

Poetry of Revolution: Romanticism and National Projects in Nineteenth-century Haiti

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**POETRY OF REVOLUTION: ROMANTICISM AND NATIONAL PROJECTS IN
NINETEENTH-CENTURY HAITI**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2008

This dissertation examines the largely dismissed nineteenth-century tradition of Romantic poetry in Haiti from the 1830s to the 1890s. I synthesize the conclusions of various studies prompted by the 2004 Haitian bicentennial in order to challenge the claims that nineteenth-century Haitian poems are banal parodies of French texts and simple preludes to twentieth-

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century Haiti literature. I argue that imitation becomes an impossible label with which to understand the complexities of Haitian poetry and national sentiment. Considering Haiti's ambiguous relationship to modernity and the clairvoyance with which Haitian poets expressed national concerns, Haitian poetry constitutes a deliberate practice in the construction, legitimization and expression of national identity.

In each of the three chapters I rely on historical context in order to situate the poetry and examine it through textual analysis. I explore in an initial chapter how political changes in Haiti in the 1820s, along with recognition of independence from France, coincided with the subsequent birth of Haitian Romanticism in the 1830s. The poetry of Coriolan Ardouin and Ignace Nau documents the development of poetic subjectivity and the inaugurating of

national history which make this a pivotal period in Haitian poetry. A second chapter focuses on Haiti's most prolific nineteenth-century poet, Oswald Durand, whose collection *Rires et Pleurs* includes poetry from the 1860s through the 1880s. Haitian theories of racial equality are expressed in Durand's corpus and set within the thematic and aesthetic norms of French Romanticism, but the effort to inscribe a national and racial specificity enriches as much as it complicates his poetic project. In the final chapter, I document the shift that occurs for the last Haitian Romantic poet, Massillon Coicou. In his 1892 collection *Poésies Nationales*, the confident project of asserting national identity gives way to the sense of national failure due to an increasingly triumphant imperialism and internal corruption. On the eve of the Haitian centennial, Coicou's verse demonstrates the ways in which political crisis in Haiti are inherently tied to the notion of poetry. He ultimately turns to political activism, and his assassination in 1908 symbolizes the demise of poetry as a viable, national project.

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PREFACE

This dissertation would never have been possible without the intellectual acumen, genuine interest, and interminable enthusiasm of my director, Giuseppina Mecchia. I am grateful for her spirited involvement throughout all stages of this project. I sincerely thank all of my committee members, Seymour Drescher, Roberta Hatcher, and Phil Watts, for their ongoing insights and encouragement. I express special gratitude to Dennis Looney for his help with the Latin references in my third chapter and to both him and Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski for all their generosity during my graduate studies.

Throughout this project I have been touched by the love of my brother Kevin and of my both of my parents. I dedicate this work to my mother for the ways she has inspired me academically and personally.

As is the case with any long project, there are many challenges which arise and changes which transpire, changes which are personal and professional, expected and unexpected. It has been largely through the unexpected that I have benefited most from the strength and talents of so many of my peers. I cannot close this preface without saying to Alison, Noémie, Jamie, Teresa, Robin, and Aparna, that you have unassumingly offered much more than what was already limitless and engaging collegial support. You have permanently transformed for me the experience of friendship.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The events of January 1, 2004, marking the bicentennial of Haiti's independence from France and the founding of the world's first black republic, occasioned celebration but also protest against the government of then Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. When unrest turned to armed struggle just two months later, the echoes of Haiti's historic revolution, the result of the only successful slave revolt in history, combined with its subsequent legacy of political instability and relentless poverty to capture media attention around the world. Reflecting on the intense media coverage of those months, Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw state:

Suddenly, too, everyone has an opinion on Haiti. Curiously, these opinions are themselves echoes of the past, shaped as they are around long-standing proprietary misinterpretations of just what Haiti "represents."¹

For many observers, they note, these opinions translated into recycled fears of Haitian violence, albeit at a safer distance via the television screen than two hundred years before. More positively, the bicentennial and the surrounding events prompted dozens of conferences and publications like the one quoted above, calling attention to the nation which so often falls through the cracks of academic disciplines. Haiti, despite its geographical location, has rarely been encompassed under Latin American and Caribbean Studies; its French and Haitian Creole-speaking citizens are isolated in a Hispanophone-dominant hemisphere. Haiti typically doesn't

¹ Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006) ix.

fall under the title of “French Caribbean” either, as do Martinique and Guadeloupe, for example, where Napoleon’s efforts to reinstate slavery were successful and which remain to this day French overseas departments. In terms of literary studies, Haiti’s nineteenth century is frequently left out of “francophone” or “postcolonial” discussions, as these fields are largely considered to be a twentieth-century, or perhaps now a twenty-first century, phenomenon. Only in the last few years have critics begun to challenge these long-established categories. Deborah Jenson, in 2005, prefaces the “Haiti Issue” of *Yale French Studies* with the following:

The Haiti Issue is the first publication to invite scholars to make and break paradigms of specifically nineteenth-century French post/colonialism in relation to the Haitian Independence [...] Nineteenth-century French studies has never been a domain particularly marked by post/colonial theory, and the outcome of the Haitian Revolution may hold the key to the mystery of that noninscription: whereas the former French colony of Saint-Domingue was post/colonial in the nineteenth century, nineteenth-century France was not.²

The studies in the two aforementioned publications contain incomparable and groundbreaking insights into history, sociology, linguistics, and literature, many of which I will refer to throughout the chapters of this dissertation. By now, and certainly in the few years since my own inquiries into Haitian literature began, many scholars have both captured and debated the significance and implications of the Haitian Revolution. Studies by David Geggus and Laurent Dubois are among the most prominent recent works to detail the various events, leaders, and influences which culminated in the destruction of France’s most prosperous colony.³ These historical studies provide the contextual backing for theorizing Haiti’s import in a myriad of new venues. It was in a “post/colonial revision of identity,” as Jensen notes, that Jean-Jacques

² Deborah Jenson, “Editor’s Preface: Nineteenth Century *postcolonialités* at the Bicentennial of the Haitian Independence,” *Yale French Studies* 107 (2005): 2-3.

³ For recent studies on the Haitian Revolution, see David Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) and the work he edits titled *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001) which contains the work of many contributors. Many studies reference the work of Eugene Genovese, specifically *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979).

Dessalines, a former slave and Haiti's new leader, replaced the French colonial "Saint-Domingue" with "Ayti" after the aboriginal Taino Indian word for "highlands."⁴ Although revisiting this moment affords unprecedented opportunity for new political, historical, and literary reflections, these events were silenced, obscured or maligned in most American and European historical accounts for nearly two hundred years.

Haitian-born Michel-Rolph Trouillot was at the forefront of turning this tide, signaling the one-sidedness of Western historicity that would be evident when it came to accounting for events like slave revolts and Haitian independence. His 1995 work *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* is now cited, studied, or incorporated by numerous critics writing about the Haitian Revolution. Trouillot argues that silences are inherent in constructing histories, as something is always left out as other facts are being recorded. The Haitian Revolution, however, bore the extra burden of being "unthinkable" and thereby silenced in dominant Western accounts of the day:

The Haitian Revolution thus entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened. Official debates and publications of the times, including the long list of pamphlets on Saint-Domingue published in France from 1790 to 1804, reveal the incapacity of most contemporaries to understand the ongoing revolution in its own terms. They could read the news only with the ready-made categories, and these categories were incompatible with the idea of a slave revolution.⁵

As Trouillot also explains, this "unthinkability" rested with the assumption that enslaved Africans could never envision freedom for themselves in a way that meant translating those desires into a military victory against the best armies of the day. This contention, Trouillot states, was based less on empirical evidence than on "ontology, an implicit organization of the

⁴ Jensen 3.

⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995) 73.

world and its inhabitants.”⁶ In this way, Trouillot highlights the beginning of what would continue to be Haiti’s immeasurable challenge of entering modernity when the already established global relations of power would refuse the Haitian experiment. The following citation summarizes the major markers of Haiti’s achievement which consequently led to Western silencing:

The Haitian Revolution expressed itself mainly through its deeds, and it is through political practice that it challenged Western philosophy and colonialism. It did produce a few texts whose philosophical import is explicit, from Louverture’s declaration of Camp Tuel to the Haitian Act of Independence and the Constitution of 1805. But its intellectual and ideological newness appeared most clearly with each and every political threshold crossed, from mass insurrection (1791) to the crumbling of the colonial apparatus (1793), from general liberty (1794) to the conquest of the state machinery (1797-98), from Louverture’s taming of that machinery (1801) to the proclamation of Haitian independence with Dessalines (1804). Each and every one of these steps – leading up to and culminating in the emergence of the modern “black state,” still largely unthinkable until the twentieth-century – challenged further the ontological order of the West and the global order of colonialism.⁷

It was this established global order, with the United States, France, England, and the Vatican in the most powerful positions, which reinforced this silencing throughout the nineteenth century. Given the dominance of these powers at the time, the Haitian Revolution was not only obscured in written records, but Haiti in general was also relegated to failure and barbarism in the following decades. As further details in this study will elucidate, Haiti was ostracized diplomatically and economically. Its independence went long unrecognized and then came at the expense of an enormous financial debt to France. As Trouillot also explains, the Haitian elites played their own dubious role (a point to be emphasized especially in the final chapter of this dissertation), but the political and economic deterioration of Haiti was largely due to this

⁶ Trouillot, Silencing the Past 73.

⁷ Trouillot, Silencing the Past 89.

ostracism.⁸ Sybille Fischer, who references Trouillot's arguments of silencing, expands such reflections to speak of a disavowal of the Haitian Revolution in the discourses of modernity. In her 2004 study, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, she argues that most accounts of the period that shaped Western modernity, accounts which placed notions of liberty and equality at the center of political thought, fail to mention the only revolution that centered on the issue of racial equality. She articulates the central thesis of her book when stating that simply including Haiti in historical and cultural accounts is not enough. Considering Haiti's Revolution would mean a complete revision of the concept of modernity itself, so that "what it means to be modern, who can claim it, and on what grounds can become visible again."⁹

In all of these historical and theoretical considerations, including the previously mentioned publications edited by Jensen, Munro and Walcott-Hackshaw, little attention is given to Haitian literature, and even less to Haitian poetry, which followed and which so often focused on the Haitian Revolution. If writing was indeed, as Michael Dash argues, "closely tied to national identity" and "a strategy for achieving recognition in a *modern* global culture," then why has nearly a century of Haiti's literature, written by Haitian mulattos and blacks after the expulsion and extermination of whites in the revolutionary aftermath, also been obscured in literary criticism?¹⁰ Journals, essays, and historical accounts appear immediately after the revolution by those claiming to be new Haitian nationals, and along with plays and other prose, many of which have never fully been recovered, these writings continue throughout Haiti's

⁸ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* 98.

