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Epilogue : histoire et mémoire

The Narrations of the Destruction of Saint-Domingue in the Late 18th Century and their Reinterpretations after the Bicentennial of the Haitian Revolution

Les narrations de la destruction de Saint-Domingue au tournant du 19e siècle et leurs relectures après le bicentenaire de la Révolution haïtienne

Las narraciones de la destrucción de Santo Domingo a inicios del s. 19 y sus lecturas después del bicentenario de la Revolución haitiana

As narrativas da destruição de Santo Domingo, na virada do século 19 e suas releituras depois do bicentenário da Revolução Haitiana

ANJA BANDAU

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Résumés

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This article combines postcolonial and literary approaches in an analysis of literary texts about the Haitian Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Its first part discusses the methodological challenges related to the topic in post-colonial and literary studies, the ideologically ambivalent colonial texts making explicit the colonial legacy of the postcolonial while not lending themselves to an easy reading along established postcolonial tropes. Literary studies have ignored these texts for a long time but might benefit from a study of the ways the literary genre is used in these texts often not coherent aesthetically. The post-2004 scholarship in Haitian Studies has also offered stimulating and valid interdisciplinary approaches in this respect. In response to this, the second part of this article presents an exemplary analysis of the



manuscript *Mon Odyssée*, a transatlantic testimony by a Saint-Domingue refugee to the United States that gives not only an interesting example of the configurations of the literary genre and their implication but also of the problematic and precarious representation of the black agents of the Revolution.

Cet article combine les approches postcoloniales et littéraires pour une analyse de textes littéraires portant sur la Révolution haïtienne, écrits au tournant du 19^e siècle. Dans la première partie sont présentées, à partir de ce corpus, les questions théoriques et méthodologiques qui se posent aux études postcoloniales et littéraires. Ces textes coloniaux, idéologiquement ambivalents, rendent explicite l'héritage colonial du postcolonial sans pour autant s'intégrer aisément aux catégories de la pensée postcoloniale. Les études littéraires ont longtemps ignoré ces textes considérés comme de qualité littéraire inférieure. Or elles pourraient s'enrichir de l'analyse des modalités qui y sont employées dans le but de fonctionnaliser les genres littéraires. Les études haïtiennes postérieures à la célébration du bicentenaire de la Révolution haïtienne ont offert des approches interdisciplinaires stimulantes en ce sens. La seconde partie de l'article présente une analyse du texte colonial *Mon Odyssée*, témoignage transatlantique d'un réfugié de Saint-Domingue aux Etats-Unis, qui offre un exemple des configurations de genres littéraires et leurs implications, notamment dans la représentation de la figure emblématique de l'esclave noir en tant qu'acteur de la Révolution haïtienne.

Este artículo combina los enfoques literarios y postcoloniales para el análisis de textos literarios que cuentan la revolución en Santo-Domingo a finales del siglo 18 e inicios del siglo 19. En la primera parte del artículo se discutirá el desafío metodológico para los estudios literarios y estudios postcoloniales, vinculado con esta temática: son textos ideológicamente ambiguos que hacen visible la herencia colonial dentro de lo postcolonial sin que se presten a una lectura fácil de acuerdo con los estándares postcoloniales. Durante mucho tiempo los estudios literarios han ignorado o desconocido este corpus, considerado como de segunda categoría en términos estéticos. Pero podrían beneficiarse del análisis de los usos genéricos llevados a cabo por estos textos. Los estudios haitianos post-2004 han producido acercamientos pluridisciplinarios muy estimulantes en este sentido. En la segunda parte se analiza el texto colonial *Mon Odyssée*, testimonio transatlántico de un refugiado dominicano que enfoca las múltiples configuraciones en que aparecen diversos géneros literarios y las implicaciones de éstas, en particular para la problemática y precaria representación del esclavo negro en tanto actor de la insurgencia.

Este artigo combina as abordagens pós-coloniais e literária para a análise de textos literários sobre a Revolução Haitiana, escritos na virada do século 19. Na primeira parte são apresentados, a partir deste corpus, questões teóricas e metodológicas relativas aos estudos literários pós-coloniais. Estes textos coloniais, ideologicamente ambivalentes, tornam explícito o legado colonial do pós-colonial, sem integrar facilmente as categorias do pensamento pós-colonial. Os estudos literários ignoraram durante muito tempo esses textos literários considerados como inferiores. Ora, eles poderiam enriquecer-se da análise das modalidades que usam esses textos para funcionalizar os gêneros literários. Os estudos haitianos posteriores à celebração do bicentenário da Revolução Haitiana ofereceram abordagens interdisciplinares estimulantes nessa direção. A segunda parte do artigo apresenta uma análise do texto colonial *Mon Odyssée*, testemunha transatlântica de um refugiado de Santo Domingo, que dá um exemplo de configuração dos gêneros literários e das suas implicações, incluindo a representação da figura emblemática do escravo negro como ator da Revolução Haitiana.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : Saint-Domingue /Haïti, révolution, représentation, analyse littéraire, genre littéraire, postcolonial, textes coloniaux, études interdisciplinaires

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Palavras chaves: Santo Domingo / Haiti, revolução, representação, análise literária, gênero, pós-colonial, textos coloniais, estudos interdisciplinares

Texte intégral



This article addresses a set of reflections and questions situated in the interstices between historiography, literary studies, and cultural studies, as well as the history of

these disciplines. These reflections arise from my work on texts dealing with the Revolution in Saint-Domingue and related topics, such as the abolition of slavery, the precarious relationship between metropolis and colony, as well as the Enlightenment and colonialism at the turn of the 19th century, more precisely between 1792 and 1815.

