exists only in three versions (its original 1859 version printed with Dantu in Paris, an 1887 version revised and edited by Bergeaud's widow, and a 2009 reprint with a scholarly preface by Anne Marty published with Zoé in Geneva). Yet, the novel has also been neglected because of Bergeaud's and Ardouin's support for a "mulatto" elite with

² Anne Marty calls Beaubrun Bergeaud's friend, but according to Raphael Berrou's and Pradel Pompilus' *Histoire de la Littérature haïtienne* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Caraïbes, 1975), Bergeaud and Beaubrun were cousins. Bergeaud was also the nephew of the general Borgella.

³ Émeric Bergeaud, *Stella* (Geneva: Zoé, 2009), 248.

strong ties to France.⁴ Joan Dayan highly criticizes Ardouin, saying that “he asserted that the road to being Haitian must progress away from the dark continent toward his present audience, those he appreciated as representing enlightened France.”⁵ Ghislain Gouraige is even more critical and insists that Bergeaud’s novel “suscite un intérêt limité.”⁶ I argue, however, that through its attention to unity and the universal, *Stella* merits serious consideration not only as Haiti’s first novel, but as a text that offers insight into early understandings of Haiti’s national history and Haitian attempts to counter mid-nineteenth-century French thought on difference.

In *Stella*, revolting slaves play a key role in a moment of *necessary* violence by taking the ideals of the French Revolution to their logical conclusions. The colonizer, simply named the *Colon*, murders *Marie l’Africaine*. Her two sons, the auspiciously named Romulus and Rémus, fight to avenge her death. They turn against each other, but, in contrast with the original story of the founding of Rome, the two brothers are reconciled in the end. Stella, a blond woman born in France, guides them in their unified quest for freedom; she personifies Liberty. *Stella*, as Marty explains, functions as a “récit

⁴ I place the term *mulatto* in quotation marks in order to highlight the fact that it is a term referring to a socially constructed racial category. I continue to use the term because it is difficult to study Haitian society, even today, without finding others who use the word historically or who even identify themselves or others as “*milat*.” I also use the terms *light-* and *dark-skinned*, even though they do not fully explain the many factors at play within the complicated racial structures of Haitian society.

⁵ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (University of California Press, 1998), 16.

⁶ Ghislain Gouraige, *Histoire de la littérature haïtienne de l’indépendance à nos jours* (Port-au-Prince, Imprimerie Théodire, 1960), 29.

fondateur” for the young nation.⁷ The novel’s reuniting of the brothers Romulus, born of an African mother and African father, and Rémus, born of an African mother and a French father (the Colon), its retelling of the story of independence in a positive light, and its hope for the unity of all humankind function to counter the political divisions of mid-nineteenth-century Haiti, the common negative portrayal of Haiti’s origins, and the profound racism that led Haiti to occupy an inferior and often forgotten position in the eyes of the international community.

Bergeaud wrote *Stella* in French for an audience of both French and Haitian readers. In exile after his involvement in an unsuccessful 1848 uprising against Faustin Soulouque, Bergeaud was writing at a moment when he found it necessary to oppose France’s condemnation of his country *and* the rifts between light- and dark-skinned Haitians that dominated the nation’s politics. Indeed, the French, and other Europeans, often denigrated and vilified Haitian leaders, especially the dark-skinned Soulouque. Profoundly racist cartoons portrayed Soulouque as an ape-like character fond of eating humans.⁸ The same year that *Stella* was published, French writer Paul Dhormoys claimed that no one should take Soulouque, Haiti, or its citizens seriously: “il est bien difficile de parler sans rire de cet empereur couleur d’ébène, de son pays et de ses

⁷ Anne Marty, preface to *Stella*, by Émeric Bergeaud (Geneva: Zoé, 2009).

⁸ A nineteenth-century image of Soulouque sitting angrily in a tree filled with monkeys, shirtless and with his hands on his full stomach can be seen at the site of the Grandpalais Agence Photographique: <http://www.photo.rmn.fr/cf/htm/CPicZ.aspx?E=2C6NU0XQ0AB9> Accessed March, 2011.

sujets.”⁹ Other famous writers, including Victor Hugo and Karl Marx, also mocked Soulouque. As Léon-François Hoffman explains, “Bergeaud voulait valoriser et justifier aux yeux des Français une Haïti qu’ils se plaisaient à dénigrer, ne voyant en elle qu’un pays d’opérette gouverné par le bouffon Soulouque.”¹⁰ Soulouque would go down in the history books of the (former) colonizing nations as a superstitious, ignorant, and ineffectual leader. Even in 1949, American scholar John Baur belittled Soulouque for his fearful “Voodooism” and implied that Soulouque’s religious beliefs contributed to the incompetency of his leadership. Baur writes that “[Soulouque’s] fears did not make him weaker; they only made him the more dangerous.”¹¹ The pro-Haitian newspaper *The Boston Journal* recognized this negative tradition early on; in 1850, it asserted that Soulouque required defense against “the universal opprobrium which has been cast upon his name.”¹² Soulouque faced criticism from France, where he was belittled based on racist prejudice, and from Haiti, where he was expected to represent a puppet government for the “mulatto” elite. He refused this position and began killing those he suspected of conspiracy against him in April of 1848. As a refugee of this violence,

⁹ Paul Dhormoys, *Une visite chez Soulouque, souvenir d’un voyage dans l’île d’Haïti* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1859), 3.

¹⁰ Léon-François Hoffman, “En marge du premier roman haïtien, *Stella*, d’Emeric Bergeaud,” *Haïti : lettres et l’être* (Toronto: Editions du Gref, 1992), 158.

¹¹ John E. Baur, “Faustin Soulouque, Emperor of Haiti: His Character and His Reign,” *The Americas*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Oct. 1949), 133.

¹² “Apology for the Emperor Soulouque,” *North American and United States Gazette*, October 31, 1850.

Bergeaud, along with Ardouin, had good reason to insist on the familial connections between light- and dark-skinned Haitians and call for them to work together “comme si vous ne faisiez qu’un seul et même être.”¹³ *Stella* thus sought to defend Haiti on two fronts by depicting the story of Haitian independence as a just fight that defined the fundamental values of the country and could, one day, lead to justice for all.

