

THE NONMAGICAL REALISM OF JACQUES ROUMAIN'S *GOUVERNEURS DE LA ROSÉE*

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Et, quand nous disons que l'homme est responsable de lui-même, nous ne voulons pas dire de sa stricte individualité, mais qu'il est responsable de tous les hommes.

—Jean-Paul Sartre

Gouverneurs de la rosée has received more critical attention than any other Haitian novel and much of that attention has been focused on the “realist” credentials of that novel. That “realism” has been variously defined – from those who have read the novel as a thinly disguised Marxist treatise,¹ to those who see in it a kind of fictionalized ethnography, allowing the reader a glimpse of the “real” daily life of the peasants of the *mornes*. Not all such judgements have been favorable and it is remarkable how many readings of the novel excoriate it for its failure to live up to the aims that *they*, in fact, ascribe to it. Thus, the novel has been criticized for purporting to address the real problems of the peasants while ignoring the documented historical travails of analogous peasant communities in the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac in the 1930s; Roumain has been accused of eluding the contradictions inherent in applying a Marxist revolutionary theory to an undeveloped agrarian society by transforming his hero, Manuel, from militant into Messiah; ethnologists have drawn attention to Roumain’s supposed ignorance of the informal laws of land tenure and succession observed in Haitian rural communities and of the way that Vodou was actually practiced by the peasants.²

The common thread running through such readings is that, whether through ignorance, revolutionary zeal or, conversely, bourgeois conditioning, Roumain somehow wrote the “wrong novel”. I believe that he wrote precisely the novel he intended to write – the problem lies in determining just what that novel is.

I start from an observation – not of something that is present in Jacques Roumain’s masterpiece, but of something that is missing. He wrote to a comrade in 1933: “J’ai beaucoup vécu avec les paysans. Je connais leur vie, leur mentalité, leur religion.”³ If he knew the peasants’ “mentality” as well as he claimed, he would surely have been aware that fundamental to that mentality is a belief in magic – specifically, a belief in magical causation. *Gouverneurs de la rosée* is replete with references to Vodou – especially insofar as that religion is seen to breed resignation – but magic is notably absent. My contention in this article is that the absence of magic in the novel is connected to the other absences detailed by earlier critics. As I shall show, Roumain was well aware of the very real socioeconomic pressures felt by communities such as Fonds-Rouge; he also knew that the peasant “mentality” was mired in magical belief, that the peasant worldview was conditioned by a belief in magical causation. If both of these factors are excluded from the novel, it is, I argue, because Roumain regards both economic causation and magical causation as pretexts. In this, he had much in common with his contemporary Jean-Paul Sartre: when human beings convince themselves that their actions are *caused* (as opposed to conditioned) by factors beyond their control – be they imperialist capitalism expansion, the whims of the loas, or the enchantments of sorcery – they cease in one important respect to be human. Finally, it will be my contention that Roumain wished to place individual responsibility at the heart of his novel: the responsibility that is the correlate of the realization that humans are autonomous human agents.

Between socialist realism and fictionalized ethnography

Over seventy years after its publication in 1944, Jacques Roumain’s *Gouverneurs de la rosée* is now established as perhaps the one undisputed world classic of Haitian literature, but the novel’s status as classic does not imply that its meaning has stabilized over time. Critics have, for example, expressed widely diverging views on the novel’s “realism,” and this article is, in part, a further contribution to that debate. If Roumain’s earlier novel *La Montagne ensorcelée* is held to mark the invention of the Haitian peasant novel, it was *Gouverneurs* that took the genre to new heights and provided the template for its subsequent development. The subject matter of the peasant novel is the life of the peasants as it is lived in the *mornes*, but the genre is also defined by the manner in which the subject matter is presented:

On pourrait dire que les romans paysans sont tous des romans plus ou moins réalistes. Je veux dire que l'on n'y trouve plus les heureux campagnards, frugaux et travailleurs dont Frédéric Marcellin et d'autres enviaient le bucolique contentement. La vie rurale est désormais montrée telle qu'elle est en Haïti: précaire, marginale et abrutissante.⁴

For Léon-François Hoffmann, then, the realism of the genre was defined by its refusal to idealize the peasants and their way of life. But his definition raises questions: it is one thing to represent the visible effects (illness, starvation, hard toil, etc.) of the precarity of rural life, but quite another to analyze the reasons for it. In other words, does a realistic representation of life involve a mimetic reproduction of the outward phenomena of that life, or does it also require an analysis of the reasons *why* that life is as it is?

If that question had been relevant in the earliest days of bourgeois realism, it was perhaps even more so at the time Roumain was writing. At the Soviet Writers' Congress of 1934, Andrei Zhdanov had promulgated what came to be known as the socialist realism doctrine of art. The Congress laid down four guidelines for the production of properly realist art: it must be i) proletarian—that is, relevant to the workers and understandable to them; ii) typical—it must present scenes of the everyday life of the people; iii) realistic—in the representational sense of that term; and iv) partisan—supportive of the aims of the state and the party.⁵ That same year, Roumain co-founded the Haitian Communist Party and published what amounted to a manifesto, the *Analyse Schématique: 32–34*. Although that pamphlet has nothing to say about art, it is quite explicit about the theory that must inform any understanding of the world *as it is*: “La théorie qui est à la base de toute activité socialiste consciente est le *socialisme scientifique* (Marxisme).”⁶ In 1941, Roumain was defining the poet's role in a way that would have met with Moscow's enthusiastic approval: “Specifically, at present, his art must be a first-line weapon at the service of the masses.”⁷ It is unsurprising, therefore, if some critics have sought to understand the realism of *Gouverneurs* as flowing directly from Roumain's political views. Stephen H. Arnold's critical approach to the novel is nothing if not direct in its assessment: “Mais même avec son fond paysan, *Gouverneurs* reste à tous points de vue le meilleur exemple de réalisme socialiste dans la littérature africaine et la littérature de la diaspora.”⁸ And in the villagers' cooperation to bring water to the village, he sees “un embryon de parti de l'avant-garde prolétarienne guidé vers la révolution.”⁹

Arnold's reading is perhaps marked more by wishful thinking than by critical acuity, but it is nevertheless worth pausing to consider what features of *Gouverneurs* led him to

recognize in it a masterpiece of socialist realist art. Assuming that Arnold had in mind the doctrine promulgated in 1934, it could be agreed that *Gouverneurs* aims for a certain typicality: it presents numerous scenes characteristic of the everyday life of the Haitian peasantry (the Vodou ceremony, the *coumbite*, the stories and riddles of Antoine, the wake for Manuel, etc.). But the extent to which the novel satisfies the other criteria for socialist art is less clear.