2 The complexity of the events that have come to be referred to as the Haitian Revolution,¹ their scattered documentation, and the difficulty of accessing some parts of it, as well as the blatantly ideological functions of the existing documents, raise conceptual and methodological questions for everybody aiming to undertake research on the Haitian Revolution. The sudden rise in the number of publications and research projects on the Haitian Revolution around its bicentenary in 2004 opened up new horizons, especially for interdisciplinary work on the subject. At the same time, the surge in publications points to current issues and significant changes in colonial as well as postcolonial (francophone) studies that place an emphasis on the perspective of entangled histories and partly redefine the links to transnational and cultural studies.

3 The object of interest here—literary texts that speak of the Haitian Revolution in the late 18th and early 19th centuries—uncovers neuralgic points of both postcolonial and literary studies: these ideologically ambivalent texts make explicit the colonial legacy of the postcolonial,² while not lending themselves to an easy reading along established postcolonial tropes. A very obvious issue is the problematic and precarious representation of the black agents of the Revolution.

4 Focusing on the work with these non-canonical texts and starting from a literary studies perspective, a whole set of questions arises: to what end can these texts be studied in literary, cultural, and postcolonial studies, and what does a postcolonial approach add to the understanding of these texts? A related issue forms around the way knowledge about these events is produced. What role do we ascribe to literary texts in the process of knowledge production, and what role do literary studies assume in the interdisciplinary venture of mapping and analyzing this production of knowledge?

5 After a short excursus into what I call somewhat emphatically “the Haitian turn”, I will develop theoretical and methodological questions that I want to link to an analysis of the colonial text *Mon Odyssée*, the configurations of literary genre and their implication for the emblematic figure of a black insurgent present in several recent studies on the Haitian Revolution.

I/ The Haitian Turn or Post-2004 Scholarship on Haiti

6 This title refers to the proliferation of studies on the Haitian Revolution, as well as its paradigmatic readings in relation to the notions of interconnectedness, circulation, *histoire croisée*, which introduce a vision beyond the bi-directional models of center and periphery. The publications on the occasion of the bicentennial of the revolution, in 2004, made this paradigm shift very clear and put Haiti back on the map of global history.³ These studies also shed light on certain pitfalls of postcolonial studies, as addressed in recent critiques.⁴ The British scholar Charles Forsdick points out that “interwoven commemorative moments [...] have insured that slavery and its legacies have acquired a necessary prominence in debates of political, philosophical, social and cultural manifestations of post-enlightenment modernity.”⁵



7 This “Haitian turn” or—putting it less emphatically—this new post-2004 awareness helps re-read the insufficiencies of the French Revolution and its unaccomplished universalism through the prism of the Haitian Revolution. It also helps reconstruct

the multiple relations in the so-called periphery of the Caribbean and the Americas, and thus subverts the center-periphery model. As early as the late 1990s, the studies of historians such as David Geggus and Carolyn Fick pointed to these links. In the French context, Yves Bénot and Louis Sala-Molins addressed these interconnections and their impact on French history, e.g., in the context of the 1989 bicentennial of the French Revolution or the 1994 bicentennial of the first abolition of slavery in the French colonial empire.⁶ The underlying motto of these re-readings can be found in an influential 1995 study by Michel-Rolph Trouillot bearing the title *Silencing the past*.⁷ But with the advent of the new millennium, historians such as Laurent Dubois, John Garrigus, and Jeremy Popkin have started a dialogue with Trouillot's thesis based on sources and archival material made accessible only recently.⁸ Slavery is seen as an intrinsic phenomenon of the history of empires: without the implicit relationships of French Enlightenment with colonialism and its telling moments of silence on the matter, the implications of slavery for the interpretation of Enlightenment thinking, and the early French Republic's colonial legal practice concerning abolition, the history of empires cannot be envisioned adequately. In the context of the revolutionary Atlantic—one of the key concepts in this paradigm—a whole network of interconnections arises; multiple agents in the Caribbean with transatlantic and inter-American affiliations become visible. Re-considering the Haitian Revolution as an important Caribbean counterpart to, or radicalization of, the French Revolution and its democratic implications is a crucial step towards restoring its importance in global history. Entangled histories begin to be told in terms of how intimately Saint-Domingue was linked to decision-making in transatlantic colonial and imperial politics, or served as an example of colonial strategies and colonial administration, as well as a prefiguration of the second French colonial empire during the second half of the 19th century.⁹ This is where the repercussions of the events in the South of the United States (New Orleans) also tie in with the Greater Caribbean region. With the demise of the colony of Saint-Domingue in the last decade of the 18th century, periods of intense violence against white settlers triggered an increasing circulation of people and information that made an impact not only on French metropolitan politics but also on the politics of the greater Caribbean region. Texts like *Mon Odyssée*, a testimony by a descendant of plantation owners which I will discuss in the second part of this article, show that the structures of circulation (goods, subjects, and ideas) were more complex than suggested by the bipolar model of metropolis-colony, or even the transatlantic triangle created by the slave trade.¹⁰