⁹ Sybille Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 24.

¹⁰ J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998) 46. Italics my emphasis.

turbulent nineteenth century and precede by nearly one hundred years any indigenous literature in the rest of the French Caribbean. Given the privileged notion of poetry in nineteenth-century Haiti, it is especially paradoxical that such fundamental texts continue to be overlooked two hundred years after the Haitian Revolution.

The cursory comments about nineteenth-century Haitian poetry in the last few years blindly and inaccurately repeat the dismissals of earlier critics. Adopting neo-classical and Romantic style and writing in French rather than in Haitian Creole remain the prominent criticisms leveled against nineteenth-century Haitian literature, often reproached for its elitism and imitation of French literary trends. Sybille Fischer, in the same work I recently referenced, deems the early Haitian novel and poetry “relatively unimportant” in a post-revolutionary society struggling with political and economic reconstruction. Although literature as an “elite” endeavor can also be applied to Spanish America, she specifies, only theater could really find usefulness in postcolonial Haiti. Despite being performed in French, its presentational mode could serve a pedagogical function to Creole-speaking audiences.¹¹ To be fair, much of Fischer’s assessments come from Haitian critics themselves, like novelist Jacques-Stephen Alexis, who points to a notion of “parrot poetry” practiced in Haiti before 1915.¹² Indeed, this consensus has had many adherents throughout the decades and in varying locations. Martin Munro, in a four-page section of his study “Two Revolutions and an Occupation: Haitian Historical Consciousness, 1804-1946,” sweepingly labels one hundred and fifty years as “postcolonial mimicry,” “cloying francophilia,” and “unflinching patriotism.”¹³ It is not until after this period, he finds, that the novel can more authentically express Haitian identity since it is no longer haunted by

¹¹ Fischer 204-206.

¹² Fischer 206.

¹³ Martin Munro, “Petrifying Myths: Lack and Excess in Caribbean and Haitian History,” Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks 24-27.

revolutionary history and heroic celebrations. Munro, like Fischer, relies on previous criticism; he cites Jack Corzani and Ulrich Fleischmann, whose studies from the 1970s also relegate Haiti's nineteenth century to blatant imitation and failure in originality.¹⁴

The most frequent, although arguably misunderstood source for these viewpoints, is *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle* by Haitian ethnologist Jean-Price Mars. In this 1927 study of Haitian peasant culture, Price-Mars states that the Haitian elite, in copying the only model they knew, lost cultural authenticity and suffered a "collective bovarysme" in seeing themselves as black Frenchmen rather than as Haitians with an African heritage.¹⁵ Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, novelists and literary theorists from Martinique, quote Price-Mars and apply the idea of a "collective bovarysme" to characterize all Haitian writing from 1804 to 1915, claiming that Haiti's independence has been contradicted by an intellectual dependence on the French literary tradition.¹⁶ To arrive at their conclusion, they cite parts of only three texts: fourteen lines of verse from the early Haitian Romantic poet Coriolan Ardouin, the Haitian novel *Stella* written in 1859 by Eméric Bergeaud, and Oswald Durand's poem entitled "Choucoune," which despite being written in Creole still lacks Haitian authenticity.¹⁷

Chamoiseau and Confiant's all-encompassing dismissal categorizes an entire century of Haitian works as completely homogeneous, not accounting for the variations during different periods of the nineteenth century and overlooking the complexity present even within defined

¹⁴ See Jack Corzani, *La littérature des Antilles-Guyane françaises*, vol. 3 (Fort-de-France: Désormeaux, 1978) and Ulrich Fleischmann, *Ecrivain et société en Haïti* (Fonds St. Jacques, Sainte Marie, Martinique: Centre de recherches caraïbes, University of Montreal, 1976).

¹⁵ Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle: Essais d'ethnographie* (New York: Parapsychology Foundation, Inc., 1954). Price-Mars, however, does not criticize all Haitian writers. In fact, he specifies that those who take their inspiration from Haitian sources, even when writing in the 'artifice' of the French language, are authors of *Haitian* literature. Among those he cites is Massillon Coicou whose poetry is the subject of this dissertation's final chapter.

¹⁶ Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, *Lettres créoles: Tracées antillaises et continentales de la littérature 1655-1975* (Paris: Hatier, 1991) 80-81.

¹⁷ To my knowledge, *Stella* is the only novel written in Haiti during the nineteenth century.

movements. It goes without saying that for their evaluation, as for those of more recent critics like Fischer and Munro, misunderstandings stem largely from not reading the Haitian texts themselves. To be sure, there is tremendous difficulty in even locating texts written prior to 1915, as original publications were limited in number and surviving copies are found in few locations worldwide. The editors of the three volume anthology of Haitian literature published in Port-au-Prince in 1975 make frequent reference to literary texts that they know to have been written but whose traces, through political conflict, library fires and other disasters leave even these Haitian researchers with a fraction of what they know to have been written.¹⁸ In addition to neglecting close readings of Haitian poetry, these responses also fail to consider the political and social settings in which Haitian poets were writing. Ignoring the complexity of these factors leads to privileging certain characteristics which are more prevalent and more desirable from a twentieth-century viewpoint: opacity over *transparency*, cultural difference over racial *equality*, avant-garde poetry over *Romanticism*, Haitian Creole and not the *French language*.

J. Michael Dash, in a 2004 article about the Haitian essayist, anthropologist, and politician Anténor Firmin, is the first critic to my knowledge to contest the principles underlying any of the above assessments. Interestingly, he too cites the Créolistes Chamoiseau and Confiant and explains their indictment of Haiti's nineteenth century in this way:

This is the case because revolutionary ideologies in the francophone Caribbean in the 1930s were constructed around myths of rupture and innovation [which] condemned the nineteenth century as a time of blind imitation. This is one of the defining characteristics of identity politics promoted in such radical journals as *Légitime Défense*, *Tropiques*, and *La Revue Indigène* [...] Current interest in crosscultural negotiations and suspicion of the nativist impulses of the explosive

¹⁸ Raphaël Berrou and Pradel Pompilus, Histoire de la littérature illustrée par les textes, Tome 1 (Port-au-Prince: Éditions Caraïbes, 1975).

radicalism of the 1930s should tempt us to look again at what has been stereotyped as an inauthentic, mimetic nineteenth century.¹⁹

If Dash's argument can reframe the study of Firmin's late nineteenth-century letters from exile, then criticisms of nineteenth-century Haitian poetry should certainly be challenged within this same framework. One century of writing, or one genre of writing, does not have to claim value at the expense of a previous period or other literary mode. If studies prompted by the 2004 bicentennial can demonstrate that Haitians did not merely imitate but ultimately transformed the universal idea of freedom through their own revolution, then surely the same claims could apply to the literature which followed. On this point, Nick Nesbitt convincingly demonstrates that as the greatest political event of the age of Enlightenment, the Haitian Revolution was by no means a passive acquiescence to the *Declarations of the Rights of Man*, never intended to encompass the total and sudden abolition of slavery and certainly not the formation of a state lead by black and mulatto leaders.²⁰ Similarly, that blacks and mulattos in nineteenth-century Haiti would author *poetry* in French, assert poetic subjectivity, and claim their own modern history constituted radically unexpected gestures in the global environment hostile to Haiti's articulations of nationhood. Moreover, Haiti's Romantic poetry displays the awareness Haitian writers had about the stakes involved in their own ideas of nation and notably of the fragility of these ambitions. This dissertation demonstrates that mere imitation thus constitutes an impossible label to characterize the first century of Haitian literature and with which to approach the complexities of Haitian poetry. Contrary to previous assessments, I argue that Haitian poetry

¹⁹J. Michael Dash, "Nineteenth-Century Haiti and the Archipelago of the Americas: Anténor Firmin's Letter From St. Thomas," *Research in African Literatures* 35.2 (2004): 46.

²⁰Nick Nesbitt, "The Idea of 1804," *Yale French Studies* 107 (2005): 17-19. Similar compelling arguments along these lines are also made by Hilary McD. Beckles in "Capitalism, Slavery and Caribbean Modernity," *Callaloo* 20.4 (1998) 777-789.

in the nineteenth century constituted a deliberate practice in the construction, legitimization, and expression of national identity.

I limit this dissertation to Haitian Romantic poetry from the 1830s to the late 1890s. Historically speaking, it is during this time frame that Haiti is geographically and politically unified: from the period after the Haitian Revolution to 1825, “Haiti” was parceled into three different parts, each with their own leaders and separate claims to legitimacy. Pétion maintained a mulatto republic in the south, Henri Christophe ruled a black kingdom in the north, and the maroon leader Goman controlled an area to the west. Prior to 1825, France, along with other European nations and the United States, had refused to recognize the sovereignty of any of these areas. French attempts to reclaim Haiti remained an imminent possibility. It is also during this time I believe, and partly due to these consolidating events, that Haitians most profoundly conceive of themselves as modern subjects; the lucid statements in the eclectic journals *L’Union* and *Le Républicain* of the 1830s speak to this new and concerted effort to participate in the global economic and political exchanges necessary to maintaining sovereignty and forging national progress on all fronts. It was undoubtedly European industrialism, politics, and aesthetics, and not associations with African customs and culture, which represented modernity to Haitian intellectuals.²¹ Paul Bénichou’s *The Consecration of the writer: 1750-1830* provides excellent insight into the evidence that in France, and consequently I contend for much of Haiti in the nineteenth century, that it was even the word *Romanticism* which expressed the feeling of modernity as something new.²² Although not even revolutionary in its connotation of its earliest years, Bénichou specifies, Romanticism’s modern spirit suggested a “recent coming to

²¹ Dash argues that while racial pride did feature prominently in the construction of a national identity in the wake of independence, Africa did not represent modernity for Haiti’s leaders. Dash, *The Other America* 44.

²² Paul Bénichou, *The Consecration of the Writer: 1750-1830*, trans. Mark K. Jensen (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) 88.

awareness” which the word “classic” could not claim. It is poetry which is most associated with this new consciousness in France and in Haiti alike. Although primitive societies and people throughout the ages have had their poets, it is, as Bénichou convincingly demonstrates, during the Romantic age that poetry’s sacred and therefore indispensable mission is generated and consecrated, given meaning anew.²³ As I will explain further in the following chapters, poetry is not only the dominant mode of expression in Haiti from the 1830s forward, but it is also the one shown to be integral to creating and legitimizing Haiti’s national identity. Considering the earlier period of 1804-1825, in which poetry was written but not privileged, and neoclassical in form and purpose as opposed to Romantic, would not, it must be specified, necessarily mean a more complete assessment of the nineteenth century. Haitians not only wrote prose, essays, and plays throughout the century, but symbolist and eclectic poetry also began to emerge in the last two decades. Turn of the century poetry in Haiti is often characterized as metaphysical and cosmopolitan, and J. Michael Dash has a thorough re-evaluation of this period in a section of his study, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti: 1915-1960*.²⁴

Before outlining the three chapters which will follow and further examining the importance of poetry and the issue of language in the period I consider, I will nonetheless give an overview of the texts which were authored just after the Haitian Revolution in order to demonstrate what foundations and points of contentions resurface during Haiti’s Romantic period. After the proclamation of Haitian independence in 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines ruled Haiti until he was ambushed and killed by radical mulatto forces in 1806. From 1806 to 1825, the territory known then and now as Haiti was sectioned into three parts and under the leaders mentioned above. Three poets in particular mark these early years: Juste Chanlatte, a general,

²³ Bénichou 87 and 88.