Writing three years before Arnold, the Haitian intellectual and novelist Jean-Claude Figiolé presents a point-by-point refutation—*avant la lettre*—of Arnold’s assessment, bearing specifically on the two criteria of “realism” and *partinost*.¹⁰ While Arnold sees Manuel as a positive hero, resolving conflict and setting the community on the path toward socialist revolution, Figiolé finds the ending false and contrived; far from being a positive hero, Manuel dies a “stupid and useless death” that resolves nothing:

Or, vivant, après avoir trouvé l’eau et réalisé l’unité dans le dépassement des antagonismes de classe, Manuel aurait à peine commencé sa lutte contre la légalité politique. Il se serait donné des objectifs véritablement révolutionnaires dont la réalisation aurait exigé la mobilisation de la collectivité, non autour d’intérêts, mais pour une prise de conscience des véritables problèmes de la paysannerie haïtienne.¹¹

Not only does Figiolé consider that *Gouverneurs* is deficient in *partinost*; he also questions the representative realism of the novel, accusing Roumain of having perpetrated an “escamotage . . . des vrais problèmes de la société rurale haïtienne.”¹²

Figiolé’s article reads like the damning report of a cultural commissar, and it provoked some fierce reactions. Jean Dominique, for one, remarks: “Figiolé juge le roman et son personnage d’après un modèle établi d’avance ou une idée préconçue.”¹³ Chief among Figiolé’s assumptions is that Roumain *must* have been trying to write a novel in tune with his Marxist convictions *because* he was co-founder of the Haitian Communist Party. This is also the assumption guiding Michel Serres’s influential 1973 article “Le Christ noir,” which states: “Jacques Roumain exprime clairement une thèse politique globale, issue du marxisme. Sans raffinement ni scolastique, et donc bien adaptée.”¹⁴ But Roumain encountered a problem, Serres argues, when it came to translating a doctrine that evolved in the industrialized North to the agrarian society of Haiti. This difficulty led Roumain—again, according to Serres—to fall back on a religious resolution at odds with the supposed atheism

of Marxism: “[Le récit] n’est même pas isomorphe à la thèse, il est un rêve religieux, celui-là même que l’auteur, le héros, tous ensemble, tenaient à congédier définitivement.”¹⁵

Rather than assuming what Roumain tried (but failed) to write, or what he *should have* written, I start from what he *did* write (or even what he chose not to). To begin, then, a deceptively straightforward question: to what extent does Fonds-Rouge correspond to what we know about actual peasant communities in the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac in the 1930s? In order to answer that question, I would like to put to one side, for now, debates about the “political message” of *Gouverneurs* in order to focus on what might be called the “ethnographic referentiality” of the novel and its alleged deficiencies.

The most extensive consideration of Roumain’s credentials as an ethnologist is found in a long article by the late Belgian ethnographer André-Marcel d’Ans, “Jacques Roumain et la fascination de l’ethnologie.” Roumain was, it seems, a latecomer to ethnology, and he never really practiced as an ethnographer. He followed Paul Rivet’s course at the Paris Institut d’Ethnologie in 1937–1938. In 1939–1940 he spent several months attempting to sign up for courses at Columbia University but was prevented from doing so by his straitened financial circumstances.¹⁶ Moving on to Cuba at the end of 1940, he met the celebrated anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, who encouraged him to complete a study of pre-Columbian ethnobotany that he had started some years earlier in Paris. D’Ans is not impressed by that work, describing it as “une œuvre bizarre, qui révèle crûment l’amateurisme de son auteur.”¹⁷ Returning to Haiti in 1941, Roumain became friends with the French ethnographer Alfred Métraux. With the latter’s encouragement he pushed for the creation of a Bureau d’Ethnologie in Haiti. When the Bureau was founded in October 1941 by presidential decree, Roumain was named director despite not possessing any formal qualifications in ethnology or having completed a single ethnographic field trip. Indeed, the sum total of Roumain’s fieldwork in Haiti between May 1941 and October 1942 (when he left for Mexico) was focused on archaeological digs.

Roumain’s first venture into Vodou proper—as an ethnographer, that is—resulted in the publication in 1943 of *Le Sacrifice du tambour-assôtô(r)*. D’Ans is scarcely more complimentary about this work than he had been about the pre-Columbian ethnobotany, describing it as “incompréhensible” and complaining that the perplexed reader is “incapable de démêler ce qui relève éventuellement d’une relation de faits saisis sur le motif par le regard de l’auteur, ou d’élucubrations ne reposant que sur des informations aléatoires” (*JRFE*

1420). None of this is surprising, d'Ans claims, given Roumain's social origins and the likelihood that he had never been confronted in his childhood and youth with the world of Vodou.¹⁸

In criticizing Roumain's ethnological works, d'Ans is entitled, as a specialist in Haitian ethnology himself, to flag the factual errors these works may contain—that is, the extent to which they do not correspond to ethnographic data. But when he moves on to consider the picture of peasant life presented in Roumain's fiction, especially in *Gouverneurs*, he can do no more than comment on the “vraisemblance” (real-seemingness or plausibility) of Roumain's account of this peasant community (*JRFE* 1423). Without getting into the finer points of narratology, one can note that the notion of *vraisemblance* refers only to fictional works, rather than to scientific ones: readers might have doubts about the way, say, Melville Herskovits collected his data, or even how he interpreted it, but would not think of criticizing *Life in a Haitian Valley* as being *invraisemblable*. Plausibility concerns the correspondence between a literary representation and reality as we know it—or at least reality *as we think we know it* (“L'idée qu'on se fait de la réalité”).¹⁹

Thus, having praised the realism of the language Roumain placed in the mouths of his peasants, d'Ans continues: “On ne peut malheureusement pas dire que *cette impression de vraisemblance* se retrouve sur le fond, où il se confirme que l'auteur ignore à peu près tout de la vie paysanne” (*JRFE* 1423, italics mine). The charge of ignorance he levels at Roumain is comprehensive: how can we believe, he asks, that a community such as this would have lost track of its water? How likely is it that an individual, after an absence of fifteen years, would return and be able to locate a spring within walking distance of the village? Moreover, who owns the land on which the spring is located?²⁰ For d'Ans, it is obvious that “Jacques Roumain n'a pas la moindre idée de ce que sont, dans la campagne haïtienne, les règles de succession et d'appropriation foncière” (*JRFE* 1423). D'Ans's scepticism is echoed by Gérard Barthélemy: “Dans un environnement rural déjà entièrement occupé . . . le grand espace vide qui semble entourer Fonds-Rouge *n'est pas plausible*.”²¹

The famous *coumbite* fares no better. *Gouverneurs* opens and closes on a *coumbite*: Bienaimé remembers one at the start and another brings the water to the village at the end. But if the description of the *coumbite* itself is accurate enough, Roumain's interpretation of its significance does not, for d'Ans, correspond to observed reality.²² Far from being the expression of an organic community or even, as Manuel appears at times to imagine, a model

for the collectivization of the means of production, the *coubite* was—as any fieldworker will tell you, writes d’Ans—“une forme coutumière de captation de la main d’oeuvre au bénéfice des mieux nantis” (*JRFE* 1423).²³ Herskovits makes a similar point, albeit in a less pointed way.²⁴