8 These multifaceted phenomena of interconnection and circulation shed new light on the question why Latin American independences have been kept separate from the events in Saint-Domingue for a long time.¹¹ The implications of the interwovenness of these phenomena have contributed to Haiti's new salience on the map of current research in postcolonial historiographical, literary, and cultural studies. In these various ways, the Haitian Revolution has become a paradigmatic case of exemplary change: the shift from a center/periphery model that juxtaposes metropolis and colony to a model of entangled history, a history about the circulation of objects, subjects, cultural practices and, generally speaking, knowledge. It has come to represent the complex and ambivalent realities of colonial situations that haunt post/colonial settings. Walter Mignolo and others address these continuities and interrelations between colonial and postcolonial situations in the context of decolonial studies, a theoretical intervention coming out of Latin-American and subaltern theoretical approaches.¹²



II/ The Scarce Textual Basis for Trans-

Atlantic Literary Studies of the Haitian Revolution

9 Studying the Haitian Revolution confronts us with a situation in which scholars have been working on scarce, scattered, un-reviewed material. Even more so, they try to study written testimony of African (American) emancipation where there are no written testimonies by (former) slaves known to us today, a situation sharply contrasting with the anglophone context.¹³ In the case of literary and cultural critics working on the subject, the situation is even more challenging, given the fact that their projects depend, to a large degree, on evidence handed down in written form. These constraints on the corpus call for interdisciplinary work with different media. They push researchers to consider texts that manifest some resistance to a post-colonial reading.¹⁴

10 A considerable portion of the texts accessible to us was written by French metropolitan subjects and by colonial or creole subjects: administrators, plantation owners and their families, settlers, civil and military servants, as well as journalists, the majority of them white. There are, however, some non-white plantation owners, and political and military leaders also figure among the authors. These texts do provide information, but they present a colonial and often racist point of view, as the ideological function is one of their main concerns. This has been one of the explanations for the absence of research in the field of literary, cultural, or postcolonial studies.¹⁵ After Leon-François Hoffmann's book on *Le Nègre Romantique* in 1973, which provides a vast set of material but lacks a postcolonial perspective, no further study was published until the beginning of the 21st century.

11 Recent publications by Sybille Fischer, Nick Nesbitt, as well as Doris Garraway, Chris Bongie, and Deborah Jenson clearly show a new cultural (and political) turn in literary studies. These authors have turned to non-literary texts, such as declarations of independence, in Fischer's case, or political documents studied together with the few explicitly literary representations of the events, in Nesbitt's. In *Modernity Disavowed*, Fischer sheds light on the conditions that led the Saint-Domingue revolution to be shrouded in silence, referred to as the 'horrors of Saint-Domingue' and received as a threat and a promise at the same time. Linking the events to the Spanish Caribbean and its reaction in various discursive moments, the author discusses the implications of the revolution for a reconsideration of modernity. She makes silences and absences speak in a heterogeneous body of texts by relying on an interdisciplinary approach that links a close reading, "attuned to precise wording, to resonances, fantasies and imagery" and "sustained hermeneutical efforts" to "reach beyond literal meaning" with psychoanalytic as well as philosophical arguments.¹⁶ Nick Nesbitt studies the Haitian Revolution in its relation to global modernity and Spinoza's "radical" Enlightenment. He proposes a "universal, categorical imperative to strive for a world without slavery" that informed the "philosophy of praxis" exemplified by the (former) slaves and calls his interdisciplinary adventure "a history of an idea".¹⁷ In a decisive way, Nesbitt's and Fischer's studies have taken their distance from traditional subjects of literary studies, applying an interdisciplinary set of analytical tools created for literary and cultural studies.

12 The small body of texts by the leading figures of the slave rebellion has been increasingly studied and re-contextualized during the past five to ten years. Deborah Jenson's *Beyond the Slave Narrative. Politics, Sex, and Manuscripts in the Haitian Revolution* addresses Toussaint Louverture's and Jean-Jacques Dessalines' heterogeneous, consciously chosen mediatic articulations in dispersed private and official letters, as well as political documents. Jenson's study is vital because it challenges the notion of the slave narrative, so far considered as the standard mode of expression of the slaves and slave emancipation. She rightly asks whether there are no other forms of testimony privileged by the black generals, e.g. letters and political



documents. The study on French and Creole theater culture in Saint-Domingue by Laurent Dubois and Bernard Camier, published in 2007, is one of the few very fruitful examples of inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration.¹⁸ Their article provides us with details on the cultural practices of the black elite (e.g. Jean-Jacques Dessalines) that were unavailable before, and explains the political use which was made of Enlightenment theatre in Saint-Domingue. It shows us how these cultural practices can serve historical research and, on the other hand, illustrates how the sources for literary and cultural studies are opened up to lists of theater repertoires, newspaper reports on theater performances, and oral forms such as proverbs. All the aforementioned texts oblige us to reconsider the “conscripts of modernity” (Scott)¹⁹ with questions such as ‘Who is considered a modern subject?’, ‘What is the appropriate genre of slave emancipation?’—and understand the non-white free population (*gens de couleur*) and slaves as agents.