²⁴ J. Michael Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti: 1915-1961* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Nobles Books, 1981).

who served under Henri Christophe, and Antoine Dupré and J.S. Milscent who wrote for Pétion. Poetry in both locales is largely known for celebration of Haitian independence, for commemoration of special occasions, or for praising the leaders of the two competing governments. Belief in viable sovereignty rested with the leader deemed most capable of resisting and maneuvering against a possible French invasion. Poetry often falls in line with classical prescriptions to respect rules of versification and retains the purpose of entertaining and instructing; under both regimes poetry's chief purpose was to defend and serve the government. This poetry is also permeated by classical allusions, and occasionally displays cosmic scenes in which Haiti is rightly placed in the universe among all equal peoples.

J.S. Milscent, a poet in Pétion's republic, founded Haiti's first literary journal in 1817 which included writing samples from the period as well as a record of political events in Haiti and throughout the world. The opening pages of this journal, *L'Abeille haïtienne*, express the desire for a Haitian political and literary presence on the world stage: "C'est en fixant parmi nous les éléments de la civilisation que nous figurerons honorablement sur la scène du monde."²⁵ In subsequent editions over the next three years, the following heading consistently appears: "L'épée et les talents doivent n'avoir qu'un but/Que chacun à l'Etat apporte son tribut." It is undoubtedly these types of declarations which lead Haitian professors and researchers Pompilus and Berrou to conclude that there is little separation between literature and government politics during this period.²⁶ Compared to the concern for history and the development of poetic subjectivity seen in nineteenth-century Haitian poetry from the 1830s onward, the function of poetry was clearly different during these precarious early years. Additionally, the overarching problem with treating this period remains the fact that these poems are even more difficult to

²⁵ *L'Abeille haïtienne, journal politique et littéraire* [Port-au-Prince] le 7 juillet 1817.

²⁶ Berrou and Pompilus 15-52.

locate than other Haitian texts. I have found no collections of poetry and only extremely limited biographical information about the poets themselves. This early poetry nonetheless contains many of the classical allusions which later generations of Haitian poets will write *against*, and the alexandrine verse, fixed forms of poetry like the epistle and the ode, and didactic tones will still be present in various texts throughout the Romantic period.

An overview of the literature from 1806-1825 would not be complete without mentioning the essays written by Henri Christophe's secretary, Pompée Valentin de Vastey (1745-1820). The son of a Frenchman and an African woman, this staunch apologist for Christophe's regime denounced mulatto hegemony in Haiti and condemned the internal divisions and civil wars he traced directly to the poisonous vestiges of colonial society in French Saint-Domingue. Most famously, Vastey authored in 1814 the first Caribbean critique of European colonialism and defense of Haitian sovereignty entitled *Le système colonial dévoilé*, in which he states:

Le voilà donc connu ce secret plan d'horreur: Le système colonial, c'est la domination des Blancs, c'est le massacre ou l'esclavage des Noirs [...] la postérité ne croira jamais que c'est dans un siècle de lumière que les hommes contestaient l'unité du type primitive de la race humaine uniquement pour préserver le privilège atroce de pouvoir opprimer une partie du genre humain...²⁷

Vastey's work, much of which has even been translated into English, has been examined by several critics including Chris Bongie, who points out the ways in which Vastey offers a comprehensive critique of colonialism as a *system*. Bongie argues that Vastey "was arguing in remarkably modern terms for the necessity of 'writing back' against the Empire."²⁸ Throughout his essays, Vastey stresses the obligation of using the written word as a defense against ongoing European injustices and as a vital step in national development:

²⁷ Pompée Valentin Vastey, *Le système colonial dévoilé* (Cap Henry: Imprimerie du roi, P. Roux, 1814) 1,30.

²⁸ Chris Bongie, "'Monotonies of History': Baron de Vastey and the Mulatto Legend of Derek Walcott's Haitian Trilogy," *Yale French Studies* 107 (2005): 77-78.

Les Français ont eu le droit d'écrire et d'imprimer contre nous...nous aurons donc bien le droit d'écrire quelques pages pour notre juste et légitime défense [...] Nous, noirs et jaunes, courbés depuis des siècles sous le joug de l'esclavage...notre race encore dans les fers et dans les ténèbres [...] Nos lecteurs n'oublieront pas que nous écrivons pour les étrangers, comme pour les nationaux.²⁹

Vastey stresses writing as a right to be exercised, and he explicitly defines the readership he envisions when making his arguments. This targeted audience of literate nationals and a French-reading public abroad remains, I believe, unchanged throughout the nineteenth century. As I will comment at greater length, only writing in French as opposed to Creole would even allow for the possibility of domestic and international reception. Most interesting in Vastey's texts, I find, are the deficiencies he cites in his own writing. As Bongie also points out, Vastey stresses that his own political writing, while crucially important, remains secondary to the higher goal of developing *literature*. At the same time, however, he recognizes the overwhelming obstacles which render this achievement difficult. Bongie states:

He stresses the limitations that come with being a mere 'political writer' [...], and notes that the situation of urgency in which the recently decolonized nation still finds itself gravitates against the emergence of an indigenous culture literary culture, a 'more stable foundation' for the nation being required before a properly Haitian writing can emerge.³⁰

It is during the 1830s, I intend to show, that this more stable political situation materializes and that poetry begins to flourish.

In another one of his essays, Vastey already sees a literary culture unfolding, all the more remarkable, he contends, given that Haiti's foundations were that of a slave society: "...encore dans son enfance, notre nation a déjà eu des écrivains et des poètes, qui ont défendu sa cause et célébré sa gloire [...] l'haytien est parvenu à la civilisation après avoir été élevé dans

²⁹ Pompée Valentin Vastey, Réflexions politiques sur quelques ouvrages et journaux français, concernant Hayti (Cap Henry: P. Roux, 1817) xi, xviii and xxi.

³⁰ Bongie 80.

l'esclavage."³¹ Although most Haitian texts were written by mulattos until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, mulattos, who for a large part, could trace their heritage to those who had been property owners rather than slaves in colonial Saint-Domingue, Vastey's text begins a tradition in which Haitian writers will posit Haitian identity as black, and hence more associated with those who had been slaves. Assuming a black identity, regardless of European ties, will be a defining feature of the major Haitian poets, whether black or mulatto, treated in this study.³² Along with those by Haiti's earliest poets, Vastey's text sets the foundations of print culture through which political concerns will be articulated and through which national identity could begin to be constructed. Throughout the nineteenth century, Haitian poets, journalists, and essayists view writing as an indispensable means of legitimizing claims to sovereignty and as a salient feature of modern civilization. Along with the entries in *L'Abeille haytienne*, Vastey's essays confirm the necessity of not being silent during these early years in spite of political upheaval and pressing societal and economic concerns.

Vastey's claims about the superiority of literature resurface with more extensive commentary in the 1830s in the theories put forth by Emile Nau and others in the journal *Le Républicain* and its successor *L'Union*. These editors call for poetry in particular to be written, and indeed the literary and expository texts in these journals usher in the Romantic poetry which will dominate the century. Many factors may provide an explanation for this emphasis, among them the fact that poetry had already been written in both the Haitian republic and the kingdom of earlier years. Furthermore, Haitians in the 1830s believed the native Taino Indians to have also had a poetic tradition. Although this consisted of oral poetry, as outlined in various articles

³¹ Pompée Valentin Vastey, *Réflexions sur une Lettre de Mazères*. (Cap Henry: P. Roux, 1816) 84.

³² I should specify that the term "mulatto", or the French "mulâtre," was used throughout the nineteenth century to refer to those of combined African and European descent. This is used to differentiate them from black Haitians, entirely of African descent, which then as now account for over 90% of Haiti's population.

eventually included in Emile Nau's 1854 compilation *Histoire des caciques*, these observations root poetry in the Caribbean, in the very space Haitians inherited through European oppression.³³ The most detailed insights into the relevance and importance of poetry are provided by Haitian texts in each of the three chapters. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind the general view of poetry during the Romantic period in Europe. Once again, Bénichou unequivocally associates not only Romanticism but Romantic poetry with the ongoing revolutionary overthrow of values. For Haiti, this would mean, I believe, negating or rebelling against the old and current racist thoughts which exclude Haitian's participation in the world sphere and the denial of racial equality in modern terms. Speaking first of this spiritual power, and then of poetry, Bénichou completes his argument in this way:

This power was situated in literature, raised to a therefore unknown eminence. Romantic spiritualism is inclined to invest poetry in particular with this eminence; in this sense, romanticism is a consecration of the poet. It is not by accident or by an incidental consequence of its nature; romanticism is in its very essence a consecration of the poet. The distinctive trait of romanticism about which there should be the least doubt is surely the exaltation of *poetry*, now considered to be the truth, religion, and the illumination of our destiny, and ranked as the highest value: it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that nothing like this had ever been thought of before.³⁴

In Haiti, this same conviction would apply to mulatto and black poets, whose writing once again meant a powerful participation in modernity and simultaneously contesting the racist ideologies and practices which tried to exclude Haitians from the global scene. Also, the Revolution in poetry is central to meaning for Haitian modernity, not only as the event that

³³ See Emile Nau, *Histoire des caciques, Tome I, II* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Panorama, 1963).