Finally, while the Vodou ceremony held to give thanks for the safe return of Manuel is not necessarily fanciful, it does not correspond to the way that Vodou is actually practiced in the Haitian countryside. It resembles more the kind of urban Vodou that could easily be observed by visitors to the city. Rural Vodou, as described at length by Herskovits, Métraux, Jean Kerboull, and others, is somewhat different. First, it is practiced not for all to see but rather in the privacy of the *lakou*. Second, it is intimately connected to what is ostensibly the central theme of Roumain’s novel: the peasants’ relation to the land. D’Ans goes so far as to say that the (informal) laws of inheritance (that is, the transmission of land) and the cult of the *lwa heritaj* are the basis of all social cohesion in the Haitian countryside.²⁵ To fail to grasp that, “c’est se condamner à ne rien comprendre aux conflits paysans, et à devoir en imaginer d’autres pour construire une intrigue qui, loin de se rapporter aux paysans réels, ne concerne plus qu’une paysannerie abstraite, esthétisée, ethnologiquement fantasmée” (*JRFE* 1424). The evaluations of these ethnographers suggest that wherever else Roumain’s realism may reside, it is not to be found in his account of the practices and customs of the community of Fonds-Rouge.

Both Fignolé and, for different reasons, d’Ans accuse Roumain, in essence, of having written the wrong novel. That is an odd claim. The novelist – any novelist – establishes and defines the frame of the novel, and a frame is as significant for what it (deliberately) excludes as for what it contains. I believe that magic – both magic practices and what I term the “magical worldview” – is the single most important exclusion from Roumain’s novel. The fact that it is left outside of the frame, I shall argue, adds a decisive coloration to what remains within it.

Magic and the Peasant “Mentality”

Whether as ethnologist or novelist, Roumain had every reason to be interested in magical beliefs, inasmuch as magic is central to the Haitian worldview, or mentality—a worldview that extends even to Haiti’s urban elites, whether they admit it or not. The importance of what could broadly be termed “magic” in Haitian rural life is attested to by the fact that all the major ethnographic studies of those rural communities have dwelled on it at

length. Herskovits dedicates a chapter (“Magic, Good and Bad”) to the subject, as does Métraux. Kerboull published a whole book on the subject, in addition to an earlier work that had examined in depth the relationship between magic and Vodou. As I discuss later, Barthélemy also attaches much importance to magic in *L’Univers rural haïtien*.

Métraux defines magic thus: “Toute manipulation de forces occultes, toute utilisation des vertus ou propriétés immanentes aux choses ou aux êtres, toute technique par laquelle le monde surnaturel se laisse dominer, régenter ou utiliser à des fins personnelles.”²⁶ He goes on to say that magic is hard to distinguish from Vodou, but I would suggest that a crucial difference between them is that magic is solicited, provided, practiced, and (usually) suffered by *individuals*. Kerboull, for his part, distinguishes not only between Vodou proper but also between magic and witchcraft.²⁷ The difficulty of maintaining that separation in practice comes from the fact that their practitioners could be one and the same person: the *houngan* who officiates at purely religious ceremonies or who provides herbal remedies may also be a *bòkò* (sorcerer). This is because the effective force behind both cures and curses is the spirit world, and the *lwas* can be served “with the right hand” or “with the left”—that is, for good or for evil.

The prevalence of magical beliefs and practices among the Haitian peasantry has usually been attributed to backwardness or ignorance. The position expressed by Jean Price-Mars in his preface to Roumain’s *La Montagne ensorcelée* is typical of the habitual condescension of the Haitian intellectual elites. Speaking as a self-proclaimed “type intellectualisé et affranchi,” Price-Mars bemoans the ignorance of the “primitive mentality”:

Son esprit rebelle à l’inquiétude critique est inapte à soupçonner la part de déterminisme bio-physique que contient le complexe de la vie. Dès lors, sa logique rationnelle étant frappée d’infirmité, il se fige avec complaisance dans les mailles denses du Mystère dont il se sent enveloppé de toutes parts.²⁸

Manuel’s speech eschews the pseudo-technical terminology, but it expresses a similar sentiment:

On prie pour la pluie, on prie pour la récolte, on dit les oraisons des saints et des loa. Mais la Providence, laisse-moi te dire, c’est le propre vouloir du nègre de ne pas accepter le malheur, de dompter chaque jour la mauvaise volonté de la terre. (*GDLR* 49)

Were it present in *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, magic would fit easily within the opposition between reason and unreason that the novel itself appears to promote as the salient opposition. But it is not certain that magic can be neatly contained within that opposition: magic has a *social function* that elevates it above mere superstition

In his influential *L'Univers rural haïtien*, Barthélemy understands magic as just one element within a much wider “system” that conditions all aspects of the lives of the peasants.²⁹ He situates the historical origins of that system in the immediate post-independence of Haiti in 1804. At that juncture, the crucial opposition was between Creoles and Bossales (the former were born in Saint-Domingue and were, for the most part, freed former slaves; the latter were born in Africa and constituted the overwhelming majority of Haiti’s population) : “L’opposition des classes a dû se transformer en un système de colonie interne où la nation créole, n’ayant jamais pu assimiler la nation bossale, n’a su que l’asservir.”³⁰

If the peasants’ attitude towards the outside (the Creole state) consisted in resisting its incursions, the internal organization of peasant society was geared at every level towards the maintenance of a strict egalitarianism. The logic is simple: if capital accumulation and the extraction of surplus value were the thin end of a wedge that had led to the horrors of the colonial plantation system, then measures must be put in place in peasant communities to nip in the bud the potential development of *distinction*, which they understood as wealth, power, or prestige.³¹

The system described by Barthélemy is a self- regulating equilibrium designed specifically to stifle development, because, for the peasants, development does not point to the future but back to the oppressive past of the plantation. It comprises mechanisms put in place to prevent “l’apparition de tendances de prise de pouvoir en bloquant dès leur naissance toutes les structures porteuses de déséquilibres inter-individuels” (*URH* 29), and it is enforced by constant vigilance exercised by each member of the group on all of the other individuals in the group: “On imagine le poids permanent et omniprésent du regard de l’autre qui conduit à la règle d’or du comportement individuel qui est la ‘respectabilité’” (*URH* 34).