13 My approach takes the demand to reconsider the foundations of modernity back to the realm of literature, genre, and poetics. It also inquires about the impact of these poetics and generic questions on the ways of speaking, claiming, and representing modern subjectivities in the context of violent confrontations and revolutionary uprooting such as the Saint-Domingue Revolution:²⁰ To what extent is it possible to detect repercussions by studying the medium, that is, the format of transmission that spreads the news on the Revolution? What impact would it have on the regulated ways of speaking, such as genre? My analysis aims at studying and specifying texts of different genres that, from 1793 onwards, give an account of the first slave uprising that ended in destruction and flight, or forced migration from Saint-Domingue. These early contemporary texts in the form of travelogues, pamphlets, reports, texts between historical account and memoir, testimonies, or letters, were written before the final result of the civil, colonial war and fight for independence was even in sight. These narrations present individual destinies, as well as the development of the colony and try to comment on, contextualize, and understand the events. From the perspective of interdisciplinary literary and cultural studies, they form a reservoir of narratives, episodes, and anecdotes that serve as a basis for modes and topoi of remembering the events of Saint-Domingue. It is still in place until the late 20th century. In this context, narrative forms that prefigure the colonial novel, but also theater and fugitives’ narratives can be read as first scripts enabling us to see processes of repression, displacement, and transformation linked to processes of memory, differing in this from later narrations.

III/ Jean-Paul Pillet’s Odyssey between France, Saint-Domingue, and the United States during the Haitian Revolution: Questions of Circulation and Genre

14 It is interesting to test these hypotheses on the manuscript *Mon Odyssée* by author Jean-Paul Pillet, who has only recently been identified.²¹ This text is part of a body of texts by creole whites affected by the events of the uprisings. Historian Jeremy Popkin has included parts of it in his collection of testimonies on the Haitian Revolution.²² So far, it was only known through an incomplete and not entirely accurate English translation published in 1959 by one of the author’s supposed descendants, Althea de Puech Parham, under the title *My Odyssey*. The 390-page manuscript of *Mon Odyssée*, now conserved at The Historic New Orleans Collection, in New Orleans, is divided into three volumes that appear to have been composed at



various points in time somewhere between 1793 and 1806. The text relates the voyages of the protagonist from and to a number of places, voyages caused by the French Revolution and the civil war in Saint-Domingue between 1791 and 1798. His “odyssey” includes various returns to Saint-Domingue from the United States. In the context of my argument, this text is of interest for several reasons: 1. It testifies to the notion of movement and interconnectedness, in the Greater Caribbean Region and beyond, in a historical perspective. 2. Relying on *Mon Odyssée*, I will argue that the study of texts written by emigrated settlers is related to questions of the Black Atlantic and its early configurations, although in these texts black people are either treated in a very stereotypical manner, or are entirely absent as agents. I suggest reading these texts against the grain—trying to understand the functions of fissures, blanks and silences, detectable when we look for representations other than hegemonic. 3. The last point of analysis relates to the question of black subjectivities and their representation: many of the recent scholarly publications on the Haitian Revolution cite a passage from *Mon Odyssée*, referring to it as an exemplary representation of the Haitian slave revolt. 4. In order to discuss this prototypical status, I propose consulting genre as a convention inscribed in the text that allows for and shapes this representation.

15 In the numerous texts of emigrated settlers (*colons*), stereotypical representations of black protagonists are common and circulate, offering harsh ideological positions: the good and the bad slave, the singing and dancing slave, versus the monstrous, disobedient one. The instances when the actions of the slaves do not fit the above-mentioned binaries, however, are of special interest. The attitudes towards slavery echo the popular discussions of pro-slavery debates during the second half of the 18th century, and although the texts do criticize the excess of violence exerted by slave masters, they do not question the institution of slavery itself.²³ In short, the ideological point of view is usually blatantly revealed and the perspectives of the majority of Saint-Domingue’s population—slaves—are marginal, if not absent. Reading these texts against the grain, asking about the fissures, blanks and silences, as I have proposed above, might bring to light Freudian “uncanny figures”, ambiguities telling in expected and unexpected ways.

16 I am interested in the ways literary genres and modes are invested in the circulation of knowledge and cultural practices related to the Revolution in Saint-Domingue. I focus on how these conventions and their violation or subversion permit, foreclose, and shape the circulation of news items and ideas, and, for the present purpose, on how certain characters are constituted and circulate, especially when it comes to describing the black majority and the news of their uprising.

17 This is the set of questions I want to address and illustrate by reading a now-iconic passage from the manuscript of *Mon Odyssée*. The paragraph is referred to in virtually every recent scholarly publication on the Haitian Revolution. It (re-)narrates an episode that aims to give us an idea of the adversaries the narrator is up against. The author tells us about his pursuit of one of the black insurgents, in violent and relentless man-on-man combat. The insurgent’s looks “caused me to judge him to be one of the principal chiefs”.²⁴ The narrator-protagonist chases his opponent, who aims his gun at him but, because the powder is damp, fails to shoot. When the narrator, in revenge, is about to “cleave his head with [a] sword,” the black man changes strategies and tries to convince his enemy, the protagonist-author, of his innocence by telling him with tears in his eyes that he is the godson of the narrator’s mother. He manages to “disarm” the pursuer discursively (“Son ton me désarma.”), who then decides to spare the slave’s life. When the former master turns his back on his opponent, the latter points his gun at him for the second time. In revenge, the rebel slave is chased and overcome. He tries to justify himself for a second time, relying on strategic argument, evoking the devil, stronger than the vanquished slave. When this fails as well, he fearlessly accepts his execution.