³⁴ Bénichou 189. Italics my emphasis.

ushered Haiti into the modern world but as the recurring reference for reassessing Haiti's ambivalent position of being inside and outside modernity.³⁵

Relatively recent observations in the study *Romantic Poetry* can expand the significance of Romantic poetry outside France and thereby further elucidate poetry's importance for Haiti in the nineteenth century.³⁶ Virgil Nemoianu, in one article of this text entitled "'National Poets' in the Romantic Age" demonstrates that while poetic sacralization began long ago, certainly already in the Renaissance with Dante and Shakespeare but also in ancient Greece and Rome with Homer, Hesoid, Pindar, Aeschylus, and Sophocles, the institution of "national poet" comes sharply into focus toward the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century:

Why did German-speaking lands need Goethe and Schiller; why did (an absent) Poland need Mickiewicz; why do Petofi and Eminescu still seem indispensable; why do even Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes grow so considerably in importance? [...] What happens in the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth century is the emergence and/or consolidation of the nation-state which feels that it has to legitimize itself by a number of features that some call institutional, others simply ideal. Even in cases where nation-states do not yet exist (in fact *particularly* under these circumstances), validation of an ethno-linguistic "national" group by a personal and autonomous literature is seen as indispensable.³⁷

This quote succinctly summarizes the connection between consolidating the nation-state in all its ramifications and the flourishing of Romantic poetry. Much of Haiti's nineteenth century is too, in fact, consumed with achieving recognition as a nation-state from world powers and then building the corresponding institutions necessary for sustaining this claim to

³⁵ I take this description from the work by Paul Gilroy, who in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* not only signals the ambiguity of the Black Atlantic which the "double consciousness" of its title aptly implies, but who also puts forth the argument that the Black Atlantic should be considered as "one single, complex unit of analysis in [their] discussion of the modern world..." Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 15. The application of Gilroy's thought as well as deficiencies when applied to Haiti has been examined by both Sybille Fischer in *Modernity Disavowed* and by J. Michael Dash in *The Other America*.

³⁶ *Romantic Poetry*, ed. Angela Esterhammer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002).

³⁷ Virgil Nemoianu, "National Poets in the Romantic Age: Emergence and Importance," *Romantic Poetry* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 249-255.

sovereignty. “Even in cases where nation-states do not yet exist” readily applies to Haiti’s ongoing nineteenth-century struggles, making Haiti an ideal illustration of the point of Nemoianu’s argument. His observations also qualify *Haitian* ambitions to have national poets as part of a larger, more global phenomenon which included Eastern Europe, Scandinavia, Southern Europe, Ireland, and Latin America. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to consider the Latin American traditions of the same period, it is worth mentioning that Romantic poets in various Latin American countries and colonies who wrote in Spanish have also been viewed as poor imitators of continental writers.³⁸ Overall, this contextualization is not meant to reduce Haitian poetry to merely another instance of Romanticism but to place it in a proper context of the period. If one considers the way in which Haiti came into existence, emerging as it did from a slave colony, it becomes apparent that Haitians use Romanticism for over sixty years of the nineteenth century to assert equality with other nations while still accounting for national specificities. If poetry is central to this enterprise, then similarly one could argue that after some time when the national dream seems to fade as it does in Haiti at the end of the nineteenth century, then poetry will also wane. Massillon Coicou, for example, after approximately 1892, turns much more to theater as genre than he does to poetry, and poetry of any national expression virtually disappears until the later years of the American Occupation, in the late 1920s and 1930s. As this general summary shows, Haiti’s national projects will not always be without contentions, and the above quotes capture that since nations seek to *legitimize* themselves through writing, a certain fragility is already intrinsic to the modern notion of nation itself, with the Haitian example being even more vulnerable. After all, Benedict Anderson defines nations

³⁸ Gwen Kirkpatrick, “Romantic Poetry in Latin America,” *Romantic Poetry* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 249-255. This study also shows that the label of imitation for Latin American poets is also now being contested.

as “imagined communities” which arose in response to the decline of national sovereigns at the dawn of the modern age.³⁹

Anderson’s text and the “ethno-linguistic” identity invoked by Nemoineau lead to a discussion of the language issue which Chamoiseau and others have initiated in relation to Haitian writing. Although the issue of adopting the colonizer’s language has sparked numerous debates not limited to the Caribbean and certainly not to the nineteenth century, it is nonetheless important to point out a few facts regarding the use and status of Haitian Creole during the period in question. Anderson points out that language was a non-issue in new world struggles for national liberation, with the United States and Spanish-speaking Latin America being the chief examples.⁴⁰ One could quickly argue, however, that the majority of Haiti’s population, perhaps as high as 90%, did not speak French but only spoke and understood Haitian Creole. This means that the number of people who did not speak the official national language was higher than in other New World regions. The ethnic and linguistic identity of Haiti’s population makes Haiti different from other “Creole Pioneers” Anderson studies in his chapter on New World nationalisms and fundamentally different from the United States.⁴¹ As I explain in chapter two, however, it is important to keep in mind that the largely illiterate population of Haiti would not have read in French or in Creole, and, that Creole was not considered a true language in the nineteenth century. Chamoiseau, too, cites this problem. As an oral language also spoken by descendants of the white colonial class born in Saint-Domingue, Creole posed numerous difficulties in writing:

³⁹ Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (New York: New Left Books, 1991) 7.

⁴⁰ Anderson 47.

⁴¹ Anderson 47-65. In discussing the new states in the Americas, Anderson states that “All, including the USA, were Creole states, formed and led by people who shared a common language and common descent with those against whom they fought” (4). This is certainly less true in Haiti’s case and is at least debatable in Latin America.

Si le créole est indéniablement la langue première du réel de ces lieux, n'en est pas moins considéré comme une sous-langue, un patois, un "mauvais François," [...] Dépourvu d'orthographe, privé d'équipements scripturaux (grammaires, dictionnaires,) écarté de l'école et de l'administration, le créole en écriture doit se faire intuitif [...] Par contre, l'écrit en français mobilise "Le Livre" et "L'Ecole," lieux d'apprentissage des "règles" de l'écriture selon l'expression de Barthes.⁴²

Considered a sub-language, Creole could not be at this time the language of modern writers. Moreover, it was with modernity, with France's plantation economy in colonial Saint-Domingue that writing *in French* entered this Caribbean space. Print culture, via the established colonial newspapers and the arrival of French texts, arrived in the colony and continued to be present even after independence.⁴³

If scholars accept and articulate the expression of modernity in the Caribbean via a number of venues, then written language and literature in French must also figure into this equation. Several studies have explored the ways in which modernity was expressed in the Caribbean from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century and through Western industrialism and the plantation economy, through colonial exploration and exploitation in general, and paradoxically, through political enlightenment ideologies. The works I have already referenced by Fischer, Dash, McD. Beckles, and additionally by David Scott, all address the notion of modernity in its various aspects not just in the Caribbean but in Haiti in particular.⁴⁴ Especially when it comes to pointing out modernity's contradictions, notably the reality of African slavery with the ideals of freedom, it is frequently in Haiti and in the Haitian Revolution that these

⁴² Chamoiseau 70.

⁴³ In addition to the European publications which arrived in the colony, several journals and newspapers, produced locally, circulated in colonial Saint-Domingue in the mid to late eighteenth century. These include Moniteur général de la partie française de Saint-Domingue [Cap François] 1791-1793, and L'Observateur colonial, [Les Cayes] 1700s among others.

⁴⁴ David Scott in Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment reexamines James' The Black Jacobins, a seminal anti-colonial text as "a particularly insightful and provocative instance – of the problem of writing critical histories of the postcolonial present." David Scott, Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 15, 115.

contradictions are played out. On this point, all of these scholars reference the seminal work by C.L.R. James *The Black Jacobins* in which he not only argues that the African slaves were part of a modern life when forced to enter into the international plantation sugar economy, but also as Dash and Fischer have demonstrated, the Haitian Revolution became the point at which slave resistance enters modern history and engages it on a global scale through the Haitian Revolution.⁴⁵ James had himself dramatically written: “Men make their own history, and the black Jacobins of San Domingo were to make history which would alter the fate of millions of men and shift the economic currents of three continents.”⁴⁶

One of the most famous anecdotes relating writing in French to Caribbean modernity is also found in James’ text and concerns the figure of Toussaint Louverture, the former slave, military leader, and governor-general of Saint-Domingue whose genius was such a threat to Napoleon that he captured Toussaint and sent him to a prison in France in 1802. Toussaint, literate and educated through the permission of his master, had read many eighteenth-century French works, including the *Philosophical and Political History of the Establishments and Commerce of the Europeans in the Two Indies* by the Abbé Raynal. It was while reading Raynal’s call for a leader among the slaves to launch a revolution which would liberate Africans that Toussaint reportedly recognized *himself*: “Over and over again Toussaint read [Raynal’s] passage: ‘A courageous chief is only wanted. Where is he?’ A courageous chief is only wanted.”⁴⁷ In this early watershed moment, he envisioned the end of slavery in Saint-Domingue. The Creole/French and oral/written split is also evident in the declaration of Haitian independence, commanded to be written by the illiterate and Creole-speaking Dessalines who led

⁴⁵ Dash, *The Other America* 15 and Fischer 14.

⁴⁶ James 25.

⁴⁷ This is recounted in various sources, notably in C.L.R. James’ *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938. New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 25.

Haiti to its independence after Toussaint's departure. David Nicholls gives an account of this event for which similar accounts are found in other sources:

The first draft of the declaration of independence had been drawn up by an educated mulatto, Chareron, who formulated a long and reasoned defense of the step which was being taken towards independence. After it had been read out, Boisrond Tonnerre, also a mulatto, who had been drinking heavily, stammered, 'All that which has been formulated is not in accordance with our real feelings; to draw up the Act of Independence, we need the skin of a white man for parchment, his skull for a writing desk, his blood for ink, and a bayonet for pen.' Dessalines replied in Haitian *créole*, 'C'est ca, Mouqué, c'est ça, même mon vlé! C'est sang blanc, mon besoin.' (That is right sir, that is right, that is my wish. I need white blood.) It was Boisrond Tonnerre who produced the final text of the declaration.⁴⁸

French continued to be the only official language of Haiti until 1961, and aside from a few experimental texts written in Haitian Creole, French remained the language not only of Haiti's Romantic poets but also of all writers throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century. Returning to the literature of the Romantic era, another study, actually on Greek Romanticism, offers insights which may further enhance understanding of language issues in Haiti. In yet another national context, Gregory Jusdanis reinforces the other arguments in the study *Romantic Poetry* that nationalism represents people's attempt to become modern and "expresses the aspiration of an ethnic group to build a political community in the modern world of nation-states." In the next paragraph he opens with this statement: "Romanticism emerged in Europe alongside and of and often danced cheek to jowl with nationalism."⁴⁹ From this, Jusdanis goes on to explain the work and contributions of Joseph Texte, the first chair of comparative literature in France, who in his 1898 *L'histoire comparée des literatures* promoted

⁴⁸ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996) 36.