Given that peasant society is geared explicitly and implicitly, according to Barthélemy, towards the suppression of individualism and, in particular, individual betterment, it is unsurprising if the Other is perceived as constant potential threat: “L’empiètement de l’autre apparaît toujours comme hautement probable, et il faut toujours s’en prémunir, surtout s’il est considéré, à tort ou à raison, comme prenant une forme

agressive” (*URH* 35). It is against that background of always potentially antagonistic interpersonal relationships that Barthélemy understands the function of magic and witchcraft: “Contre cette agression toujours appréhendée, toujours suspecte, le moyen de défense le plus approprié est la sorcellerie” (*URH* 35). In *Life in a Haitian Valley*, Herskovits devotes many pages to descriptions of the manufacture of magical expedients purchased with a view to self-protection; their names in French (*gardes, arrêts*) speak precisely to their function.

In “Voyage au pays des Gouverneurs”, Barthélemy makes one further point about the psychology of the peasants who inhabit this magical world : “Ce monde du regard permanent de l’un sur l’autre . . . est un monde où la faute n’est pas intériorisée à travers la culpabilité mais, au contraire, extériorisée à travers le mécanisme de la persécution.”³² The reaction of the individual caught out in wrongdoing is never a heartfelt *mea culpa* but an aggressive *sua culpa*: he has been slandered, the one who denounced him is motivated by personal ambition, he is a victim of ill-intentioned gossip etc. In other words, in a world where first causes are held to be hidden and possibly unknowable, it is not only guilt that disappears, but *responsibility*. This point about the “irresponsible”³³ mentality characterizing this world is central to my argument in this article. Put briefly, Roumain needs first to make his peasants guilty before he can make them responsible. I should now like to contrast the restricted role accorded to magic in *Gouverneurs* with another of Roumain’s peasant novels – one in which magic is given free rein.

Magic in *Gouverneurs* and *La Montagne ensorcelée*

In truth, magic is not entirely absent from *Gouverneurs*: it runs through it like an undercurrent that never quite breaks through to the surface. There are, for example, three direct references to *lougrou*.³⁴ In Haitian folklore, *lougrou* are not the werewolves of European tradition but (usually) old women who are thought to possess magical powers, including the power to fly through the air, transform themselves into a range of different creatures, and suck the blood of small children.³⁵ In *Gouverneurs*, these references play no part in the plot and function solely as local color.

Elsewhere in the novel the power of magic is metaphorized, and passes almost unnoticed. Manuel’s first reaction to the desolation of Fonds-Rouge is “*Parece comme une malédiction*” (*GDLR* 30, original italics), while, as I discuss later, the community may have had every reason to blame their misfortune on a curse. At the end of the chapter in which Bienaimé explains the origin of the dissension in the village, Manuel gloomily surveys the

roofs of the dwellings: “Dans chaque case macérait le poison noir de la vengeance” (*GDLR* 59). Readers would doubtless understand this “black poison” as a metaphor, but in a community such as Fonds-Rouge the recourse to a (magically activated) poison may well have been considered an appropriate form of vengeance. Upon realizing her love for Manuel, Annaïse exclaims: “Ah Dieu bon Dieu, quel était ce sortilège? Certains maudits . . . connaissent les maléfices qui changent un homme en bête, en plante ou en roche. . . . Et je ne suis plus la même, qu’est-ce qui m’arrive?” (*GDLR* 93). Annaïse’s naïve musings may appear a banal variant on the oldest of all commonplaces that a lover has been “bewitched” by the loved one, but in reality love potions are amongst the most frequently purchased magical expedients in Haiti. Finally, there is the case of Mauléon, whose wife, Cia, is suffering from a fever that conventional medicine has been unable to treat: “Dorméus prétendait qu’un malfaisant avait jeté un sort sur elle; il demandait une quantité d’argent pour l’en débarrasser, le rapace” (*GDLR* 136). But even here, the possibility that one of the other peasants really had placed a curse on Cia is pushed into the background by the emphasis given to the exploitative actions of the *houngan* Dorméus—all the more so as the novel has just shown that Mauléon and his wife are deeply in debt to the equally rapacious Florentine. All of this encourages the reader to think in terms of rational rather than magical causation.

In the above instances, magic is either treated as local color or rationalized. But while magical beliefs are evoked in these ways, there is a striking *absence of reference* to magic at certain key moments of the plot. The narrative is driven by the fact of the drought that afflicts the community—even when neighboring communities are unaffected. The beginnings of the drought are never elucidated, but the implication is that it began after the feud that saw the killing of Dorisca (the leader of another branch of the extended clan) and the imprisonment and death of Sauveur (Manuel’s paternal uncle) the killing happens in the midst of a *coumbite*, which means that the land was still fertile and productive at that point). As other critics have pointed out, the obvious inference is that the events are somehow connected, but the only explanatory system capable of establishing such a connection is magic.³⁶ Observing a community very similar to Fonds-Rouge, Herskovits remarks that magic is always the prime suspect in the case of crop failure.³⁷ Yet in Roumain’s novel, the possibility that the drought is in fact the vengeance of the restless souls of Dorisca and Sauveur is raised briefly and obliquely, only to be dismissed as a “vieille histoire” (*GDLR* 135).³⁸

Another key event in the plot from which magic is unexpectedly absent is the discovery of the spring by Manuel—and the villagers’ reaction. Other critics, as I have

mentioned, have remarked on the implausibility of that discovery, but what is scarcely more plausible is that the villagers would have accepted that Manuel—who after all is a quasi-outsider, having been absent in Cuba for the previous fifteen years—would have been able to locate the spring without *supernatural* assistance. The power of divination either runs in families or can be purchased, along with a range of other powers that may give someone an edge over their neighbor.³⁹ In the Mirebalais described by Herskovits, the peasants appear to have spent much time and energy (not to mention money) on buying charms to give themselves just such an advantage or to protect themselves against the charms purchased by others. An individual seeking such powers may enlist the help of a *baka* (demon) and enter into an *engagement*. Such a pact inevitably leads to his or her undoing.

Given the importance of Manuel's discovery, not to mention the power and prestige (distinction) it could have given him, it is at least surprising that none of the peasants allege magical malpractice, but rather seem content to believe that he just happened to be good at finding water! Curiously enough, the text does raise the possibility of just such a magical explanation but dismisses it immediately. Délira wonders: "Qu'est-ce que [Manuel] peut bien chercher dans ces mornes? Peut-être un trésor? Mais on prétend que pour trouver un trésor il faut avoir des compromissions avec le diable. Manuel n'en est pas capable" (*GDLR* 106). Thirty pages later, when the news of Manuel's miraculous discovery is broken, the association between magic and treasure is raised again: "Les uns assuraient que c'était vrai, d'autres que non, certains allaient jusqu'à affirmer que Manuel avait rapporté de Cuba un bâton magique qui découvrait les sources et même les trésors" (*GDLR* 133). But that line of thinking is taken no further—even though the rival clan, especially Gervilen, would have had every reason to denounce Manuel as a sorcerer.