18 The question I will explore is the following: What can we learn from this passage



about the figure of the black slave in revolt, so often absent from discourse or represented only through sentimental figures, gothic modes of representation, and other conventions? This passage is one of the few that ascribe a certain degree of subjectivity to the black slave. In what way and to what extent is this related to the question of literary genre? Can we understand genre as a medium that links the past, as a world we would like to access, to the present?

IV/ Negotiating Social Status via the Homeric Epic

19 The fight against the revolutionary uprising is narrated as an adventure and man-on-man fight. In this respect, references to the Homeric epic are prominent in the whole scene, and present from the very beginning. The narrating voice is telling “his odyssey” and claims to be a Ulysses of his time and circumstance. The text gives information on age, family ties and social status of the narrator-protagonist, who is just about 18 years old at the outbreak of the slave revolution in 1791, when he, after receiving an education in Paris, returns to Saint-Domingue in July 1791, the place of his birth.²⁵ Homer’s *Odyssey* proposes not only a model of subject formation to this young author, mastering all sorts of adventures, hardships and tests, as well as liminal situations on his way back home. What our author finds is a model narrative of a long journey, in which he faces all kinds of dangers and archaic forces, mourns his dead friends and survives, finally regaining wealth, a home, and reputation—like Ulysses.

20 The following passage shows, however, that the *Iliad* is also an explicit intertext here and serves the author’s purpose of portraying the colonial and civil war as a series of aristocratic man-on-man fights:

Je me précipitai sur lui mais il se donna garde de m’attendre; et nous voilà
jouant tous les deux une partie de barre.

Quoique bancal, le drole²⁶ était ingambe

Autour des champs il joua de la jambe

Tout comme hector en jouait autrefois [...]

quand poursuivi par achille en colère

des murs d’illium il fit le tour sept fois,

comme un lapin, sans regarder derrière.

je n’avais pas de patrocle à venger,

mais plus qu’achille aussi j’étais léger,

grace, d’abord, à ma personne étique ;

puis à ce Grec du faubourg St Marceaux,

qui nous croyant des apprentis héros,

chaque matin, dans sa rage olympique,

nous faisait faire un cours de gymnastique.²⁷

21 Here, the black adversary is compared to the Trojan hero Hector who, in a duel with Achilles, escapes the latter, running three times around the walls of Troy before being killed. In this paragraph, the narrating voice takes on the role of Achilles, savior



of the Greeks who persecutes Hector in revenge for the death of his friend Patrocles and who will defeat both Hector and the Trojans. But while in the *Iliad* the physical and verbal man-on-man combat depends on the favor of the gods, here the gods no longer offer shelter to the protagonists of Pillet's *Mon Odyssée*. The passage develops an explicitly comic excursus on the narrator's physical exercise, back in France, that enable him to outdo his opponents just like the ancient "Olympic heroes". The mocking effect is achieved through parodying the original scene of the chase. Instead of three times, the adversaries now run seven times around Troy. This exaggeration is presented in the tradition of anacreontic poetry, a genre that Pillet uses extensively to cope with the traumatic experiences but that I cannot go into here in detail. What is noteworthy, however, is the fact that the ironic attitude of anacreontic poetry towards Greek mythology serves as a model for a distancing use of the epic in Pillets text.²⁸

22 The author-narrator is caught in a situation of actual fighting, contradicting the aristocratic ideal of combat, which is not so much linked to survival, as it was in Antiquity, but to physical exercise. The mockery might be a symptom of the fact that this aristocratic behavior is being jeopardized by the slave, since he seems to appropriate to his needs the stratagems that distinguish Ulysses from the ancient heroes. Whereas the *Iliad*, as we know from Horkheimer and Adorno,²⁹ is placed under the rule of the physical and verbal man-on-man duel, the *Odyssey* presents a hero who defeats his adversaries by using tricks and cunningness.

J'attrapai donc mon coureur au moment qu'il allait m'échapper en se jetant dans un bois. Eh bien, il eut l'impudence de me soutenir que j'avais mal vu, et qu'il aimait trop le fils de sa marraine pour vouloir le tuer. Quand il se vit convaincu par une foule de témoins, il changea de batterie et me dit dans son jargon: hum ! maitre, moi connai ça. C'est diable qui tá entré dans corps à moi. Moi bon nègre: mais [ça vous vouler...] diable malin trop. Son excuse me fit rire malgré ma colère, et si j'eusse été seul, je lui aurais certainement permis de se sauver, mais les soldats qui m'environnaient s'en emparèrent et l'attachèrent à un arbre pour le fusiller.