⁴⁹ Gregory Jusdanis, "Greek Romanticism: A Cosmopolitan Discourse," *Romantic Poetry* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 269-270. Jusdanis also references one of his previous works, *The Necessary Nation* published in 2001, in which he states that in as disparate locations as Germany, Greece, Brazil, the Philippines, or India, patriots used the strategies of nationalism against foreign aggressors.

the international character of Romanticism as an agent of “compression’ and “expansion” that would allow for fuller understandings of foreign literary works. Texte, drawing on the work of A. W. Schelgel, had remarked the extent to which cosmopolitanism was a national characteristic of the German people during this time. Vital to this effort, then, was practically thinking of ways to make one’s national literature accessible to an international audience. In the case of Greek Romanticism, the focus of Jusdanis’ study, this meant massive efforts in translating into Greek the literatures of other nations and the translating into other languages the Greek poetry of the Romantic period. Applying these notions to Haiti, one can see how writing in French bypasses the need for translation, and even if only ideally so, makes Haitian works readable within and beyond national borders.

My brief discussion of modernity, leading to this understanding of how French language and literature first entered and then continued to exercise influence in Haiti, is not meant to turn the focus to the complex theoretical notions of modernity itself but rather to outline a general framework before proceeding to a study of Haitian Romantic poetry. The statements by Haitian journalists and other writers, working in tandem with the Haitian poems I consider in the subsequent three chapters, will fill in this framework to give a more complete picture of the literary ambitions and ambiguities. Keenly aware that their existence as a nation and their political ambitions were problematic, Haitians who wrote in the nineteenth century were no less convinced that their aspirations were noble and their literary output imperative. Literature would not be immune to the vexed and contradictory aspects of Caribbean modernity, making it an even more fascinating subject of study.

In this dissertation I examine each period and poet as a largely separate project, making the general approach to my analyses one eclectic in nature. Each of the three chapters considers Haitian poetry according to its specific historical context, and therefore different theoretical texts and secondary sources, some from the nineteenth century, others from present-day American scholarship, serve to elucidate the texts in question. The individual nature of each chapter means that some of the same ideas resurface throughout. Repeating key insights is nearly unavoidable and only reinforces the shared and prominent observations which come through studying the poets, texts, and other factors in question.

The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on the poetry by two writers of the 1830s, Coriolan Ardouin and Ignace Nau, whose poems about personal loss, pre-national myths and Haitian revolutionary heroes represent a change from the celebratory and partisan poetry of the preceding decades. Their poetic texts, along with theories of nationalism and prescriptions for national poetry articulated in journals of the period, inaugurate the Romantic desire for history and the liberation of poetic subjectivity which will remain influential throughout Haiti's nineteenth century.

I begin this chapter with an historical overview in order to demonstrate that the political stability, geographical unity, and French recognition of Haitian independence all allow for new concepts of nation to flourish during this period. President Jean-Pierre Boyer unified the disparate parts of Haiti in 1820 and maintained a twenty-rule. Many of Boyer's actions also prompt protest in the name of national interests. The recuperation of Dessalines, a former slave who carried the Haitian Revolution through its final phase, contested the mulatto control and their exclusive claims to the nation. I then reference two articles occasioned by Haiti's 2004 bicentennial. In conjunction with the theories on nationalism and literature found in the literary

and political journals *Le Républicain* and *L'Union*, and the poetry by Nau and Ardouin, I speculate on the ways in which *silencing* may already have seemed prescient to these Haitian intellectuals.

I introduce the personal poems of both writers as they relate to Romantic notions of subjectivity. As articles in the aforementioned journals also reveal, the issues of elitism and imitation are nuanced in light of Haiti's efforts to modernize literature and establish community within and beyond national borders. In the entries to these journals several Haitians write that they recognize the limitations of literary activity in an impoverished and nascent society, but they nonetheless call for *poets* to write in the name of national interests. The construction of national identity in Nau's and Ardouin's poems is expressed partly through poems about local landscape, an additional characteristic which differentiates this poetry from that of the preceding generations. Two poems about Haiti's pre-revolutionary past, notably the demise of the Taino Indian population and the African slave trade, present the horrors of colonial violence and the imagined bond the Taino and their African successors forged in their common oppression. I also highlight the poems about the Haitian Revolution, aspects of which may already have been forgotten in Haiti of the 1830s. Subjectively, these texts serve as Haiti's earliest history before more official historical accounts came about even within Haiti.

The second chapter is a study on the poetry of Oswald Durand, Haiti's most prolific nineteenth-century poet whose diverse collection *Rires et Pleurs* (1896) contains three decades of personal and national poems. I begin once again with historical information of this period. This includes growing color divisions in Haiti and an overview of the racist rhetoric in Western texts which specifically targets Haiti in the second half of the nineteenth century. Biographical information about Durand includes his relationship with mentor and friend Demesvar Delorme

and wife and poet Virginie Sampeur, details of which, along with the epigraphs throughout the collection, suggest the ways in which Durand's inspiration is indebted to both French and Haitian literary traditions.

As a whole, I read this poetry in light of Jean Paulhan's ideas on figures of rhetoric in poetry. I couple this with Haitian theories of racial equality which included numerous comments about literature as well. The stylistic and thematic variety of this collection can be summarized by two of Durand's longest poems. They allow for transition into the dominant themes of other poems and through direct questions posed by the interlocutors they provoke debate about the nature and purpose of poetry in Haiti during this time. The poet's conception of his role as divine emissary and national representative are Romantic notions which remain relatively constant in Durand's corpus over the years. Nonetheless, I strive to organize the chapter according to themes, beginning with nature, which means also considering the more Parnassian moments in which Durand describes women and flowers in the Haitian countryside. I then examine the many poems about love, paying particular attention to the portraits of women and their representation of a feminized Haitian hinterland.

"Choucouné" is not only an example of how relations of imperial power are still present in the realm of Romantic relationships in Haiti of the late nineteenth century, but it is also a prime example of Durand's understated subjectivity. As evident in other poems, this very real but also ironic posturing of humility further elucidates Durand's predicament as Haiti's national poet. Durand's poetry can be seen as an interrogation into how to reconcile the influence of French poetry and his own poetic accomplishments with a complexly defined Haitian identity. The debate of what constitutes poetry in Haiti becomes problematic when trying to render this poetry a national and racial specificity. In the last thematic section, I move on to how Durand

recasts the Haitian Revolution as an event of hemispheric significance which must nonetheless be revisited given Haiti's current crises. In these poems, Durand's larger anti-imperialist stance, especially against Spain and Germany, allows for poems to be written not just on behalf of Haiti but also in defense of Cuba and even France. As a conclusion to the entire chapter, I cite the journalistic comments which summarize the vast diversity of Durand's project and the varying ways in which he was honored at the time of his death.

My third and final chapter explores the work and legacy of Massillon Coicou, a poet whose political engagement resulted in his execution under Haitian President Nord Alexis in 1908. I open this chapter with observations surrounding Haiti's bicentennial with the intent to question how Haitian intellectuals may have viewed their own approaching centennial over one hundred years ago. With more focused historical information on the 1880s and 1890s, I proceed to introduce Coicou's *Poésies Nationales* which contains poetry from 1888 to the year of the collection's publication in 1892. The lengthy preface to *Poésies Nationales* by fellow Haitian poet Charles Williams defends the continuing attraction for and importance of poetry in late nineteenth-century Haiti. Williams also includes many Greek and Roman references which will continue to mark Coicou's collection. The didactic nature of Coicou's poetry and prophetic visions of national collapse are just some of the examples which can be traced to Roman history and literature. The section following my introduction examines the first poem, "Introduction," a poem similar in verse and in content to Durand's "La voix de la patrie." I read this poem partly for its intertextual references to Durand's piece and ultimately as an affirmation of Coicou's commitment to write exclusively national poetry with fervent patriotic sentiment. The ideas of suffering, martyrdom, poetic futility, and national failure remain present throughout the collection.

I address the poems in which the threat of foreign intervention is portrayed as an imminent reality in which corrupt Haitian officials are often complicit. Although these poems forcefully denounce foreign intrusion in multiple ways, national viability is further threatened through rivaling powers within Haitian society. Coicou's indictments of American capitalism, German gun-boat policy and constant civil wars reveal the extent to which the Haitian experience is still inescapably linked to conflict and military aggression.

In the section on "Race, Nation, and Coicou's génie africain," I examine the unprecedented importance accorded to race in Coicou's texts. I begin by citing the poems about the Haitian Revolution, many of which anachronistically portray black/mulatto solidarity in the Haitian Revolution, all in an effort to forge present racial unity. Poems about the Revolution and the slave trade also anchor Haiti's history in that of the African diaspora, as a nation predicated on race must display a consciousness beyond its borders.

I conclude this chapter with the poems and biographical information leading up to his execution, notably his adherence to the political philosophy of Anténor Firmin. Close readings of select poems, along with journalistic and other sources about Coicou's political leanings help document Coicou's trajectory through literature and politics. Finally, I emphasize that while Coicou's death marks the end of certain literary and political era in Haiti, his notions of racial solidarity and consciousness of African identities would resurface in Haitian literature of the early twentieth century.

These four poets in these three periods are those whose output is the greatest and whose work is most recognized by professors and researchers in Haiti as being expressive of Haitian national concerns. The general genre of poetry, the sensibilities of Romanticism, and limits of chronology (between Boyer's consolidation of competing governments to the eve of the

American Occupation), tie together these three chapters, with the other unifying tenet being the Haitian Revolution itself. Anthologies and literary histories, however dismissive, date the start of Haitian literature precisely to 1804, often starting with the Haitian declaration of independence. Without the Haitian Revolution, it is not known if or at what point one could speak of “Haitian” literature. The poetry of Haiti’s nineteenth century is therefore one of Revolution, one of the many cultural repercussions, to return to Munro’s and Walcott-Hackshaw’s study, of this monumental event. It is its own revolving topic, the one which Haitian poets in the nineteenth century return to again and again, whether as celebration, recent history, remote past, or renewed project.

2.0 PERSONAL HISTORIES, NATIONAL PASTS, AND REVOLUTIONARY POETRY: CORIOLAN ARDOUIN AND IGNACE NAU IN HAITI OF THE 1830S

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The rationale for beginning this study with the 1830s is both political and aesthetic. It was during this time that fragmented Haitian territories and governments consolidated as one “Haiti,” that Jean-Pierre Boyer conquered various governments on the island of Hispaniola, and that recognition of Haitian independence was finally granted by France. These on-going changes just decades after the Haitian Revolution were accompanied by an aesthetic revolution which rejected poetry of earlier years and ushered in Haitian Romanticism which would set the stage for later generations of Haitian writers in the nineteenth century.