The third oddly nonmagical major event is Manuel's death. The reader knows that Manuel falls victim to the jealous rage of a love rival, but the villagers are asked to believe that a vigorous, healthy young man should succumb in a matter of hours to a mysterious Cuban fever.⁴⁰ In the communities described by Herskovits, Moral, Barthélemy, and others, all deaths are potentially "suspicious" – if one defines a suspicious death as one that may have been caused by the intervention of a third party – given that, the incursion of the Other is always to be feared and expected.⁴¹ In fairness to Roumain, he does not strain plausibility to the point of ignoring the possibility of magical causation altogether, but again, the explanation is quickly rejected:

L'événement leur tombe sur la tête comme un quartier de roche. Ils sont écrasés. Un nègre si gaillard. Hier encore, je lui disais à Manuel: compère Manuel . . . C'est pas naturel, non, c'est pas naturel. Mais à toutes les questions, Délira répond: la fièvre, les mauvaises fièvres de Cuba. (*GDLR* 165–166)

For the peasants described by Herskovits, Moral, Métraux, and Barthélemy, the causation would have been obvious: Manuel was paying the price for the *engagement* that permitted him to discover the spring in the first place: as Herskovits writes, “When a god is bought, it is always acquired so as to enhance the position of its owner at all costs, despite the knowledge that the power thus purchased is dearly bought, bringing its own eventual punishment.”⁴² But Roumain’s peasants allow themselves to be fobbed off by a story of Cuban fever that is scarcely more credible than an *engagement* with a *baka*. At every turn of the plot, then, Roumain favors explanations that are apparently rational (as opposed to magical) when it comes to motivating events in the narrative or justifying the actions and reactions of the characters—and he does so despite the fact that it makes the text less plausible, at least from an ethnographic point of view.⁴³

The obvious question is: why? It cannot be that Roumain was simply unaware of the importance of magic and magical beliefs in Haitian peasant society. First, as shown above, the text flirts with a magical order of explanation, but Roumain keeps it securely confined within the boundaries of folklore, local color, or the idle chatter of ignorant *commères*. Second, Roumain had already demonstrated a deep knowledge of the importance of magic in peasant society in a text published thirteen years before *Gouverneurs*. A brief discussion of that text will also serve to demonstrate that Roumain himself had grasped perfectly the deep connection between magical beliefs, on the one hand, and personal or collective “irresponsibility” on the other.

Roumain’s *La Montagne ensorcelée* (1931) is regarded by some as the book that inaugurated the peasant novel genre in Haiti. It takes place in an unnamed village clinging to the side of a hill somewhere in the north-east of Haiti. The village is blighted: the novel opens on a scene of drought and desolation similar to that described in *Fonds-Rouge*. Soon, the drought gives way to torrential rains that wash away what was left of the villagers’ crops: people and animals fall ill, children die; somebody must be responsible for these calamities. The finger of blame is pointed at Placinette, a reclusive old woman who has a reputation as a *doktè fey* (practitioner of herbal medicine) and perhaps more. The principal rational voice of

the novel is that of the *chef de section* Balletroy. But Balletroy is in love with Placinette's daughter, Grâce, and she is in love with another, Aurel. Out of spite and injured pride, Balletroy withdraws his protection from Placinette and tricks her into confronting the villagers who, manipulated by the cynical maneuverings of a peasant (Baptiste) who covets her land, believe her to be a sorceress. She is stoned to death and her daughter is decapitated by another peasant (Dornival), himself driven to insanity by the death of his own child. Aurel arrives with the police just too late to prevent the killings.

La Montagne ensorcelée anticipates many of the themes later developed in *Gouverneurs*—it even uses the same device for its dénouement: the vengeance of the jealous lover—but it treats them in a very different way. If magic is relegated to the background of *Gouverneurs*, it takes center stage in the earlier novel. The representation of Placinette, the novel's central figure, contains considerable ambiguity about her status as a sorceress: is she merely a harmless old woman who falls victim to the superstitious ignorance of the peasants and to their need to find a scapegoat, or is the reader meant to suspect that she may indeed have supernatural powers? The key scene is a conversation between Placinette and Balletroy, who has come to warn her that the villagers are in an ugly mood and are searching for a scapegoat: “Ils cherchent un coupable. Tu les connais, Placinette, c'est un monde ignorant, mais il faut prendre des précautions.”⁴⁴ The discussion immediately shifts to guilt and persecution: “Hein, alors la coupable, c'est moi-même?” replies Placinette (*LME* 218–219). As she speaks, she leaps from her chair “avec une souplesse stupéfiante” and with burning eyes (*LME* 218–219)—uncanny details designed, I would suggest, to sow doubt in the mind of the reader. She goes on to complain that the villagers have been persecuting her for years because she knows herbal medicine and because her two former husbands have died. But confiding in Balletroy that her father (Occéna Tithomme) had indeed been a sorcerer does not help her case:

Tout le voisinage sait ce qu'il y a. Et tu vois venir dès la brune, une bande de gens.
Il s'enferme avec chacun d'eux et tu peux entendre:

—Tithomme, papa, j'ai un voisin qui est ennuyant.

—Bon, et après.

—Occéna, cher. C'est une prière, fais quelque chose contre lui. . . .

Quelques jours après tu apprends, un tel est mort, une telle est malade et on prépare déjà le cercueil pour elle. (*LME* 221)

Occéna is finally taken by the soldiers and shot, presumably for practicing sorcery. His last words are “Ah! c’est pas ma faute!” Despite her assurances that she is not like her father (occult powers are believed in Haiti to be passed from parents to children), the peasants’ suspicions seem rather less irrational. And those suspicions are not allayed by the manner of her death. The peasants are closing in for the kill:

Alors elle cria d’une voix incroyable:

—*Vodoudoho!*

Ils s’arrêtèrent brisés nets dans leur élan. Ils se heurtaient à cette malédiction comme à un rocher. (*LME* 240)

For the reading I am proposing of *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, the single most interesting thing to take away from this dark novel is that phrase “Ah! c’est pas ma faute!” Barthélemy also singles out this phrase: “Ce *ce pa fot moin*, il faut que Roumain l’ait entendu et ait véritablement compris son appel et son message.”⁴⁵ He sees in it confirmation of his view that Vodou and *a fortiori* magic constitute a world in which (personal) guilt does not exist because it is immediately exteriorized as persecution. The magical realm is the realm of *irresponsibility*.

Magical beliefs and practices are most often held to arise from a prescientific worldview. This was the point made by Price-Mars in his preface to *La Montagne ensorcelée* and indeed by Roumain himself in his short article “A propos de la campagne anti-superstitieuse,” published two years before *Gouverneurs*: “Les superstitions appartiennent à la pré-histoire de la pensée humaine. . . . Tous les peuples ont conservé le résidu de cet héritage des âges obscurs dans leurs croyances religieuses populaires, leurs pratiques magiques et même leur philosophie.”⁴⁶ Viewed in this way, the effective banishment of magic from *Gouverneurs* could be understood as central to the rationalistic message of the novel. It would also reinforce a reading that sees the central concern of the novel as being the opposition between reason and unreason, here represented as scientific (Marxist) modernity, on the one hand, and a traditional belief system (Vodou) that impedes the progress of the peasants, on the other.