Defining Haiti’s Past

Comment Haïti elle-même parviendrait-elle à se dégager des entraves qui s’opposeraient au libre développement de sa civilisation, si elle fermait ses yeux sur son passé ?

- Beaubrun Ardouin

Stella seeks to create a common past of which Haitians can be proud. This past is to function as a unifying force that will help Bergeaud’s fellow citizens to overcome political and racial divisions in their country. Every Haitian is a descendant of Marie, *l’Africaine*, mother Africa, the “sein de la joie et de l’abondance.”¹⁴ Her murder by the Colonizer is a fundamental act for which Romulus and Rémus, the founders of a potentially great civilization, have taken revenge. This revenge was sanctioned and led by Stella, a creation of the French Revolution—a revolution “au nom de la Liberté et de l’Egalité.”¹⁵ Only Romulus and Rémus recognize Stella’s divinity; she only finds the

¹³ Émeric Bergeaud, *Stella* (Geneva: Zoé, 2009), 89.

¹⁴ Ibid, 30.

¹⁵ Ibid, 33.

respect that she deserves in Haiti. The novel recounts Haiti's emergence as a battle whose participants finished what the French started but could never fully realize.

Stella portrays the unity of light- and dark-skinned Haitians as essential to Haiti's attainment of the idealized society that the French could only imagine. The death of Marie, the mother who, as she lay dying, gestures toward the mountain from which the vengeful sons will lead their revolution, unites her sons in revolt against her killer. When Romulus and Rémus eventually turn against each other, their mother "trassail[it] dans sa tombe" and even Stella, their "alliée divine," hides deeper in the mountainside cave where she keeps watch over their ammunition.¹⁶ Romulus imitates the French by using force "contre son frère" and learns the error of his ways when the French use their force "contre lui pareillement."¹⁷ The novel asserts that no good can come of turning against one's brother: "Le désaccord est un état violent et douloureux qui épuise les individus et ruine les sociétés."¹⁸ Neither brother can ask for Stella's support while still in revolt against the other. Romulus does not dare approach her with "ses sanglants lauriers," a sign of the fierce way he usurped power from Rémus.¹⁹ Only once Romulus

¹⁶ Ibid, 130.

¹⁷ Ibid, 142.

¹⁸ Ibid, 161.

¹⁹ Ibid, 138. Bergeaud's critique of Romulus here is a thinly veiled critique of Toussaint Louverture, which has fueled some of the most highly critical reviews of the novel. Gouraige complains that Bergeaud "reprend avec candeur certaines charges formulées contre Toussaint dans la guerre du Sud, comme si cette guerre n'était pas nécessaire pour vider le conflit d'autorité entre Toussaint et Rigaud" (29). Gouraige's

and Rémus are reunited can they succeed. In a similar manner, *Stella* posits that Haiti's success will come from its ability to triumph over internal divisions: "Que la discorde soit à jamais bannie de notre pays!"²⁰

This bright new future requires understanding Haiti's founding as a rupture with a horrible past that, to succeed, required violence. The Revolution, "inaugurée par un supplice ... terminée par un massacre" effectively rendered the horrific past forgettable.²¹ The novel asserts that blood transformed the past. Indeed, the blood of Marie begins the Revolution; the mother's blood-stained dress serves as the battle flag for her sons' revolt. In the end, despite the good intentions of the supporters of abolition, the first stone of Haiti's foundation, according to Bergeaud, was "posée dans le sang."²² Haiti's founders wash away the sins of Saint-Domingue with the blood of its creators, the colonizers. The murder of Africa on which Saint-Domingue was based is avenged when the Colonizer is forced to kneel on the grave of Marie where "on [verse] tout son sang."²³ The colonizer's blood serves to re-christen Saint-Domingue (the country's "nom d'esclave") *Haiti*. Blood serves a purpose and therefore makes the violence of Haiti's

comments prove that political disagreements negatively affected *Stella*'s reception, even a century after its publication.

²⁰ *Stella*, 161.

²¹ *Ibid*, 247.

²² *Ibid*, 231.

²³ *Ibid*, 247.

birth justifiable. Bergeaud explains: “en abolissant l’horrible tyrannie sous laquelle avait gémi, pendant des siècles, toute une famille humaine, on séparait le présent d’un passé souillé d’atrocités monstrueuses.”²⁴ In Bergeaud’s present, Haitians leave behind the atrocities of slavery to become “[c]itoyens d’un pays désormais indépendant et libre.”²⁵ The violence that led to this independence is rendered forgivable by its fundamental role in making Haiti free.

The divine Stella, a blond woman who calls herself Liberty, watches over this newly independent country and mimics the transformation of the country itself: she is first French, then Haitian, then, through her connection to the universal, divine. As curious and perhaps troubling as Stella’s appearance and national origin might be, her transformation emphasizes the point that Haiti achieved what France could not. The few scholars who have written on *Stella* have struggled to understand why Stella, the protector of the Haitian Revolution, is a white woman, a product of the French Revolution; but the importance of her change of appearance, which I believe offers a clear example of Bergeaud’s political strategy, has often been ignored. Marty, in her preface to the 2009 reprint of the novel, theorizes that Marie and Stella, despite their difference in skin color, “sont vécues comme complémentaires et nécessaires aux yeux

²⁴ Ibid, 91.

²⁵ Ibid, 235.

des garçons.”²⁶ Indeed, Marie and Stella both function as a maternal figure for Romulus and Rémus, but the fact remains that Stella, at least originally, physically resembles the oppressor more so than the oppressed. Hoffman, rather pessimistically, conjectures that, in 1859, “[l]’heure de la Négritude n’avait pas encore sonné.”²⁷ I find, however, that, because Stella only thrives in Haiti, her Frenchness works to prove Haiti’s superiority over France. Furthermore, a transformation of Stella’s skin color emphasizes the impotence of race as a divisive construction.