Quand il vit que son sort était décidé, il se mit à rire, chanter et badiner tantôt il nous injuriait d'un ton furieux, tantôt il se moquait de nous d'un air goguenard. Il donna lui-même le signal et reçut la mort sans crainte et sans se plaindre, nous trouvâmes dans une de ses poches des pamphlets imprimés en France remplis de lieux communs par les droits de l'homme et la sainte insurrection.³⁰

23 The linguistic registers attributed to this presumed leader of the rebellious slaves range from a set of (discursive and performative) puns and tricks to the honorable behavior of a man awaiting his death with dignity, situating him between Hector and Ulysses. Although in sync with the intertext, the distribution of roles makes it quite clear that this black man is destined to be defeated. He is, however, described with a wealth of details. This variety of strategies and differentiated description has induced scholars to position the opponent on an equal level with his "European" counterpart.³¹ The passage cited above gives good reasons to presume that it is the rebel who takes the role of the strategic agent of the epic.

24 On the other hand, the same property is associated with voodoo, that is, in the eyes of the narrator, archaic forces similar to those defeated by Homer's Ulysses. These ambiguities in the distribution of roles and values make it difficult to establish a perfect isotopy between a model and its epigone. Enlightened rationalism and archaic animistic myth seem to be distributed in unexpected ways, echoing the difficulties the narrator himself has in distributing the roles of his characters. The man-on-man model of combat is undermined by the black opponent, representing Ulysses; but at the same time, his behavior is associated with Hector's.

25 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno see at the core of Enlightenment a passage from archaic to modern, from myth to rationality, and from aristocracy to bourgeoisie. But this happens dialectically through a process in which the subject interiorizes mythic power in order to overcome it.³² From a historical perspective, the



bourgeois interiorizes aristocratic principles when overthrowing the *Ancien Régime*. Our author narrates this dialectic, while at the same time trying to maintain, or to redefine, the frontiers between both worlds in a colonial context. While from the point of view of the slave-owning settler-narrator-protagonist the colony is abandoned on the altar of the bourgeois revolution, at the threshold to adulthood he ascribes to himself aristocratic ways and is—very much like Ulysses—moving in different spaces and is also applying cunning tricks. In his presentation, Jeremy Popkin very aptly catches the main characteristics of the text and its narrator when he underlines the fluidness of the protagonists' identity, subject to change in the course of the narrated events.³³ This change, however, does not take one precise direction: the parodic adoption of Achilles gives way over time. Later, the narrator himself relies on the strategy of tricks, as he saves his life by travesty, dressing as a servant (MO, vol. 1: book 3, 123). This travesty is a strategy from the very start, but its context and character change with the ongoing narration: if, in the beginning, the protagonist takes pleasure in dressing in women's clothes, the same action becomes a strategy of survival later on. Dressing as servant is not a playful act but an act of survival. This strategy represents the changed position of the author-narrator in a hostile environment, due to the radical change that came about in between the three corners of his Atlantic world: on one shore, the colonial world is endangered by the slave rebellion; on the other shore, the metropolitan Revolution which empowered a bourgeois worldview and stance—while in the third reference point, in the young American Republic to the north of the Caribbean, revolution has led to a democratic government permitting gradual emancipation while maintaining slavery in the South. These coordinates, as our narrator-protagonist and his odyssey show, geographically cannot be kept neatly separate in the course of events; they clash, overlap, and constitute transatlantic reconfigurations of space through the movement of our protagonist. The narrator, young and still malleable, has not yet made up his mind, navigating as he is between different timelines and spaces. Different dimensions and possibilities of interpreting the actions overlap.

V/ Ulysses as a Floating Signifier

26 His *bricolage* of different models and interpretations becomes possible because the young author is not somebody who designs his text as a highly complex construction, cautiously, but who works with the models he has at hand, relying on his education in the classics and making his understanding of them serve his purpose. The epic tradition becomes a kind of “Antiquity shop” where every item or fragment seems endowed with the aura of the universe of epic, at the disposal of the buyer. Therefore, the references to details in the intertexts are precise, but often contradictory, while their projected reassembly/figuration, the narrative itself, remains uncertain. However, his use of the generic model makes visible the tensions and fissures that occur in the process of adaption. Ulysses and Hector enable the text to conserve relations of power that encompass constellations of colonialism, enslavement and cultural contact in Antiquity. At the same time, they restrain the possibilities of articulating social change and the transformation of subjectivity into a bourgeois identity, and of expressing the contact with other cultural systems. We can summarize the characteristics of the black man as follows: associated with Hector in the beginning, the black opponent temporarily becomes Ulysses' behavior. Ulysses thus provides a new paradigm or model of subjectivity that separates physical power and survival. But the “trickster” might be pointing to a mythical character of the African Caribbean mythology as well, a separate and autonomous tradition at the core of the opponent's behavior. The author interprets the stoic attitude of the black man facing death as related to fetishistic beliefs. From this point of view, the above-



mentioned archaic forces are mastered by the narrator-protagonist who regains the dominant role of Ulysses as he attributes fetishistic beliefs to his black adversary.

27 Are these new possible readings of the rebellious slave? The black opponent cannot be ascribed to either one of the generic models or intertexts. Eventually, this process of opening up the paradigm closes towards the end of this scene, and in the course of the text, with the gradually increasing fragility of the narrator's position. We have to bear in mind that the African opponent is acting and speaking reported speech, through "his master's voice," that is, mediated by the perspective of the white master born in the colony and educated in the metropolis. This is why the former slave's discourse contains images that have been used before by the narrator. It includes well-known stereotypical images of the black slave that circulated at the time (*bon nègre*). Nevertheless, in one case at least, this mimicry of the pre-uprising relationship of mutual obligation between slave and owner ("fils de sa marraine") serves a different goal: his insistence on the quasi-parental relationship between master and slave is used here as a trick to manipulate the former master, escape punishment for rebelling, and survive.