Such a reading is obviously valid, but, as I shall now argue, matters are perhaps not quite that straightforward. I propose to view magic—or its absence—as part of a slightly different opposition: that between responsibility and irresponsibility. Several commentators⁴⁷ have remarked on the somewhat fanciful nature of Roumain’s representation of peasant agronomy, and nowhere is this more evident than in the explanations proffered by *Gouverneurs* for the causes of the drought that afflicts the peasants: deforestation. Given that it is drought which drives the whole plot of the novel, it is surprising that only one critic, to my knowledge, has underlined the implausibility of that drought – in terms of its location, duration and, above all, its cause (the supposed ignorance of the peasants): “Les agriculteurs savaient, avant les experts et les agronomes ... qu’on ne déboise pas impunément un morne ... Elle est improbable, l’erreur de Fonds-Rouge.”⁴⁸ Roumain’s narrator, and his central character in the novel, Manuel, nevertheless go out of their way to pin the blame for that situation firmly on the shoulders of the peasants. The first mention of deforestation comes only three pages into the novel. As Bienaimé—adrift in a calamitous present—daydreams about the lost Golden Age, readers become privy to his train of thought: “Pour sûr qu’ils avaient eu tort de déboiser. . . . Ils avaient incendié le bois pour faire des jardins de vivres: planté les pois-congo sur le plateau, le maïs à flanc de coteau” (*GDLR* 15). If this is understood as free indirect discourse, it is clear that Bienaimé is himself included among the culprits. On his return, Manuel berates the villagers for their foolishness: “J’ai vu que vous avez déboisé les mornes. La terre est nue et sans protection” (*GDLR* 39) and then proceeds to explain—presumably more for the benefit of the reader than the peasants—why chopping down trees on mountainsides is a bad idea, especially in tropical climes! He also frames this action as partaking in a cycle of guilt and retribution: “C’est le nègre qui abandonne la terre et il reçoit sa punition” (*GDLR* 39). A little later, he upbraids Laurélien in the same terms. However, the latter gives a different reason from that of Bienaimé for the deforestation (“On a éclairci pour le bois-neuf, on a coupé pour la charpente et le faîtage des cases” [*GDLR* 54]) only to add, somewhat implausibly: “On ne savait pas nous-mêmes. L’ignorance et le besoin marchent ensemble, pas vrai?” (*GDLR* 54). Either way, the message is clear: the peasants have brought the catastrophe on their own heads through a mixture of ignorance, greed, and recklessness. But that message does not tally with extradiegetic reality, and Roumain surely knew that.

Deforestation began in earnest in Saint-Domingue in the colonial period, with the clearing of land for large-scale agriculture, and accelerated rapidly following independence.⁴⁹

Throughout the nineteenth century, Haiti was stripped of nearly all of its precious tropical hardwoods by successive governments forced to export whatever commodities they had in order to pay down the crippling indemnity extorted by France in 1825 as the price for recognizing Haitian independence. By the end of the century, most of that wood had disappeared forever. Deforestation continued to be driven by external demand in the first decades of the twentieth century, this time by US companies operating in the country during the US occupation (1915–1934). In telling contrast to Roumain’s depiction, Marie Vieux-Chauvet’s *Amour* contains a vignette in which the rapacious Mr. Long forces the local peasants to chop down and sell their trees following the global collapse in coffee prices in the mid-1930s. They do so reluctantly and even though they are *perfectly aware* of the dangers attendant on removing the tree cover from the surrounding hillsides.⁵⁰

By the 1930s the main driver of deforestation was internal rather than external: the wood was used for building peasants’ huts and fences, for producing lime, and above all, as an energy source: traditionally wood or wood charcoal has been the only source of energy for over 90 percent of Haiti’s population.⁵¹ In light of this, it is curious that Roumain should choose to single out the clearance of land for expanded agricultural activity (“jardins de vivres”) as the main driver of deforestation around Fonds-Rouge. In so doing, he is simply echoing the common criticism of ignorance and backwardness leveled at the peasants by the Haitian urban political elites. The truth is that Haitian peasants—historically and to this day—do not engage in deforestation out of ignorance and greed: they do so out of necessity.⁵² The real, underlying cause of the phenomenon lies in the egregious social inequalities that plague Haitian society.⁵³ This dynamic was already underway at the period in which Roumain’s novel is set, but the author shows a wilful disregard for mitigating factors such as social inequality, preferring instead to lay the blame for their plight solely at the feet of the peasants. It is true that the mechanisms of peasant exploitation are present in the novel (the *chef de section*, the market inspectors, loan sharks, local lawyers, magistrates, and surveyors) but they are never described as factors contributing directly or indirectly to the catastrophe that has befallen Fonds-Rouge. Instead, the text returns obsessively to a narrow theme of guilt-punishment-redemption.

Had he wanted to, Roumain could have found further mitigation for the peasants’ actions in what Figolé and d’Ans refer to, respectively, as the “real problems” and the “real difficulties” that peasants in the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac faced at the period. For both writers, the problems concerned persecution and exploitation from the outside. Figolé writes:

La misère des paysans n'est pas la conséquence de la sécheresse, encore moins de leur mentalité magico-religieuse. Elle résulte des rapports techniques et sociaux de production; régime foncier caractérisé par la grande propriété aux mains des grands dons et de l'état.⁵⁴

D'Ans, for his part, broadens the charge sheet to include the predatory HASCO: "En effet, cette région avait été, à partir des années 20, le théâtre de graves dépossessions paysannes, du fait de la rapacité foncière de la Haytian American Sugar Company (HASCO)" (*JRFE* 1424). D'Ans is, again, accusing Roumain of having written the wrong novel: "D'autres difficultés [apart from drought] ne manquaient pas qui, si l'auteur en avait eu conscience et voulu en traiter, l'aurait assurément conduit à écrire un roman différent" (*JRFE* 1424).

If d'Ans had read Roumain's *Analyse schématique* 32-34, in which he fulminates at length against "les conquêtes de la HASCO, et de PETTIGREW, de la Compagnie des Ananas contre la masse paysanne," he would have known that Roumain was in no way ignorant of the problems or difficulties faced by the peasants.⁵⁵ The question, therefore, is why he *chose* to exclude that whole socioeconomic back-story from the plight of the peasants of Fonds-Rouge. Roumain was no less aware of the centrality of magical beliefs and practices to peasant life than he was of the real forces that conditioned their actions from the outside. His deliberate minimization of both of these aspects is connected to what I called at the start of this article the problematic "message" of his novel.