This portrayal of Haiti’s superiority over France opposes France’s negative discourse while also providing Haitians with a national story that promotes unity and solidarity. The novel describes the French Revolution as one that could never quite realize its liberty, certainly not the kind that Romulus and Rémus achieve. The poor in France tried, but never had enough to advance the cause. Stella lived off of unreliable charity in France:

Il n’y avait que l’homme du peuple... qui partageât avec moi de bon cœur sa pitance, quand je le rencontrais et quand il le pouvait : car il avait faim aussi.²⁸

Stella suffered in France *and* under the control of the colonizer in Saint-Domingue. The colonizer incorrectly assumed that Stella might be his possession if he brought her to the New World. Yet, by keeping her in confinement, the Colonizer completely ignored

²⁶ Ibid, 13.

²⁷ Hoffman, “En marge,” 162.

²⁸ *Stella*, 55.

Stella's sanctity. The slaves must destroy the master's house before Stella is released.

Romulus and Rémus, more attuned to Stella's value than were their French contemporaries, offer their hearts to her in exchange for her compassion: "On n'a jamais qu'une mère: nous serons éternellement orphelins. Ayez compassion de notre misère. Nous vous donnons nos cœurs tout entiers."²⁹ By devoting themselves to Stella, the two brothers recognize her divinity in a way that the French never did; she then aids them in their battle. They may never forget nor cease to be victims of Marie's destruction, but Stella offers a way to overcome this loss. Stella becomes the earthly, albeit still godly, incarnation of the murdered Marie. The only way to restore *l'Africaine* is to free oneself from those who destroyed her. When freedom is achieved, Stella comes to resemble the departed Marie and then joins her by ascending into the heavens. Stella's transformation coincides with the moment of triumph for Romulus and Rémus:

Fidèle à sa parole, la vierge de la montagne, durant le combat, garda sa place à la tête des bataillons.... Sa robe blanche, le seul signe ... que l'on pût distinguer au sein de cette nuit sombre, brilla toujours en avant. Quand il fit jour, la figure angélique de la jeune fille, *noircie par la poudre*, ses vêtements troués, déchirés en plusieurs endroits, rappelèrent aux soldats sa bravoure surhumaine...³⁰

Stella's torn clothes resemble the African mother's bloodstained dress that serves as the slaves' battle flag. It functions to make only Stella, only Liberty, distinguishable in the

²⁹ Ibid, 52.

³⁰ Ibid, 173. My emphasis.

dark night that is their battle for freedom. In the morning light, Stella's skin, originally white, has now been altered to resemble the skin of Marie; she has been blackened by the violence of her sons' battle for freedom. Just as Bergeaud transforms blood into a force for good, he also transforms gun powder into something positive because it functions to render Liberty *Haitian*. In this passage, the author plays with blackness (night, skin, violence, and enslavement) and whiteness (day, skin, clothing, and liberty) in a way that emphasizes the mutability of the two categories and their connection to each other. Blackness and whiteness, Marie and Stella, function as binaries that constantly inform each other and eventually merge, setting the stage for Stella's transition from particular (i.e. French or Haitian) to universal (i.e. divine). At the end of the novel, after Haiti's *Declaration of Independence* is read, Stella opens her wings and takes flight "vers les cieux."³¹

Stella might have been born in France, but only Haiti recognizes her as the redemptory other half of a ruined Africa. Liberty forms the basis of a Christian-influenced retelling of Haitian independence. Stella, like Marie, sacrifices herself as a second Christ: "Une mère, c'est plus qu'une femme, c'est plus qu'un ange: c'est la Providence elle-même, descendue au foyer de l'homme pour le recevoir à l'entrée de la

³¹ Ibid, 237.

vie... et quelquefois mourir pour lui comme *un autre Rédempteur*.”³² Saint-Domingue, the past that “signifiait esclavage,” has been vanquished. Haiti, founded on the blood of a second, maternal Christ, is to transition in the same way that Stella does; it is first French, then Haitian, then, Bergeaud hopes, divine: Haiti will achieve its divinity when it can serve as the beacon for all civilizations that promote “l’alliance du genre humain.”³³ By thus defining Haiti, Bergeaud succeeds in creating a collective memory suitable for a prosperous future: “Ainsi s’accomplit la révolution de Saint-Domingue, ... [l]e peuple qu’elle émancipa peut aujourd’hui s’en glorifier.”³⁴ Haiti stands in opposition to the racism that is foundational to the institution of slavery. Stella’s transformation proves the artificial and ephemeral nature of racial distinctions. Only through the recognition, the avenging, and the ultimate triumph of Africa are the true universals of the French Revolution realized. Like the legend of the famous maroon chief Makandal who turns to smoke when he is captured, Stella’s story proves that Marie, Africa, will not be confined to her tomb. As Stella flies away, she leaves behind her “un long sillon d’or.”

³² Ibid, 29. My emphasis.

³³ Ibid, 248.

³⁴ Ibid, 247.

Defending Haiti's Future

What distinguishes the small nations from the large is not the quantitative criterion of the number of their inhabitants; it is something deeper; for them their existence is not a self-evident certainty but always a question, a wager, a risk; they are on the defensive against History, that force is bigger than they, that does not take them into account, that does not even notice them.³⁵

– Milan Kundera

In the nineteenth century, though Haiti had “won” its independence, its existence was still “a question, a wager, a risk.” With major authors, such as Chateaubriand and Hugo, denigrating Haiti’s fight for independence and its political structure, Haiti indeed had to be “on the defensive against History” in order to tell the story of its past in a positive light and claim its just and equal status among nations. Bergeaud wrote *Stella* to defend his country against a History that might forget it and he believed that the genre of the novel was essential to this project.