28 Jeremy Popkin argues that "framing their combat in Homeric terms [...] humanizes both participants."³⁴ In this respect, Popkin also underlines the fact that the courageous and simultaneously strategic behavior of the black man, who is also represented as an embodiment of the African Other and the principles of the French Revolution, "seem to represent the core of what many contemporary scholars want to find in the Haitian slave revolt."³⁵ But the story, "too good to be true literally,"³⁶ contains a conglomerate of all the commonplace beliefs about the "core" of the Haitian Revolution: an uprising inspired by French philosophers, the important status of voodoo for African slaves, and others. One question, however, remains unanswered: can we read this passage as the acknowledgement of black subjectivity, and if so, to what degree is this facilitated by the convention of genre? There is no definite answer. One might think that, at some point, the white author's subjectivity is weakened, so that the framing of the Other's discourse becomes uncertain and the subjectivity of his black opponent becomes a possibility. The author, who is seeking recognition in comparing his story to the one Ulysses survived, glorifies his own actions by confronting a worthy opponent. But later in the story, the logic of war is changing and, in parallel, so is the logic of representation.

29 This ambivalence does not lead to a favourable situation concerning black subjectivity. On the contrary, in the course of the text, this possibility becomes more and more unlikely. The moments when this black subjectivity seems at hand are especially remarkable and are found at the beginning of the tale. They are shut down as soon as the narrator loses control over the events. The "unquestionable symbolic truth" of this presentation of the black insurgent might, ultimately, be more a history of denial than a representation of the Other.³⁷ The genre offers the possibility of representation, but its realization depends on the author, who is more or less willing, and able, to let himself be guided by the internal "logic of the plot". The text's form testifies to the ways of voicing the violent confrontations and revolutionary uprootings connected to the Haitian Revolution.

30 The hybrid nature of the text as a whole—the merging of the dramatic and the comic, verse and prose, ancient epos and *poésie galante*—can thus be taken to be the result of a more or less unconscious need to integrate different spheres and experiences that express themselves in separate literary and genre traditions. The intersecting spaces of experience are realized in colliding metropolitan, colonial, as well as aristocratic and bourgeois codes, but also in the framework of genre-poetics.



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Notes

1 The struggle for independence and for the abolition of slavery in the French colony of Saint-Domingue is encompassed in the long historical period of the Haitian Revolution, between 1791 and 1804. This did not only put an end of the richest of the French colonies, but also led to the creation of the first independent nation in Central and South America. It also entailed a short period in which slavery was abolished in the French colonies as a whole (1794). The slave revolt and competing claims to power from colonial middle and upper classes (European and Creole) became historical simultaneities which took place in the transatlantic space between the metropolis, itself shaken by revolution, and the colony. We will not discuss the complex interplay of movements of emancipation among the different social groups involved in the Haitian Revolution. See, for more information, Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World. The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA/London: Belknap, 2004); John D.



Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). See also Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010).

2 The discussion on the “post” in postcolonial studies - how much rupture and continuity it does contain and to what extent - is vast. Several waves of critical re-reading from Ania Loomba to Graham Huggan define the discussion.

3 Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies. The Scribal Politics of Post/Colonial Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008). Charles Forsdick, “Interpreting 2004: Politics, Memory, Scholarship,” in: *Small Axe* 27 (2008): 1-13. Anja Bandau, “Du bon usage de la révolte: Haiti en el discurso Caribeño,” in: *El Caribe y sus Diásporas*, ed. A. Bandau & M. Zapata Galindo (Madrid: Cartografía de saberes y prácticas culturales, 2011): 242-68.

4 I refer to the critiques by Huggan and Loomba concerning tendencies towards a certain reductionism and exoticism. What is at stake here is the theorization of an 18th and 19th century postcoloniality struggling with anachronism. Authors such as Lynn Festa, Daniel Carey, and Timothy Watson pointed out that a historical dimension is often missing, not only in the French context, but also in postcolonial studies, introducing key words such as postcolonial Enlightenment. Chris Bongie polemically argues that Haiti came to mean the site where a “return to the political” in postcolonial literary theory could take place (Chris Bongie, *Friends and Enemies*, 2008).

5 Forsdick, “Interpreting 2004,” 3.

6 Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); David Patrick Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). See also publications by Yves Bénot, Louis Sala-Molins and Marcel Dorigny.

7 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995). Trouillot referred not only to silences in contemporary texts and sources and to the impossibility of thinking this slave emancipation, but also to the modes of invoking the events and how historiography addressed the events, or chose not to.

8 See in this respect John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); as well as the publications by Laurent Dubois and Jeremy Popkin. See also new scholarship in French, such as: Dominique Rogers, *Les livres de couleur dans la capitale de Saint-Domingue: fortune, mentalités, et intégrations à la fin de l'ancien régime (1776--1789)* (Bordeaux: Université Michel de Montaigne, 1999).