If Roumain chose to exclude important aspects of the reality confronting communities like the one he depicts, it could be because that reality concerned a relation to the "elsewhere" that he wished to eliminate from the equation. It seems clear that Roumain was seeking to remove excuses—whether those excuses lay in the HASCO boardroom, in the villas of the rapacious big landowners, or in "ces régions irréelles et louches où les guettait la déraison farouche des dieux africains" (*GDLR* 68). It is as if Roumain believed that placing the blame on external forces is itself a form of magical thinking, even if those forces happen to be real. To put this another way, it is as if he had wanted to deprive his peasants of the recourse to the mentality of "ce pa fot mouin."

That, of course, is very much in line with Manuel's castigation of the resignation of the peasants in the face of the tribulations they are enduring. But critics have been too ready to explain Manuel's attitude as a function of the atheism assumed to be part and parcel of his supposed Marxist beliefs. There is nothing specifically—or exclusively—Marxist in his

criticisms of their pious resignation, and neither are Marxism and religious faith necessarily mutually exclusive: the example of liberation theology proves the contrary, as does, perhaps, the (early) career of Jean-Bertrand Aristide. If Roumain did indeed write the novel he intended to write, its message appears less crudely political than fundamentally humanistic. I take “humanism” to denote a conviction that human being is all there is; that humans are free, autonomous agents and, as such, must act to give meaning to their own lives and to the lives of others without recourse to an ethics deriving from the supernatural (religion, magic etc.). Above all, the ethical dimension of humanism is constructed on empathy: the capacity to recognize the other as another “myself”. With that recognition comes the kind of responsibility succinctly defined by Jean-Paul Sartre in the quotation used as an epigraph for this article: “Et, quand nous disons que l’homme est responsable de lui-même, nous ne voulons pas dire de sa stricte individualité, mais qu’il est responsable de tous les hommes”.⁵⁶

The final pages of the novel provide a telling image of collective responsibility: “Mais à travers la plaine courait la saignée du canal vers les bayahondes éclaircis à son passage. Et si on avait de bons yeux, on pouvait voir dans les jardins les rigoles préparées” (*GDLR* 197). The ramifications of the canal are more important than the canal itself: the collective labor required to bring the water to the individual plots is as nothing compared to the demands made henceforth on the individual responsibility of each peasant. If those upstream fail to recognize their responsibility to those downstream—by keeping the channel free of weeds, by de-silting it, by stopping their livestock from polluting the water, etc.—then the whole system collapses. The idea, briefly floated by Manuel (*GDLR* 127), that they could create a management committee (a “syndic”) is never developed, and for good reason. Water management by way of a syndic dates back to colonial Saint-Domingue, and cooperation was enforced through violence, or the threat of violence, as throughout the colonial system.⁵⁷ In contrast to the vertical hierarchy of the colonial syndic, Roumain proposes a horizontal—almost rhizomatic—distribution of responsibility: the water comes down from on high but is shared horizontally. Each individual accepts his or her responsibility as implying a responsibility to others. While the villagers’ collective labor doubtless reflects their pragmatism, that kind of *sustained* collective praxis requires a foundation that is stronger than momentary self-interest and I do not believe that Roumain wished his readers to view their endeavors as the fruit of mere pragmatism. The irrigation system that brings life back to Fonds-Rouge also brings a new moral life.

Conclusion

If Roumain had intended to analyze what Fignolé called the “real problems” besetting the real peasants of the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac, then *Gouverneurs de la rosée* falls woefully short of the mark. If he had set out to rival the ethnographic exactitude of Herskovits, Moral, and Métraux in his portrayal of Fonds-Rouge, then the book fails on a second count. It is simpler to conclude that he wrote what he set out to write, namely: a *secular parable*. That is to say, short, didactic tale designed to illustrate a (usually universal) truth. The parabolic nature of *Gouverneurs* has not been lost on critics, though most have associated it with the biblical overtones of the novel. Britton observes that Manuel “‘preaches’ unity and reconciliation, in a series of pronouncements whose eloquence has a distinctly evangelical, parable-like quality.”⁵⁸ Serres sees in the parabolic qualities of Manuel’s speech proof of the narrative sleight of hand that transforms him from militant into Messiah.⁵⁹ But that is to ignore the *content* of those parables: the *form* of the parable may well be strongly associated with the communication of religious messages, but the content has nothing to do with redemption or with the reward of the afterlife. The overriding message of those parables is summed up by Manuel shortly before his death: “Chaque nègre va reconnaître son pareil, son prochain et son semblable.” (*GDLR* 129)

The efficacy of that message is illustrated not least by the remarkable transformation undergone by Manuel’s mother, Délira. Of all the characters in the novel, none is more steeped at the outset in enfeebling religiosity, more paralyzed by resignation than Délira, yet it is she who ultimately convinces the rival clan to put aside their hatred and join forces with her family, and she does it in part by means of the interpretation she gives of Manuel’s “sacrifice”:

Il m’a dit, voici ce que Manuel mon garçon m’a dit: vous avez offert des sacrifices aux loas, vous avez offert le sang des poules et des cabris pour faire tomber la pluie, tout ça a été inutile. Parce que ce qui compte, c’est le sacrifice de l’homme, le sang du nègre. (*GDLR* 190)

Manuel’s death is not a sacrifice akin to that of Jesus: it is neither deliberate nor premeditated. At the very most, his actions on behalf of his sisters and brothers expose him to danger, but he has no reason to expect that the animosity of his rival, Gervilen, will become lethal. It is nonetheless understood as a sacrifice by his mother in the above quotation – but very clearly as that of a *man* laying down his life for his fellow humans.

It is precisely because it is a parable that *Gouverneurs* continues to resonate beyond its temporal, social and geographical setting. It resonates, for example, in these remarks by Gilles Danroc written shortly after Haiti's catastrophic bicentenary in 2004:

Dans la culture politique haïtienne, l'ailleurs est prépondérant. . . . L'effet pervers de cette référence à l'ailleurs où se prennent les vraies décisions consiste à déresponsabiliser la société haïtienne. . . . Le discours politique haïtien est essentiellement romantique puisque aucune responsabilité partagée n'est en jeu.⁶⁰

When Danroc talks of this “elsewhere” where the real decisions are taken, he is probably referring to any number of anonymous forces: global capitalism, the IMF or the World Bank, the US Embassy in Port-au-Prince... Roumain was well aware of these, or similar forces but he also understood this “elsewhere” as embodied in the invisible world of the loa, or the realm of magical causation, and he saw this “elsewhere” as a constant and pernicious alibi in the life of the peasant communities on which he modeled Fonds-Rouge. In depriving his fictional village of recourse to this “elsewhere”, he imagines the birth of a community where what *is* – here and now – is recognized as the consequence of human actions, and where the future will be shaped by fully human actions informed by a shared responsibility.