As mentioned in the introduction, Haitian literature during the first two decades after Haitian independence was primarily a commissioned activity for one of two Haitian governments: a black kingdom in the north and a mulatto republic in the south. Most poetry, neoclassical in style, was published in the southern republic. The literary journal *l’Abeille Haytienne* (1817-1820) contained poems praising the republic’s Haitian leaders and celebrating

the nominal independence achieved from the French in 1804. It was in the 1830s, however, and in a politically united Haiti, that the important beginnings of a new consciousness began to take shape. Unlike the partisan poets of Haiti's earliest years, several Haitian poets publishing in the journals *Le Républicain* and its successor *L'Union* between 1836 and 1839, chose to find new inspiration in personal and national themes more Romantic in sentiment.⁵⁰ Coriolan Ardouin and Ignace Nau are among the writers who emerged with a keener awareness of what it meant to be a national poet as well as a *poet* in one's own right.

This poetry of the 1830s is typically viewed either comparatively or retrospectively, that is to say either considered in relation to French literature or valued as an early expression of a twentieth-century Haitian trend. Specifically, critics such as Léon-François Hoffmann consider Romantic poetry of the 1830s an initial expression of Haitian *indigénisme*, a movement focused on celebrating local themes of Haitian indigenous (and essentially African) culture of the 1920s and 1930s.⁵¹ In one of the most widely recognized studies on *twentieth-century* Haitian literature, J. Michael Dash includes a survey of the nineteenth century in which Ardouin and Nau are once again inheritors of Romanticism and responders to early theories of literary *indigénisme*.⁵² Although he briefly considers Ardouin and Nau, Dash is admittedly more interested in Emile Nau's literary prescriptions of 1836 and 1837, claiming that "the actual artistic achievement of this movement is less impressive than its literary theories."⁵³ It is precisely because poetic texts of the period have not been studied in depth that they are not given much consideration in literary studies. Although *Romantic* and *Indigenous* each correspond to

⁵⁰ *Le Républicain*, deemed a "journal littéraire," includes diverse articles on literature, history, and nationalism in addition to French and Haitian poems. The name change to *L'Union: recueil commercial et littéraire* happened April 20, 1837 but was explained by the editors on August 17, 1837. It was meant to broaden the scope of the journal beyond literature to include politics, scientific and industrial information, agriculture, and especially commerce.

⁵¹ Léon-François Hoffmann, *Littérature d'Haïti* (Vanves: Edicef, 1995).

⁵² Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti: 1915-1961*.

⁵³ Dash, *Literature and Ideology in Haiti: 1915-1961* 10.

certain characteristics of Haitian literature of the 1830s, these terms are inadequate to discuss the complexities of poetry of this period. More than a reflection of French Romanticism, and certainly more than a mere precursor to the poetry of twentieth-century Haitian writers like Carl Brouard and Jacques Roumain, Haitian poetry in the 1830s arguably represents the most significant turning point in nineteenth-century Haitian literature. The themes of *personal history* and more importantly of *national history* as elaborated in Ardouin's and Nau's texts inaugurate the themes of Haitian poetry which will remain dominant throughout the nineteenth century. This chapter explores the 1830s as a pivotal time in the development of Haitian poetry as a national project.

Changes in Haitian society, politics, and economics were dramatic during this time. Haitian poetry in the 1830s cannot be studied in isolation, and providing an historical context can only enhance an understanding of the literature of the period. This chapter will therefore begin with a review of Haitian history from 1820 to 1840, citing twentieth-century historical studies as well as the Haitian journals *Le Républicain* and *L'Union*, both of which serve as valuable nineteenth-century Haitian sources for the events from 1836-1839. Following this historical information, recently published articles surrounding the bicentennial of the Haitian Revolution will also help contextualize the current relevance of Haitian poetry from the 1830s. The personal poetry of Ardouin and Nau will then be situated in relation to debates already occurring in Haiti at that time around issues of literary imitation and elitism. The rest of the chapter will be devoted to examining their national poems, first those about Haiti's pre-revolutionary past and finally the poems which feature the Haitian Revolution.

The aforementioned literary journals and the beginnings of Haitian Romantic poetry developed during the twenty-five year presidency of Jean-Pierre Boyer. His rule is not only the

longest of any Haitian leader, but it also boasts the most significant achievements of nineteenth-century Haiti. It was under Boyer's rule that all of present-day Haiti and the entire island of Hispaniola were united into one political unit and that Haiti secured the long-awaited recognition for its independence from France. In many ways, however, Haiti's troubles were only beginning, and several details of the period allude to the growing unrest which would eventually culminate in a revolt against Boyer from within the country's mulatto elite.⁵⁴

Jean-Pierre Boyer (1776-1850) was a mulatto who had served as a general of Alexandre Pétion's army during the Haitian Revolution. He later occupied key government posts in Pétion's southern republic, and having been named by Pétion to be his successor, became president upon Pétion's death in 1818. At this time, Haiti remained divided as King Henri Christophe maintained an independent territory in the north. Christophe's kingdom, however, was already vulnerable to collapse, and activity against a repressive regime was well underway when Boyer took office. Troops revolting against Christophe began their siege in the northwestern city of Saint-Marc and were then joined by Boyer's forces as they marched into the kingdom's capital of Cap-Haitien. Incapacitated by a stroke, Henri Christophe committed suicide in his citadel rather than be defeated by approaching troops. Upon Christophe's death, Boyer became the official leader of both the north and the south, uniting Haiti as it had been during Jean-Jacques Dessalines' rule just after independence from 1804-1806. With the western half of the island now under his control, Boyer sought to take possession of the eastern half as well and unify the whole of Hispaniola for the first time since 1697.⁵⁵ Santo Domingo in the east had declared its independence from Spain in 1821, but Boyer's military excursion in 1822

⁵⁴ Unless otherwise noted, the historical information to follow is taken from David Nicholls' From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti.

⁵⁵ The only brief exception was Toussaint Louverture's temporary rule over the island in 1801-1802.

solidified the two parts of the island into one political unit. This would lessen the chances of European forces beginning an invasion in the east and regaining territorial control.

Since 1804, two risks had concerned Haitian leaders: the general fear of invasion by a European power and the specific threat concerning a French expedition to take back what it viewed as a run-away colony. Neither Pétion nor Christophe had been successful in achieving the recognition of independence which would have moved Haiti in the direction of guaranteed sovereignty. According to historian David Nicholls, Boyer, like previous leaders, may have briefly entertained the idea of Haiti being a French protectorate, both to secure his own power and to protect Haiti from the control of other European nations.⁵⁶ Knowing how fiercely this would be resisted, however, by the general populace and by the government's elite alike, he moved toward securing recognition in the early years of his regime. A specific treaty to this effect, along with the political and geographical unity of the island, came to be viewed as an indispensable measure in the quest for national viability. Not only was Haiti's very political existence at stake, but other European nations appeared reluctant to enter into commercial and diplomatic relations with Haiti until France had formally granted such recognition. Negotiations led to a French royal ordinance in 1825 which stipulated recognition in exchange for 150 million francs and trade advantages for France. Although this treaty was accepted, Boyer soon pursued an additional series of negotiations which would reduce the amount of the indemnity to 90 million francs.⁵⁷ Both governments agreed to this amount and ratified a new treaty in 1838.

This long-awaited negotiation was carefully detailed and debated in journals of the period. Initially, the results of the agreement appeared to follow expectations, as Denmark,

⁵⁶ Nicholls 65.

⁵⁷ Most sources cite this figure, although *L'Union* editors refer to the figure as 60 million. Aristide's administration estimated the present-day equivalent at approximately 22 billion US dollars when seeking reparations from France in 2004.

Sweden, Holland, and England followed in France's footsteps and began diplomatic relations with Haiti. Not all Haitians, however, were enthusiastic about the treaty, and many of their reservations at the time anticipated the negative consequences which would later be presented by some historians. Twentieth-century Haitian diplomat and essayist Dantès Bellegarde, for example, reports that many officers in Boyer's presidential guard viewed the move as shameful.

⁵⁸ Not only were Haitians *paying* for what they had already achieved militarily, but such an agreement would only reinforce economic and political ties to France. Bellegarde also suggests that a treaty favorable to France may have angered American officials, being the pretext to the U.S. barring Haiti's participation in the Panama Congress of 1826 (the hemisphere's first region-wide conference of independent states) and its refusal to recognize Haiti until as late as 1862. This is of course in addition to the commonly cited reason for U.S. refusal to recognize Haiti which had to do with the existence of American slavery on its own soil. Several anonymous entries in *L'Union* in 1838 and 1839, attesting to the varying opinions on the subject and including all the specific problems mentioned, also put forth the theory that the treaties were not negotiated at all but forced by the presence of French military squadrons in Haitian waters. Moreover, it appears that an agreement with France did not completely end Haiti's isolation. Some articles lament the possibility that commercial advantages for France, which were also part of the 1838 treaty, may have sacrificed meaningful commercial relationships with other nations. Other articles remind readers that Haiti continued to be surrounded by English, Spanish, and French colonies with which Haiti was prohibited direct contact, limiting inter-island trade. Although Haiti ruled over Santo Domingo in the east, Haitian ambitions to exert its influence

⁵⁸ Dantès Bellegarde, *La nation haïtienne* (Paris: J. de Gigord, Editeur, 1938) 107.

throughout the Caribbean (having it be free from slavery and from European influence) were put off to a distant and uncertain future.

Although the necessity, benefits, or repercussions of the treaty with France continue to spark much debate, the one undeniable consequence came in the form of economic devastation. For its initial payments, Haiti was forced to secure a large bank loan from France, and Boyer's government also attempted to raise funds in the form of domestic taxation which fell disproportionately hard on rural workers. Boyer's 1826 *Code Rural* was designed to increase the cultivation of crops for export. This new set of agricultural and labor laws mandated that Haitians who were not public functionaries work the land and do so with little freedom of mobility by remaining on assigned plantations as stipulated by the government. Ultimately the *Code* failed for several reasons. One theory suggests that with the threat of French invasion waning, the average Haitian was content to produce food for local or individual consumption. A sparse military presence also made enforcing the laws difficult, especially given the resistance on the part of peasants to the *Code*'s harsh working conditions.⁵⁹ In many ways, Boyer's policies seemed doomed either way; the unpopularity of the *Code* among rural blacks was countered by support for the laws from many mulattos. A decade after its demise, contributors from the Haitian elite criticized Boyer in *L'Union* for renouncing what they believed would have benefited the Haitian economy over time.⁶⁰

Boyer's decision to relinquish the *Code* was followed by a search for alternative means to boost agricultural output. Without the labor source formally supplied by large numbers of Africans arriving during the slave trade, Haiti had been unable since the Revolution to keep up

⁵⁹ These ideas are taken from Robert I Rotbert's *Haiti: The Politics of Squalor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971).