“L’Histoire,” Bergeaud writes, is a choppy “fleuve de vérité qui poursuit son cours majestueux à travers les âges.” History is majestic and thus worthy of respect, but also a force to be navigated with care. While Ardouin directly approached the topic of the history of his country in his popular *Etudes sur l’histoire d’Haïti*, which was published in Paris the same year as *Stella*, Bergeaud imagined that only circumventing a direct

³⁵ Milan Kundera, “Die Weltliteratur,” in *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts*, trans. Linda Asher (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 33.

discussion of Haiti's past through the genre of the novel would allow him to successfully navigate the "human hurricanes" of history:

L'Histoire, écho sonore des ouragans humains, en reproduit fidèlement les bruits et les fureurs. Pour affronter ces tempêtes et conduire à bon port nos héros sauvages, il faudrait autre chose qu'un frêle canot d'écorce ; et d'ailleurs, sauvages nous-mêmes, nous n'avons ni carte, ni boussole, ni connaissances nautiques. A vous donc l'orageuse mer, pilote expérimenté, à nous le lac tranquille ; en nous abandonnant au souffle de Dieu, peut-être arriverons-nous au terme de notre course, guidé par l'étoile de la patrie!³⁶

The young nation, without a map, a compass, or the necessary experience of representing itself on the international stage, needed history in the form of a novel. "The Novel," for Bergeaud, counters the rough waters of History because it is "un lac tranquille" that sometimes hides "dans ses profondeurs le secret de la destinée des peuples."³⁷ *Stella*, however, is understood to differ from the genre of the novel that one often associates with fiction; it is a veritable history of France's past horrors: "ce livre...ne devait avoir du roman que la forme. Il fallait que la vérité s'y trouvât."³⁸ Bergeaud establishes that the novel, this long respected literary genre, holds the "secret of the destiny" of the Haitian people; yet he also finds that it holds the secret of transforming history's reality into a more palatable construct for a potentially unreceptive foreign audience. Using another genre to explain the importance of Haiti's

³⁶ *Stella*, 36.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 36.

³⁸ *Ibid*, vi.

founding would be nothing more than a “frêle canot d’écorce” incapable of navigating the unreliable “fleuve de vérité” that is History. Bergeaud sets up his novel as a conscious attempt to turn history into symbolic narrative by describing his characters thus: “Romulus, Rémus et le Colon sont des êtres collectifs, l’Africaine une idéalité, Stella une abstraction.”³⁹ *Stella* is a deliberate novel that reveals the “truth” of the past (i.e. the cause of Haiti’s founding) in hopes of using it to construct a future made brighter by the “star of the fatherland,” the light of Haitian independence.

Novels were written far less often in Haiti than in France and part of the appeal of the novel for Bergeaud originated most certainly in French respect for the genre.⁴⁰ As Louis-Philippe Dalembert and Lyonel Trouillot have demonstrated, Haitian literature has often been studied as if it were created within a derivative “French” model.⁴¹ *Stella*, in its attempt to portray historical truth while simultaneously using broad, abstract, and idealized characters, however, defies a clear-cut comparison between French and Haitian novels of the period. Influenced by a frequent tendency to compare Haitian literature to a French model, Haitian writers and intellectuals who wished to be taken seriously by an often unsympathetic French audience most certainly knew that writing a

³⁹ Ibid, 20.

⁴⁰ Sibylle Fischer mentions four novels, in addition to *Stella*, that were published in the nineteenth century in Haiti. See *Modernity Disavowed* (Duke University Press, 2004), 206.

⁴¹ Louis-Philippe Dalembert, Lyonel Trouillot, *Haïti: une traversée littéraire* (Paris: Editions Philippe Rey, 2010). For an analysis that compares Haiti’s treatment of the novel to that of its French contemporaries, see J. M. Dash, “The Peasant Novel in Haiti,” *African Literature Today* 9 (1978), 79.

novel meant something very specific in France. This does not mean, however, that they did not alter and mold the genre to meet their specific goals. Bergeaud's *Stella*, for example, redefines the novel by implying that his narrative is the sugar coating of a pill he wanted the French to swallow.

The way that Bergeaud uses language in his novel also speaks to this simultaneously compliant and defiant method of presenting Haitian history to the French. His compliance works to gain the respect usually reserved for French authors by using their language. Yet, he also opposes French linguistic prejudices by introducing Haitian language into its literature. Hoffman explains that writing *Stella* in "le français haïtien" would have made the French, so attached to the supposed "purity" of their language, laugh at the novel. Writing in Kreyòl, "méprisé de l'élite," would have not only been mocked by the French, who would not have understood it, but it would have also made the novel less literarily significant to a section of the Haitian population wedded to the idea of the superiority of France's language.⁴² In his *Etudes sur l'histoire d'Haïti*, Ardouin openly reveals the linguistic anxiety common to many Haitian writers and intellectuals of the period while also working to speak positively of "le français

⁴² Hoffman, "En marge," 163. Unfortunately, the erroneous belief in the superiority of the French language still has tremendous influence in Haiti today. For more information about the linguistic politics of Haiti, see the work of Michel DeGraff.

haïtien.” He portrays Haitian linguistic differences in French as simply a mark of derivation:

Si cet ouvrage trouve quelques lecteurs à Paris, ils y verront beaucoup d’incorrections dans le style, encore plus de fautes contre les règles de la grammaire...il ne leur offrira aucun mérite littéraire. Mais ils ne devront pas oublier qu’en général, les Haïtiens ne bégaièrent les mots de la langue française, que pour constater en quelque sorte leur origine dans les Antilles.⁴³

This anxiety about how Haitian speakers might somehow sully the French language witnesses to tremendous prejudice against Haitians. Ardouin attempts to counter this prejudice by insisting on the importance of the audibility of the “origin” of language. Similarly, Bergeaud also defends the Haitian language by inserting, however subtly, Kreyòl into his French. The “Notes explicatives” of the novel explain that the phrase “Le jour ne se lève qu’à son heure,” is a French translation of the Kreyòl proverb: “pressé pa fait jour l’ouvri.” (The modern Kreyòl translation would be: “twò prese pa fè jou louvri.”)⁴⁴ Bergeaud’s translation certainly attests to his linguistic anxiety, but his insertion of a Kreyòl proverb, even though clothed in French, asserts the importance of the Haitian language to Haitian literature. Because we are in fact unsure whether Bergeaud or Ardouin wrote the “Notes explicatives” of the novel, it is possible that Bergeaud did not make it known that his expression was a Kreyòl translation, but that

⁴³ Beaubrun Ardouin, *Etudes sur l’Histoire d’Haïti* (Paris: Chez l’Auteur), 1859, Tome 1, 9.