¹ Serres, “Le Christ noir.”

² See Fignolé, “Sur *Gouverneurs de la rosée*,”; d’Ans, “Jacques Roumain et la fascination de l’ethnologie,”

³ Roumain, “Lettre à Tristan Rémy,” 639

⁴ Hoffmann, *Le Roman haïtien*, 117, 118.

⁵ See James, *Soviet Socialist Realism*.

⁶ Roumain, *Analyse schématique*, 670, italics in the original. Although signed by Roumain, this piece was probably cowritten with Etienne Charlier and Christian Beaulieu.

⁷ Roumain, “Is Poetry Dead?,” 723.

⁸ Arnold, “Approches critiques de *Gouverneurs de la rosée*,” 1581.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism*, 13. *Partiinost*’ could be defined as “the open allegiance of art to the cause of the working class, a conscious decision on the part of the artist to dedicate his work to the furtherance of socialism.”

¹¹ Figiolé, “Sur *Gouverneurs de la rosée*,” 1526.

¹² Ibid. The essence of Figiolé’s critique is that Roumain had written a bourgeois novel that comforted the Haitian bourgeoisie.

¹³ Dominique, “Délire ou délivrance,” 1532.

¹⁴ Serres, “Le Christ noir,” 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁶ Carolyn Fowler, however, references a letter from the registrar at Columbia seemingly indicating that Roumain did indeed register in the Graduate School in September 1939, only to withdraw definitively in February 1940. See Fowler, *A Knot in the Thread*, 209–210.

¹⁷ d’Ans, “Jacques Roumain et la fascination de l’ethnologie,” 1396. Future references to this work will be cited parenthetically within the text as *JRFE*.

¹⁸ Although Roumain claimed that he knew the peasants’ religion well, one might question just how much of their religion the peasants would reveal to an outsider—especially when that outsider was the son of the landlords on whose land they toiled.

¹⁹ I am drawing here on Gérard Genette’s seminal essay “Vraisemblance et motivation.” For a recent discussion of these notions, in relation to the question of racism in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, see Harrison, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 22–30.

²⁰ Similar objections are raised by Serres and Figiolé.

²¹ Barthélemy, “Voyage au pays des gouverneurs,” 1277, italics mine.

²² While accurate, Roumain's depiction is based largely on secondary sources. For example, the song sung by Antoine (*Gouverneurs de la rosée*, 17–18) is found verbatim in Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 75–76.

²³ On the topic of community, see Britton, *The Sense of Community in French Caribbean Fiction*, 19–35.

²⁴ Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 70–71.

²⁵ See Kerboull, *Le Vaudou, magie ou religion?*, 229–251.

²⁶ Métraux, *Le Vaudou haïtien*, 237.

²⁷ Kerboull, *Vaudou et pratiques magiques*, 16. He also insists on the European (not African) origin of most magical beliefs and practices in Haiti.

²⁸ Price-Mars, “Préface à *La Montagne ensorcelée*,” 199.

²⁹ Barthélemy, *L'Univers rural haïtien*, 27–44.

³⁰ Barthélemy, *L'Univers rural haïtien*, 26. Future references to this work will be cited parenthetically within the text as *URH*.

³¹ Like most cultural systems analyzed by ethnologists, this system has to be understood as largely unconscious—that is to say, not consciously rationalized in strategic terms.

³² Barthélemy, “Voyage au pays des gouverneurs,” 1276.

³³ I use the term “irresponsible” to mean “without sense of responsibility”, or “feeling no burden of responsibility”, as opposed to the more derogatory meanings of “reprehensibly careless” or “carefree”.

³⁴ Roumain, *Gouverneurs de la rosée*, 37, 80, 156. Future references to this work will be cited parenthetically within the text as *GDLR*.

³⁵ In “Voyage au pays des gouverneurs,” Barthélemy quotes a *fait divers* from *Le Nouvelliste*, in 1996, reporting the lynching in Anse d'Hainaut of a man suspected of being a *lougarou* (1276).

³⁶ See for example Ormerod, *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel*, 26.

³⁷ It is true that the curse afflicting Fonds-Rouge strikes *all* of the peasants, whereas magic tends to be used by individuals against other individuals.

³⁸ The peasants decide to have a joint mass said for the two dead men *just in case*. This is an excellent example of what Herskovits called “socialized ambivalence” (Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 299–300). Likewise the attitude of Mauléon to his wife’s illness: the *houngan* is a money-grubbing charlatan who diagnoses a curse that he alone can lift, but *better to be safe than sorry*. The formula of socialized ambivalence is identical to that of disavowal in psychoanalytical theory: “I know (that this is not true), but all the same . . .”

³⁹ Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 153.

⁴⁰ It would be more accurate to say that the reader presumes that Manuel has been killed by Gervilen. *Textually*, Manuel is stabbed by a “shadow” (*GDLR* 159). Few, if any, critics have dwelt on the fact that Manuel’s killer is never named, either by the narrator or by Manuel.

⁴¹ See above, p.12

⁴² Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, 225.

⁴³ For a definition of “motivation” in the context of narratology, see Genette, “Vraisemblance et motivation,” 96–99.

⁴⁴ Roumain, *La Montagne ensorcelée*, 218. Future references to this work will be cited parenthetically within the text as *LME*.

⁴⁵ Barthélemy, “Voyage au pays des gouverneurs,” 1280.

⁴⁶ Roumain, “A propos de la campagne anti-superstitieuse,” 745.

⁴⁷ Notably d’Ans, Serres and Barthélemy in the articles already discussed above.

⁴⁸ Serres, “Le Christ noir,” 14.

⁴⁹ I draw, in this section, on Duplan, “La dégradation de l’environnement”; Louis, “Haïti”;

McClintock, “Agroforestry and Sustainable Resource Conservation”; Michel, “Charcoal Production through the Distillation of Wood.”

⁵⁰ Vieux-Chauvet, *Amour*, 134.

⁵¹ Duplan, “La Dégradation de l’environnement,” 174.

⁵² As early as 1826, Jean-Pierre Boyer’s *Code rural* explicitly forbade the chopping down of trees on steep slopes, on mountain tops and in the vicinity of springs and rivers. That interdiction was reinforced by the *Code rural* of 1864. See Duplan, “La Dégradation de l’environnement,” 175.

⁵³ See Pierre, “Haïti.”

⁵⁴ Figiolé, “Sur *Gouverneurs de la rosée*,” 1526.

⁵⁵ Roumain, *Analyse schématique*, 658.

⁵⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’Existentialisme*. 24.

⁵⁷ Costantini, “Un Français bâtard,” 89.

⁵⁸ Britton, “The Sense of Community,” 29.

⁵⁹ Serres, “Le Christ noir,” 17-18.

⁶⁰ Pierre, *Haïti*, 193.

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