⁶⁰ A series of criticisms to this effect can be found in a lengthy speech by Henri Dumesle's which was transcribed in *L'Union* on April 29, 1838.

the large plantations which had provided such wealth under France's rule. The sugar plantations were largely abandoned, and a shortage of labor in general meant that even the smaller plots of land were difficult to cultivate. Throughout the 1820s, Boyer came to view immigration, especially from the United States, as a possible solution, and he worked with American philanthropists and abolitionists to bring an estimated 6,000 American blacks to Haiti.⁶¹ On a large scale, however, this plan also failed both for fault of systematic organization and for the disillusion experienced by black Americans once they arrived in Haiti. Though they hoped to be independent farmers, they frequently found themselves more as agricultural laborers. In addition, their linguistic, religious, and cultural differences also led to difficult integration. Another attempted labor source, mostly in the 1830s, came from slave ships in the Caribbean. As part of a commercial treaty, the English agreed to bring to Haiti any ships intercepted by their fleet. Although this measure also proved to be insufficient in solving Haiti's economic problems, Haitian essays and historical texts for years to come would celebrate Haiti's symbolic role in African solidarity and its political leadership with the abolitionist cause. As was the case under Dessalines, any person of African descent could, under Boyer's government, receive Haitian citizenship, and Haiti played an important role in the 1831 and 1833 summits with England and France to put an end to these powers' participation in the Atlantic slave trade. The journals *Le Républicain* and *L'Union* feature articles about Haiti's calls for abolition, theories of racial equality, and attacks on colonial exploitation.

The racial unity gestured to the outside world did not, however, negate the color antagonisms within Haitian society. Along with the *Code Rural* and the ensuing economic difficulties, the other problem associated with Boyer's regime was the increase in divisions

⁶¹ Chris Dixon, *African Americans and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (West Port, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000).

between mulattos and blacks, and once again Boyer's role remains difficult to pinpoint. With sugar and coffee plantations difficult to maintain, many large property owners, who were mulattos, lost interest in agriculture altogether and began to flee the countryside for urban areas. This meant that the mulattos resided primarily in cities, received the education and societal benefits enjoyed by the Haitian elite, and participated in government affairs. In *The Haitian People*, James Leybrun explains that while Boyer initially attempted to employ an equal number of blacks and mulattos in his government, this soon became impossible as fewer blacks were able to read, and literacy was vital to most positions.⁶² The majority of Haitian blacks continued to live in the countryside to pursue some sort of farming, or they served in the army for which literacy was not a requirement.⁶³ The absence of a concordat with the Vatican may also have had a negative effect on education, as Catholic missionaries were not present to set up schools in Haiti as they did elsewhere in the world at this time; only about 1000 Haitian children were in school during the 1830s and fewer than 300 people subscribed to periodicals.⁶⁴ This would have made the Haitian elite, and hence the literary community, a small one indeed.

Chief opposition to Boyer's regime came from mulattos who called for increased power in the legislature, expanded education, and freedom of speech. Whether in terms of economic policy or cultural practices (one of Boyer's ministers was in charge of rooting out African customs such as voodoo, for example), those who criticized Boyer viewed his government as too Francophile in its inclinations. They also challenged the president's powers to set economic policies, enact treaties, and organize elections, seeing the legislature rather than the chief

⁶² James Leybrun, *The Haitian People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) 79-87.

⁶³ In addition to the unpaid soldiers in the National Guard (mandatory for all men of a certain age) were paid soldiers or career soldiers from various regions. Regional military leaders, however, could draft recruits at will into the paid army. Michel S. Laguerre, *The Military and Society in Haiti* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993) 23-61.

⁶⁴ These figures are taken from Rotbert's text, page 74. The numbers referring to education and readership are also confirmed in *L'Union*.

executive as the true representative of national interests. In *L'Union* are numerous entries which accuse Boyer of ignoring legislative decisions, revising judiciary decisions, and publishing false reports of government actions. Hérard Dumesle, whose speeches and letters are published by *L'Union*, was a mulatto poet, orator, and statesman who led the charges that Boyer's actions were increasingly autocratic. Dumesle, after being dismissed by Boyer as a representative in the *Chambre des représentants* went on to organize the *Société des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, the goals of which were to set up a new provisional government. This organization was successful in inciting insurrection against Boyer who fled Haiti in 1842.

This twenty-year period of relative stability and formal recognition from France allowed for a fuller concept of nation. On a most basic level, the 1830s is the first decade to be without the competing Haitian territories and governments, so that literature could be written against the backdrop of a more outwardly unified political landscape. At the same time, however, many of Boyer's policies prompted protest in the name of national interests. On the whole, not only have previous literary studies not accounted adequately for Haiti's historical circumstances during this period, but the sweeping and sometimes dismissive labels of *Romantic* and *Indigéniste* have not really reflected close readings of the poetic texts themselves.

Haiti's 2004 bicentennial prompted multiple reconsiderations of the Haitian Revolution on historical, political, literary and philosophical levels. Before coming to the actual poems, it will be useful to review two articles which will assist in better framing what Ardouin's and Nau's poems, especially those about the Haitian Revolution, can bring to the current field of Haitian studies. Susan Buck-Morss's critical essay "Hegel and Haiti," for example, has inspired a reconsideration of Haiti's role not only in world history but also in the history of Western

thought.⁶⁵ She convincingly argues through extensive archival research that Hegel's famous master/slave dialectic, contained within the pages of Hegel's 1807 *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, was not metaphorical but based on Hegel's knowledge of the Haitian Revolution. After quoting Hegel's own notations about the importance of newspapers and in keeping up with world events, she concludes:

We are left with only two alternatives. Either Hegel was the blindest of all the blind philosophers of freedom in Enlightenment Europe, surpassing Locke and Rousseau by far in his ability to block out reality right in front of his nose (the print right in front of his nose at the breakfast table); or Hegel knew ---knew about real slaves revolting successfully against real masters and he elaborated his dialectic of lordship and bondage deliberately within this contemporary context.⁶⁶

Although the details as to how she arrives at her eventual conclusion are too complicated to be treated here, the importance of such a discovery lies with "the potential for rescuing the idea of universal human history from the uses to which white domination has put it."⁶⁷ In this way, Buck-Morss' study can be seen to coincide with other efforts by historians and cultural theorists to counter the *silence* which has typically concealed the Haitian Revolution in western studies.⁶⁸

To cite another recent text which will lead us to Ardouin's and Nau's poems, Nick Nesbitt's 2004 article "Troping Toussaint, Reading Revolution," is in dialogue with much of Buck-Morss' argument and expands to focus on two additional interpretations of the Haitian Revolution which have also received little attention: another by Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, and

⁶⁵ Susan Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry* 26.4 (2000): 821-865.

⁶⁶ Buck-Morss 844.

⁶⁷ Buck-Morss 865.

⁶⁸ Buck-Morss quotes Michel-Rolph Trouillot from his book *Silencing the Past* which states that the Haitian Revolution was unthinkable at that time in history. Sybille Fischer's *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) is another recent book which argues that including the previously suppressed events of the Haitian Revolution would mean a complete revision of the Western notion of modernity.

Aimé Césaire's *Toussaint Louverture et le problème colonial*. My mention of Nesbitt's article and of the works he examines is not intended to further an understanding of either of those two texts per se but rather to point out that such reconsiderations have not, thus far, been complemented by study of *Haitian* texts themselves. One could conclude that although the "silence" on the Haitian Revolution has been endemic to both sides of the Atlantic, the recuperation of its importance is an accomplishment which comes from outside Haiti, and even this has come slowly. As Nesbitt points out, it was not until Victor Schoelcher's *Vie de Toussaint Louverture* in 1889 and C.L. R. James' *The Black Jacobins* in 1938 that works outside Haiti analyze the events of 1804.

Concerning works within Haiti, Nesbitt notes the obstacles to analyzing the Haitian Revolution, as he makes this observation:

In the years following the independence of Haiti in 1804, the triumph of the world's first postslave republic remained a scandal [...] Haiti was quarantined by the Western powers [...] Within this context, no sympathetic and articulate defense of the Revolution would appear until the founding studies of Thomas Madiou (*Histoire d'Haïti* 1847-1848) and Beaubrun Ardouin (*Etudes sur l'histoire d'Haïti*, 1853-1860).⁶⁹

The first histories by Haitians, those by Madiou and Beaubrun Ardouin serve as valuable resources even for contemporary scholars. However, there are even earlier *Haitian texts*, in the form of essays, articles and poetry which are indeed sympathetic and articulate defenses of the only successful slave revolution in history. The fact that Haitians as early as the 1830s took stock of their own revolution (and to some extent, in terms different from these later historians,) seems to remain largely unknown even by Caribbean specialists.⁷⁰ The status of current

⁶⁹ Nick Nesbitt, "Troping Toussaint, Reading Revolution," *Research in African Literatures* 35.2 (2004): 6.

⁷⁰ According to David Nicholls, Beaubrun Ardouin especially is considered a proponent of the mulatto version of the past.

criticism in this regard will be especially important when considering Ardouin's and Nau's poems about the Haitian Revolution later in this chapter.

2.2 CORIOLAN ARDOUIN AND IGNACE NAU: PERSONAL HISTORIES, PERSONAL POETRY

Coriolan Ardouin and Ignace Nau were among a handful of Haitian poets whose writing in the 1830s began to challenge accepted notions of Haitian poetry since independence. Jean-Baptiste Chenet, Alibée Féry, and Pierre Faubert, along with Ardouin and Nau, are the names occurring most frequently in the journals *Le Républicain* and *L'Union*, the weekly publications which were important for the transmission of their work and, not incidentally, were also the venue through which opposition to Boyer was expressed.⁷¹ The period of the 1830s is actually marked by great literary diversity, but it is these poets, sometimes referred to as the "cénacle romantique," whose work is most associated with the emerging theories of literature and national identity as put forth by the journals' editors. I specifically focus on Ardouin and Nau, who are most consistently remembered by later generations of Haitians in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Haitian poet Oswald Durand mentions them by name in his 1869 "Dédicace" to his collection of poems *Rires et Pleurs*.⁷² Twentieth-century poet and novelist René Depestre acknowledges Ignace Nau.⁷³ My readings of the personal poems by these two writers will be framed by discussions of various literary and political issues which inevitably

⁷¹ Nicholls 74.

⁷² Oswald Durand, *Rires et Pleurs* (Paris: Editions Crété, 1896).

⁷³ René Depestre in an interview published in *Optique* under the title, "Introduction à un art poétique haïtien," février, 1956.

influenced poets grappling with the uncertainties of a shifting literary and political space. Articles, essays, and letters in these journals in fact anticipate with stunning accuracy the criticisms of imitation and elitism which have been used to discredit Haiti's nineteenth-century literary tradition.