⁴⁴ My thanks to Jacques Pierre for his help with this Kreyòl expression.

Ardouin, who wanted to reveal the Caribbean origin of Bergeaud's words, decided to add this explanation.⁴⁵

Bergeaud, like many of his contemporaries, found himself in a delicate balancing act between trying to please a French audience influenced by its rigid opinions and exposing the biases at the foundation of these opinions. A profound prejudice against African religious traditions, which became known as "le Vaudoux," dominated both French and Haitian attitudes in the nineteenth century. Bergeaud works to remove Haiti from these negative associations by making *Stella*, through the images of Stella, Stella Maris, and Marie l'Africaine which all evoke the Virgin Mary, a conspicuously Christian text. After the Boyer regime, which established laws against what it called "sorcery," certain Catholics felt that Haiti had become more "superstitious" and spoke ill of its religious practices. Kate Ramsey cites a Roman Catholic Church historian, Adolphe Cabon, who, in 1845, lamented that the religion that Boyer had been successful at repressing seemed to reappear with more adherents after his reign.⁴⁶ It is unlikely that these prejudices did not influence Bergeaud. Ardouin, as a senator whose brother Céligny was the government's secretary of state for the interior in the mid-1840s, issued

⁴⁵ See Hoffman, "En marge" for his theories about the origin of the *Notes explicatives* of *Stella*'s 1859 edition.

⁴⁶ Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 73.

a circular insisting that “Vaudoux” and “superstitious sects” must be stopped.⁴⁷ Dayan also mentions Ardouin’s stance against African religious traditions. Though Bergeaud’s religious beliefs are not as well documented as Ardouin’s, we can imagine that he, through his close connection with Ardouin, sought to insert Haiti and its history into a Christian tradition that was more accepted by European powers.

Though Bergeaud’s position on “le Vaudoux” supports prejudice against his country’s religious practices, his novel does recognize the double bind in which French prejudice places Haiti and its citizens. Stella tells Romulus and Rémus that: “Ceux dont vous êtes l’objet empêcheront que de longtemps vous ne soyez considérés autrement que comme des animaux en révolte.”⁴⁸ As objects of French scorn, Haitians are assumed to be inferior. They must, from this inferior position, convince their oppressors of the fallacy of the prejudice that initially put them in this position. His project to make Haitians more than “like animals in revolt” required exposing the violence of enslavement as the original source of the actions of Saint-Domingue’s enslaved, which, in turn, led to the independence of Haiti. While Bergeaud might have been lenient in his opposition to French linguistic prejudice, he is much more explicit in his opposition to

⁴⁷ *The Spirits and the Law*, 77.

⁴⁸ *Stella*, 74.

French colonial conduct. *Stella* opens with a description of the blatant inequality between masters and slaves in Saint-Domingue:

Au contraste frappant de ces deux habitations, il n'y avait point à se méprendre sur la position respective des personnes qu'elles renfermaient. L'opulence était là en présence de la misère, l'orgueil en face de l'abaissement, la puissance au-dessus de la faiblesse qu'elle écrasait à loisir.⁴⁹

By making the misery of slavery stand in stark contrast with the master's opulence and greed, *Stella* bases its supportive portrayal of Haiti's founding on the violence of the fundamental injustice of the slave system of Saint-Domingue. The colonizer's violence is at the origin of the violence of Haiti's fight for independence and is, in contrast, not justifiable.

French colonial violence, for Bergeaud, finds its roots in the fundamental racism of the institution of slavery that assumes and establishes the inferiority of "les malheureux Africains." Attacking the logic of French racial hierarchy was therefore necessary to *Stella's* project of defending Haiti:

Pour torturer sans remords les malheureux Africains, les maîtres, voilant le crime sous le sophisme, ont prétendu qu'ils étaient inférieurs aux autres individus de l'espèce humaine, par cela seul qu'ils étaient noirs.⁵⁰

Bergeaud makes no attempt here to placate *Stella's* potential French readers; French masters hid the *crime* of slavery by supporting the myth of racial hierarchy. This

⁴⁹ Ibid, 24.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 116.

hierarchy must be proven false because all individuals belong to “l’espèce humaine.”

Romulus, when he sees French ships arrive off the coast of Saint-Domingue, responds:

“La France est une mère dénaturée qui veut la destruction de son enfant.”⁵¹ Romulus determines that only an unnatural, twisted mother would want to kill her child. France created Saint-Domingue, but would rather destroy it than renounce its obstinate grip on its supposed racial superiority.

Stella attacks the French and the erroneous beliefs that led to the crimes of their past, but it also portrays the relationship between French and Haitians as complex. The Colonizer does not represent all Frenchmen, only the crime, the murder of Marie, that even France-the-Liberator cannot erase. Romulus and Rémus have “deux sentiments puissants, *la gratitude et la haine*, l’un qui les attachait de cœur à leur libérateur, à la France, et leur inspirait la noble résolution de mourir plutôt que de la jamais trahir ; l’autre dont ils poursuivaient l’assassin de leur mère et qui ne devait s’éteindre que dans son sang.”⁵² This profound ambivalence must be dealt with by understanding that the French are not entirely bad or good; recognizing this ambiguity will help Haiti establish a new relationship with the French. *Stella* explains to the brothers that they must be

⁵¹ Ibid, 144.

⁵² Ibid, 94. My emphasis.

wary of the colonizer *and* treat him with respect because he will be both a friend *and* an enemy:

- Je vous conseillerai plutôt de le traiter avec égards.
- Il n'est donc plus l'assassin de notre mère ? le crime est-il oublié ?
- Il est votre ennemi et votre ami ; votre ennemi pour le mal qu'il vous a fait, votre ami pour le bien qu'il vous fera : vous devez vous rapprocher de lui.
- Ce rapprochement sera-t-il possible ? Le Colon nous admettra-t-il jamais au rang de ses égaux ?
- Non ; il ne cessera de vous mépriser et rêvera incessamment au moyen de vous asservir encore.
- Or, il sera toujours notre ennemi.
- Et votre ami tout à la fois. Je n'entends pas dire que pour vous faire du bien, il vous prendra par la main et vous élèvera ; c'est au contraire en travaillant obstinément à vous abaisser, à vous nuire, qu'il vous frayera la route vers des destinées supérieures.⁵³

Stella, thanks to her divine wisdom, instructs the brothers that “rien n'est complètement mal dans ce monde.”⁵⁴ The suffering that they must undergo because of the French is transformed into a positive force because it is through this suffering that the Haitians will find their “superior destiny.” French violence, like Haitian violence, is thus transformed; a horrible past is turned into a catalyst for future prosperity. *Stella* succeeds in removing Haiti and Haitians from a vicious cycle of discrimination by positing that suffering can be transcended and, ultimately, lead to a brighter future.