9 Christopher Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle. Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2008): 246-273.

10 Nathalie Dessens and Ashli White show a multidirectional mobility of refugees between the Caribbean (Saint-Domingue, Cuba, Jamaica), the United States (Virginia, Massachusetts, New York and, later on, Louisiana) and France at least during the first 20 years after the events designated as the revolution.

11 See Alejandro Gómez' 2010 doctoral dissertation *Le Syndrome de Saint-Domingue*, or Ada Ferrer's recent article “Talk About Haiti: The Archive and the Atlantic's Haitian Revolution”.

12 Walter D. Mignolo, *The darker side of the renaissance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003). Other theorists working in the field are Aníbal Quijano, Fernando Coronil.

13 See Deborah Jensen, *Beyond the Slave Narrative*, 2-3, 18, 24 contesting this criterion of slave emancipation.

14 One of the main tasks of historians in the past ten years has been to research the archives and make available a whole new body of texts. The digitization of documents and archives has importantly facilitated broader research on the sources. I am referring to the various databases provided by Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Gallica), Archives nationales d'outre mer de France (ANOM) as well as digital sources of municipal libraries.

15 I am referring here to the French or francophone context, as the situation in the anglophone world is different.

16 Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed. Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*. (Durham/London: Duke, 2004): x-xi.

17 Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation. The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008): 8.

18 Laurent Dubois is well positioned to do so since he has been appointed in history as well as literary studies at Duke University.

19 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 2004).

20 In a British context, such studies have been undertaken much earlier and in a far more systematic way. The postcolonial re-consideration of the Enlightenment has been researched;



continuity has been found between Enlightenment thought and post-revolutionary developments, as in Timothy Watson, *Caribbean Culture and British Fiction in the Atlantic World 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Lynn Festa's work on sentimental figures in French Enlightenment discourse, readapted in the colonial and imperialist ventures in the late 18th century and during the 19th century is an important landmark in exploring the French context. In France these issues are studied by specialists of Atlantic history. Only lately have French history and colonial history become interrelated objects of study.

21 The manuscript does not indicate the name of its author. However, only recently, two French genealogists, Bernadette and Philippe Rossignol, have identified the author Jean (Paul) Pillet, who was born in 1772 or 1773 in Saint-Domingue and died in 1832. He inherited a plantation in the North of Saint-Domingue at Terrier Rouge, together with his sister, whom he also addresses in his text. For further information see <http://www.ghcaraibe.org/articles/2012-art09.pdf>.

22 Jeremy Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution. Eyewitness accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago/London: Chicago UP, 2007). Together with Jeremy D. Popkin I am preparing an edition of the manuscript under the title *Mon Odyssée: L'Épopée d'un colon de Saint-Domingue, par Jean-Paul Pillet*, ed. by Anja Bandau and Jeremy D. Popkin, Collection "Lire le Dix Huitième Siècle", Paris, Société française d'étude du Dix Huitième Siècle, forthcoming 2014.

23 This is so, although the contemporary discussion included voices that put forth the inefficiency of the system of slavery and the necessity to look for alternatives.

24 Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, p. 63. The original citation (here translated by Jeremy Popkin) is found in anon., *Mon Odyssée*, Historic New Orleans Collection: Puech Parham Papers, MS 85-117-L, vol.1, p. 51.

25 The actual time-frame when the manuscript was written cannot be reconstructed with accuracy. But if we are to believe the allusions made in the text, the author edited his notes between 1800 and 1806 in the United States.

26 The quotations are taken from the manuscript and are reprinted as in the original, leaving the old spelling without correcting inconsistencies in spelling and grammar.

27 Anonymous, *Mon Odyssée*, vol. 1, book 1, 51.

28 The tradition of *anacreontic poetry* constitutes the subjectivity presented in the text. Educated in France, the young author is well trained in this conversational poetry that gives him the possibility to keep his aristocratic, libertine self-image upright and to serve in the course of the events as antidote to his traumatic and disabling experiences of civil war, flight and loss. *Mon Odyssée* shares the reference to ancient mythology with a number of the genre forms of salon writing. The irony and parody with which the texts of the 17th and 18th century often approached the ancient models offer a key to understand the distancing from the epic. For a detailed analysis see: Anja Bandau. "Une Odyssée sans retour: le texte et ses modèles." In *Mon Odyssée: L'Épopée d'un colon de Saint-Domingue, par Jean-Paul Pillet*, ed. by Anja Bandau and Jeremy D. Popkin, Collection "Lire le Dix Huitième Siècle", Paris, Société française d'étude du Dix Huitième Siècle, forthcoming 2014.

29 Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, [1944] 2002).

30 Anonymous, *Mon Odyssée*, vol. 1, book 1, 51-52.

31 "It provides a powerful image of the black insurgency" (Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 63).

32 Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford UP, [1944] 2002).

33 Jeremy Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution. Eyewitness accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago/London: Chicago UP, 2008), 62-63.

34 Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 63.

35 Unpublished paper given by Jeremy Popkin at the French Colonial Historical Society conference in Paris in June 2010.

36 Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 63.

37 Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution*, 64.

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Auteur

Anja Bandau

Université Leibniz Hanovre/Allemagne, Institut d'Études Romanes,
bandau@romanistik.phil.uni-hannover.de

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