⁵³ Ibid, 88.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 88.

Bergeaud, Reybaud, Race and Nation

Bergeaud and Reybaud were contemporaries; at the same time, on different sides of the Atlantic Ocean, they were writing novels about the Haitian Revolution. They also both manipulate the concepts of *race* and *nation* in ways that supported their vision of a utopian (post)colony. Influenced by the Saint-Simonians, Reybaud includes several harmoniously associating differentiated groups of people in her utopia. These people, though they did not always belong to it, were all united by a national-racial identity that separated the French from a caste of colonizers represented by characters like M. de Loinvilliers and M. de la Rebelière. In a similar manner, Bergeaud attempts to unify Haitians across racial divisions by making Haitian national identity *more* important than the racial distinctions established between light- and dark-skinned Haitians. Reybaud, in contrast with Bergeaud, still understood racial differentiation to be a logical part of social organization. Yet, even though the two authors have contrasting understandings of racial distinction and hierarchy, both seek to make *nation* stand in for *race*.

Bergeaud's appeal to ignore racial difference in favor of national unity diverges, however, from Reybaud's promotion of national unity because, for Bergeaud, national affiliation can make racial affiliation disappear. This opposition between an interest in likeness and one in dissimilarity is evident in the two authors' descriptions of their characters and the relationship between them. Bergeaud begins *Stella* by explaining that

Romulus and Rémus were more similar than different: “Cette différence de couleur n’excluait pas entre eux un air de famille.”⁵⁵ Reybaud, in contrast, begins *Les Epaves* by insisting on the differences between M. de la Rebellière, Eléanor, and Cécile: “Les trois personnes réunies autour du guéridon étaient si dissemblables de traits et de physionomie, qu’il était évident au premier abord, qu’elles n’appartenaient ni à la même famille, ni au même pays.”⁵⁶ Whereas Reybaud’s colonial utopia seeks to divide and organize, Bergeaud’s postcolonial utopia seeks to unify.

When Bergeaud attempts to diminish the importance of difference, he is following a philosophical tradition familiar to Haitian intellectuals. An argument between the controversial newspaper editor Felix Darfour and J.S. Miliscent, editor of *L’Abeille Haytienne*, reveals the common understanding of the importance of national affiliation’s prominence over racial distinction. Darfour, in a critique of racism, began proudly signing the word *Africain* after his name. For him, Africans were just as capable as any other people and, in order to assert this position, he claimed publically to belong to this *different* race. Miliscent responded with this critique:

For a long time I have forgotten that my colour is somber; it suffices me to sense that I can put my ideas in order and combat the quibbles of our detractors; it

⁵⁵ Ibid, 28.

⁵⁶ *Les Epaves*, 24.

does not seem fitting to me to adopt a denomination which recalls the difference of my skin. I am a Citizen of Haiti.⁵⁷

Darfour accepted Miliscent's point and dropped the title of African. The agreed upon tactic was *not* to "recall the difference of [one's] skin." When Darfour sought to point out racial difference and to claim belonging to a racial group, he was quickly corrected. Miliscent downplays his skin color at the same time that he proudly proclaims his citizenship. In this moment, nation takes the place of race.

Bergeaud also believed that the nation formed a structure that could overcome racial divisions in Haiti. The Colon, the evil white father, had been vanquished. Only Marie l'Africaine and her double Stella remained in the form of divine guiding lights for the united brothers, the nation's founders. Bergeaud proclaims: "Les Africains prouvèrent, à une époque donnée, que la couleur de leur peau n'était point un reflet de la nuit et de leur esprit. Haïti surgit du sein d'un orage. En dépit des artisans du chaos, la lumière se fit dans cette genèse d'une nation."⁵⁸ Bergeaud recasts Romulus's and Rémus's dark skin as a signifier of light. Light is attributable to the birth of Haiti. The nation of Haiti has provided the light which illumines the fallacy of the supposed racial inferiority of its African founders.

⁵⁷ From *L'Abeille*, no. 3, 1 Sept. 1818, cited in Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (University Press of Florida, 2001), 114.

⁵⁸ *Stella*, 93.

Conclusion: The Transforming Power of the Colony-as-Utopia

Les Colons de toutes couleurs: histoire d'un établissement nouveau à la côte de Guinée, a utopian novel written by Adrien de Texier in 1798, begins with a letter from a former colonist of Saint-Domingue who assures his reader that not only has he safely escaped Saint-Domingue, he has found unrivaled bliss in a new colony in Africa.

Ce n'est pas sans un étonnement mêlé d'admiration que je reporte mes regards vers le passé. Par quelle chaîne inextricable d'incidents est-il arrivé que l'époque qui me dépouillait de tout ce que je possédais, a préparé néanmoins *ma félicité permanente*? Oui, c'est alors que mes concitoyens m'enlevaient l'hospice natal & toutes mes propriétés (hors l'honneur); c'est dans ce même instant que je recouvrais bien *au-delà de ce que j'aurais pu conserver parmi eux*. Apprenez, mon ami, que ce coin du monde où vous me croyez exilé par la nécessité, est un séjour de paix & de bonheur : j'y trouve l'hospitalité généreuse, le repos de l'âme, la sureté, la protection, tout ce que me refusaient mes deux patries d'Europe & d'Amérique.¹

This letter is dated November, 1793. Within months of the first abolition of slavery in Saint-Domingue, even before it was made official in Paris, this colonist finds paradise in Africa. The troubling time during which the colonist lost “all that he possessed” is replaced by a period of “permanent happiness” that neither Europe nor the Americas could provide. He denies the forced exile of French slave owners; this colonist is not

¹ Adrien Texier, *Les Colons de toutes couleurs* (Berlin: George Decker, 1798), Tome 1, 5. My emphasis.

absent from Saint-Domingue out of “necessity.” Instead, he has simply found something better elsewhere. In reaction to the beginning of the Haitian Revolution, even before anyone spoke of Haiti’s independence, this novel works to make Saint-Domingue irrelevant. In a “canton obscure de la Guinée,” this former slave master of Saint-Domingue has found a paradise that was, he implies, never possible in “la Perle des Antilles.”

Les Colons de toutes couleurs, though its title promises a story about a colony whose leaders could be members of any number of racial groups, still privileges, as Roger Little explains, “French socio-cultural norms.”² Hoffman asserts that only “la couleur de leur peau” distinguishes the inhabitants of this utopian society because they all speak French and practice Catholicism.³ Relying on this pro-French utopian model, Texier proposes several methods to help the French deal with the “troubles” of Saint-Domingue. *Les Colons de toutes couleurs* makes Saint-Domingue a ruined colony that the French are in fact *not* sad to leave. It denies the stark racial hierarchy and inequality of Saint-Domingue by calling its inhabitants the “concitoyens” of the colonist. Furthermore, the novel keeps French cultural superiority intact, even as it posits that a new racial formation might be necessary to the development of the ideal colony.

² Roger Little, “From Taboo to Totem : Black Man, White Woman, in Caroline August Fischer and Sophie Doin,” *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (Oct. 1998), 952.

³ Léon-François Hoffman, *Le Nègre romantique: personnage littéraire et obsession collective* (Paris : Payot, 1973), 142.

Though they destroy the masters' possessions, no revolting slaves in Saint-Domingue succeed in taking away the "honor" of the French. The colonists use this pride to begin anew. The imagined presence of a utopian colony outside of the Americas responds to Chateaubriand's lamentation that the French might somehow be excluded from the New World: "Nous sommes exclus du nouvel univers, où le genre humain recommence."⁴ The dream of forming a utopian colony in Africa, one that makes Saint-Domingue forgettable, alleviates this anxiety about France's exclusion from the supposed paradise of the Americas.

I begin my conclusion with this novel because it illustrates the tenacity and efficacy of the dream of the colony-as-utopia. De Gouges, Doin, Desbordes-Valmore, and Reybaud were all engaging in a literary tradition that, from the first news of the slave revolts of 1791 to decades after Haitian independence, maintained hope for an idealized colony while suggesting a myriad of ways to attain it. Bergeaud's words also describe the French understanding of the feelings of the colonized when he attributes to Romulus and Rémus *la gratitude* and *la haine*. French authors of this period continue to believe that, if France just improved its colonial practices, gratitude would win out over hate.

⁴ François-René de Chateaubriand, *Voyage en Amérique, Œuvres complètes*, Tome 6: (Paris: Académie, 1861).

The notion of the colony-as-utopia did not always translate into an unquestioned support of colonialism, but it did mean that colonialism, as an institution, was rarely condemned by nineteenth-century French writers. Of the French authors studied in this dissertation, de Gouges and Doin most closely approach supporting decolonization, but they either hesitate to fully endorse ending colonial rule or remain wedded to the notion that colonialism can be improved. De Gouges, for example, theorizes that a merging of the executive and legislative powers in the National Assembly might be beneficial, even if it could mean the “unfortunate” loss of the French Empire: “Mon opinion seroit encore de raccommoder le pouvoir exécutif avec le pouvoir législatif ... d’où naîtra, malheureusement peut-être la perte de l’Empire François.”⁵ She does not go into detail about the reasons why she theorizes that allowing for the potential loss of the Empire would be preferable to supporting a structure that might keep it in place, but de Gouges does at least entertain the idea that the colonial empire’s demise might promote the formation of a better system. She wrote these words two years after the 1789 performance of her abolitionist play; but in the 1792 preface to the last version of *L’Esclavage des noirs*, de Gouges expresses pity for the colonists who have lost their

⁵ De Gouges, *Déclaration*, 20-22.

possessions. The playwright, therefore, continually expresses ambivalence about the colonial system.⁶

Doin, through her support of Haiti, sees the positive aspects of promoting freedom rather than maintaining a slave society, even if it means the end of colonial rule. She also seeks, however, to change France's policies in an effort to *improve* colonial life. Doin proposes, for example, a variety of jobs for the formerly enslaved and required days off:

Si ces noirs étaient libres, ils travailleraient mieux, et plus long-temps; si on les considérait comme ouvriers, journaliers, domestiques enfin, ils se feraient payer selon l'ouvrage qu'ils seraient capables de faire, et ils en feraient le plus possible, afin de gagner davantage; mais ils soigneraient leur santé, se reposeraient lorsqu'ils en sentiraient le besoin; ils auraient des jours d'entière liberté, jours pendant lesquels ils ne travailleraient que pour eux.⁷

Though Doin fully supports liberty, her abolitionist argument also involves appealing to the supporters of French colonial rule and positing that liberty would be good *for colonialism*. A firm stance against France's colonial project is therefore lacking in de Gouges's and Doin's work.

Desbordes-Valmore's and Reybaud's texts, through their portrayal of well-run, successful colonies, support colonialism in a more explicit manner than those of de

⁶ It is important to note that de Gouges's untimely execution occurred just one month after news of Sonthonax's decree abolishing slavery reached Paris. For more information about the circulation of this information, see Jeremy Popkin, *You are All Free*, 278.

⁷ Doin, *La Famille noire*, 45.

Gouges or Doin. The two authors differ, however, in their conception of social hierarchy, which makes their suggestions for improving France's colonial model distinct.

Desbordes-Valmore's *Sarah* criticizes slavery through its attention to the similarities between individuals, even though, at the same time, the novella posits that a successful colony requires only the intervention of a benevolent patriarch. As Doris Kadish and David Denby have shown, sentimental narratives like *Sarah* support a "leveling of social classes." Arsène, for example, member of an exiled class, plays a central role in the novella as a moral example for the other characters.⁸ As the relationship between Arsène and Sarah proves, the novella blurs distinctions between groups of people; Desbordes-Valmore's suggestions for reforming rather than dismantling the colonial model require eliminating hierarchical divisions based on age, gender, *and* racial affiliation.

Reybaud's support of a social hierarchy of differentiated groups as described in her novel *Mézélie* differs from Desbordes-Valmore's imagined colony through its attention to and respect for group affiliation. Furthermore, her novels support colonialism and French nationalism through their persistent nostalgia for Saint-Domingue. At the end of her 1852 novel *Sydonie*, for example, the main character, Sydonie Kernadec, now an old woman living in England, looks upon a painting of her former plantation in Saint-Domingue that she carried with her as she fled the slave

⁸ Doris Kadish and Deborah Jenson, introduction, *Sarah: an English Translation* (MLA, 2008).

revolts that killed her entire family. With her eyes turned “vers l’océan,” she nostalgically sighs, “c’est là-bas, là-bas, qu’était l’habitation Kernadec.”⁹ Reybaud never seems to lose this longing for Saint-Domingue. Sydonie, along with the characters Christine de Rieux, Marie d’Enambuc, and Cécile Kerbran, all either dream of or participate in the creation of an idealized French colony, one in which they have control, comfort, and moral clout.

The oversights of these authors, even those of the most radical abolitionists, prove that France processed its first postcolonial moment in a way that focused on how to handle its defeat and avoid failure as a colonial power. This focus included the broader philosophical questions of human rights that its colonial presence and its involvement in the slave trade inevitably posed, but only insofar as answering these questions could help the French re-interpret their past defeat and/or avoid another in the future. Moreover, an examination of the powerful dream of the colony-as-utopia shows that, even if female authors tended to pay special attention to women’s rights and challenge traditional gender roles, their works do not present opinions about French colonialism that challenge it in a more aggressive manner than those of their male counterparts.

⁹ Mme Charles Reybaud, *Sydonie* (Paris: Hachette), 1858, 174.

I propose, however, that because many women who wrote about the colonies saw in the notion of the colony-as-utopia an opportunity for women's empowerment, this widespread utopian fantasy meant something different for French women than it did for French men. De Gouges's Mme de Saint-Frémont, who asserts her authority as the wife of the governor, takes a position of moral leadership and gains power as the partner of a powerful man in the colony. Sophie also shows moral authority in the colony by leading the fight to save Zamore and Mirza from punishment by the colonial system. As mentioned in the introduction, Doin, though less overtly feminist than de Gouges, does imagine the colony to be a site where women could have exercised moral authority: "Peut-être Saint-Domingue et tant d'autres auraient encore des maîtres, si les femmes des propriétaires n'avaient pas tant de fois méprisé leur pouvoir le plus doux."¹⁰ Reybaud's fantasy of a utopian colony led by the idealized Marie speaks the most clearly to what the author understood to be at stake for French women in the loss of Saint-Domingue. Her continual nostalgia demonstrates the depth to which she believed that a better life for French women was possible in a properly run colony. For Reybaud, losing Saint-Domingue meant losing this imagined utopia.

The hope for empowerment and moral leadership that French women saw in the colony-as-utopia suggests that altering the way in which colonialism had set up racial

¹⁰ Doin, *La Famille noire*, 86.

categories offered French women a chance to rethink gender equality. This might explain why the word *slave* seemed to them an appropriate term for French women. The colony-as-utopia formed an imagined space in which women's liberation could be realized. When life in the métropole failed to meet these expectations, French women saw themselves as victims of an imperfect system, just like the slaves that their imagined colonial presence would supposedly benefit.

Nineteenth-century French women writers projected their anxieties and hopes for equality onto the notion of the colony-as-utopia. The site of the colony offered them a promise of empowerment because women were understood to be capable of *redeeming* France's colonies. For them, Saint-Domingue, followed by Haiti, signaled the necessity of this redemption, which would come from the reworking of racial hierarchy that they thought French women's colonial presence would facilitate. De Gouges's play seeks to include Zamore and Mirza as common subjects of a French patriarchy; French women demonstrate the morality and necessity of this inclusion, which amounts to a reformulation of the colonial racial hierarchy that makes "difference only exist in color." Doin's notion that women's assertion of "leur pouvoir le plus doux" would have led to the maintenance of masters in Saint-Domingue suggests that women's empowerment in the colonies would have altered racial hierarchy for the better. Even if this would not have led to the complete abolition of slavery that Doin desired, she still assumes that

slaves would have been treated better if women had exercised more authority in the colonies. Desbordes-Valmore's "leveling of social classes" profoundly modifies colonial racial hierarchy; and it is Sarah's presence in the colony as a double for Arsène that makes this transformation possible. Reybaud's idealized female leaders allow the French to consider themselves members of a benevolent albeit still superior race. Their colonial leader, through her assumed-to-be-innate morality, treats each separate group respectfully while maintaining a modified racial hierarchy.

The belief in the redemptive power of women was, however, not unique to these women authors or to the French. Whereas, for Bergeaud, *Haiti* is the result of redemption, he, like his French female contemporaries, also makes this transformation motivated and guided by women. Yet, for him, the process of redemption led by the female characters of Marie and Stella requires the transcendence of racial divisions and the complete abandonment of the colonial system. Though each of the authors of this study conceived of different ways to alter the racial hierarchy of the colonies, each one proposed that women play a role in the process of that transformation.

In these writings, therefore, sometimes the aspiration toward gender equality and the initiative to eliminate colonial rule aligned and sometimes these two ideas worked at cross purposes. Women writers, including feminists, were not necessarily colonial or anti-colonial. Rather, they used the idea of the colony to their advantage—

just as Bergeaud shows us that the anti-colonial author could also use gender to his literary and polemical advantage. The starkest contrast between French and Haitian authors of this period is that, even in a postcolonial moment, the French still clung to the idea of the colony-as-utopia. For Haitians, their hoped-for utopia could only be obtained through the full acceptance and realization of their *post*coloniality.

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