Coriolan Ardouin (1812-1836) and Ignace Nau (1808-1845) were by all appearances close friends and had shared much in common.⁷⁴ Both were born to mulatto families shortly after independence in what was then Pétion's republic. Coriolan and Ignace, along with their respective brothers, were among the elite to attend the *Institution de Jonathas Granville* in Port-au-Prince. This was a small, private academy which emphasized military training, general education, and classical studies.⁷⁵ Coriolan's older brothers Beaubrun and Celigni both became known as Haitian historians in the 1860's, and it is Beaubrun who published a collection of Coriolan's poems along with a biographical introduction written in 1865. One of Ignace Nau's brothers, Eugène, was an important agronomist and scientist, and more famously his other brother Emile was not only of the main editors of *Le Républicain* and *L'Union* but also author of *Histoire des caciques* in 1854, the first Haitian work to focus on the pre-colonial history of Hispaniola. It was Emile Nau who first published a booklet of Coriolan Ardouin's poems shortly after his death. Compared to their brothers, Ardouin's and Nau's lives were more marked by more tragedy; each suffered the loss of companions shortly before their own early deaths. Ardouin died at just age 23 from complications with tuberculosis, and Nau died at age 37 for reasons which remain undocumented. Actual collections of their poetry were published in Haiti

⁷⁴ The biographical information about these two poets is taken from Raphaël Berrou and Pradel Pompilus, *Histoire de la littérature haïtienne illustrée par les textes Tome 1*.

⁷⁵ Beyond this general description, I was not able to find any more specific information regarding curriculum at this school.

only posthumously. The exact composition dates for individual poems are not known, but all poems appear to have been written prior to or during the mid 1830s when several of their poems were published. Both poets published not only in *L'Union* but also in Parisian reviews dealing with French colonial affairs such as *La Revue des colonies* during approximately the same period.⁷⁶ All of Ardouin's poems, even those printed in the above publications, appeared shortly after his death, which is believed to have been either late 1835 or early 1836.

Although it is not known if French literature was part of the Institution's curriculum, it is generally thought that the work of French writers infiltrated Haiti through French journals and texts arriving from across the Atlantic during this period. As critics like J. Michael Dash and Leon-François Hoffmann have demonstrated, it has not been difficult to trace the similarities, stylistically and thematically, between Haitian and French poets in the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ It is also not insignificant that the only two French poets whose poems appear in *Le Républicain* and *L'Union* are Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo, as it is these two poets whose poetry at this time incarnates the important veins of Romanticism and the significance of the French Revolution on personal, social, and historical levels. In the poetry of Lamartine, it is the personal lyricism, connection to nature, and an array of themes like nostalgia, regret, and the fleeting nature of human existence which resonated with Haitian poets as universally human concerns. By the early 1830s, Lamartine's concern with the social mission of the poet is evident, and a progressive concept of history was capturing the attention of Haitian intellectuals. An

⁷⁶ Some anthologies of Haitian literature also mention that Ardouin's and Nau's poetry was published in *La Revue des deux mondes* and *La Revue coloniale*, although I have not yet found their poetry in these journals.

⁷⁷ Léon-François Hoffmann in *Littérature d'Haïti* has thematically and stylistically compared the verses of several poets from the 1830s to show similarities between their work and that of Lamaratine and Hugo. For Dash's comments see *Literature and Ideology in Haiti: 1915-1961*.

excerpt of Lamartine's 1831 three-part poem entitled *l'Ode sur les Révolutions* appears in an early edition of *Le Républicain* and includes this stanza:

Marchez! L'humanité ne vit pas d'une idée
Elle éteint chaque soir celle qui l'a guidée,
Elle en allume une autre à l'immortel flambeau
Comme ces morts vêtus de leur parure immonde,
Les générations emportent de ce monde
Leurs vêtements dans le tombeau.

In the article which includes Lamartine's poem, editors insist on the idea of a shared humanity which permeates all nationalities and is a precondition of it: "l'humanité préexiste la nationalité."⁷⁸ Haitian editors continually express Haiti's very existence as crucial to the idea of a complete humanity which includes all races. Developments in Victor Hugo's poetry are also followed with interest, and he is praised by Haitians in the 1830s because "il s'adresse *aux hommes....*"⁷⁹ One editor introduces Hugo's *Les voix intérieures* (1837) a few months after its publication in Paris and includes these verses from the opening poem:

Ce siècle est grand et fort ; un noble instinct le mène.
Et partout on voit marcher l'Idée en mission ;
Et le bruit du travail, plein de parole humaine,
Se mêle au bruit divin de la création....

Des poètes puissants, têtes par Dieu touchées,
Nous jettent les rayons de leurs fronts inspirés.
L'art a de frais vallons nous où les âmes penchées
Boivent la poésie à des ruisseaux sacrés.

Haitian editors embrace the Romantic notion of the poet as divine emissary. This century, the Haitian writer continues, is "positive" for developing these tendencies. As will be noted in a later section that treats Nau and Ardouin's national poems, Haitian intellectuals urged their poets to follow modern transformations toward social and national concerns they had observed in poets like Hugo. They believed that while the two "Haiti's" (Henri Christophe's

⁷⁸ "De la nationalité et de la communauté des peuples," *Le Républicain* le 15 août 1836.

⁷⁹ "Poésie: Les voix intérieures par V. Hugo," *L'Union* le 12 avril 1838. Italics in quote my emphasis.

kingdom and Alexandre Pétion's republic) after independence were identified by the sovereignty and persona of their respective leaders, Haiti in the 1830s would be legitimated by having its poets. Most importantly, Lamartine and Hugo are consistently identified in the journals as *French* poets, and the hope is that Haiti will have poets of similar caliber it can claim as its own. According to the anonymous contributor who introduces Hugo's poetry, Haiti *will* but has not *yet* fully developed an interest in poetry. Again the emphasis is placed on Haiti's participation in global advancements in multiple areas, which includes literature and poetry:

Nous nous intéressons bien un jour à la poésie, et autre que les chants de l'étranger auront du retentissement chez nous, des voix, s'élevant de notre sein même, s'adresseront, ce qui sera mieux, à nos sympathies nationales.⁸⁰

It is important to note that such changes and debates surrounding Romanticism and the importance of the nation were nearly contemporary in both France and Haiti. If Haitians indeed turned outward from current literary activity in Haiti, it is because they sensed a connection with Romantic expression while nonetheless being committed to national prosperity. Numerous articles from these two journals consistently contextualize what adoption of Romantic sentiment likely represented for Haitian writers at the time. The opening issue of *Le Républicain* stresses that since Antiquity, civilizations "se régénèrent avec le contact," and literature, it is implied, is to be considered along with commerce, diplomacy, and industry, all of which need the benefit of *exchange* for the larger purpose of national development.⁸¹ Speaking in general terms, one editor cautions: "Ne copiez pas servilement de parti pris les autres nations...mais quand la vérité vous apparaît, quelle soit d'origine française, anglaise, allemande, *que votre nationalité lui donne l'asile.*"⁸² In literature specifically, Haitians naturally recognized France as an important source

⁸⁰ *L'Union* le 12 avril 1838.

⁸¹ "De la nationalité et de la communauté des peuples."

⁸² "De la nationalité et de la communauté des peuples." Italics my emphasis.

in their own literary development. In the article which introduces *Les voix intérieures*, the writer states “...les grandes œuvres littéraires de la France dont il nous est permis, au moins par la langue et les idées, de partager les impressions [...] il faut bien alors que nous allions puiser l’émotion aux sources françaises.”⁸³

A large part of Romantic expression of course includes the liberation of poetic subjectivity which would allow the Haitian poet to transcend the previous role as social entertainer or government servant which had defined poetic function in earlier decades. Ardouin’s and Nau’s personal poetry may seem less interesting than their more political poems, it does account for a substantial portion of their work. As evident in the title alone, Ardouin’s poem “Moi-même” serves as such an example.⁸⁴ This sentimental and largely autobiographical poem begins with this stanza:

Pauvre jeune homme âgé de vingt-un ans à peine [sic]
Je suis déjà trop vieux. Oui, l’existence humaine
Est bien nue à mes yeux.
Pas une île de fleurs dans cette mer immense!
Pas une étoile d’or qui la nuit se balance.
Au dôme de mes cieux! (1-6)

As with early Romantic poetry in France, the revolutionary nature of Ardouin’s and Nau’s poetry does not rest with radical innovations in form. The stanza begins with two alexandrine lines followed by a verse with half that number, and then the sequence repeats. This meter, along with the rhyme scheme, can also be traced to poems by Lamartine and Hugo. It is unlikely, however, that Haitian intellectuals and poets themselves viewed such an appropriation of structure as imitative in any negative sense. Numerous articles in *Le Républicain* as in *L’Union* suggest an awareness of how “imitation” might interfere in the building of national

⁸³ “Poésies: Les voix intérieures par V. Hugo,” *L’Union* le 12 avril 1838.

⁸⁴ All of Ardouin’s poems are quoted from the 1881 edition of *Poésies* (Port-au-Prince: Etheart).

identity, but the consensus is generally that imitation is typically relative and to some degree is even appropriate. As noted earlier, these early editions of *Le Républicain* explain that all nations throughout history have enriched their culture through contacts with others and that one's nationality is never independent of all influences.⁸⁵ Although very aware of the stakes, many Haitians in the 1830s did not believe that similarities with French literature signaled a lack of intelligence or innovation. Rather, consciously appropriating French literary traits would provide a recognizable framework for Haitian literary expression within and outside of Haiti. The Haitians affiliated with these journals insist on discarding the mediocre names in French literature and retaining the superior ones, notably Lamartine and Hugo. One writes: “[...] dans cette infinité d’ouvrages de tous genres qui se publient journellement en France, il importe de faire un choix.”⁸⁶ Moreover, Haiti's youth means that all that the literary, institutional, economical, and cultural traditions which characterize national identity occur over time and as a process of development, hence the question, “la France du 7ème ou le 8ème siècle, vaut-elle Haïti aujourd’hui? les nations ne grandissent pas en un jour...”⁸⁷

The hyphenated word “*moi-même*” in Ardouin's title not only centers with extra emphasis the personal nature of Ardouin's poem, but it also highlights the simultaneous situating of the subject in both the specific and the universal, in an individual difference that retains human *sameness*. This similarity becomes a cornerstone of Haitian arguments against racism and the continued practice of slavery. In this poem, similarity is also an anchoring point for a subject whose existence is constructed by opposition and negation. At barely twenty-one years of age, the subject is already “too old,” and although he clearly sees the bare essence of human

⁸⁵ *Le Républicain*, le 15 août 1836.

⁸⁶ *Le Républicain* le 15 octobre 1836.

⁸⁷ *Le Républicain* le 15 octobre 1836.

existence, this understanding includes the utter emptiness of life. Several verses in the stanzas which follow continue to sketch the barren internal landscape which connotes the poet's misery. The body of this 36-line poem references several details about Ardouin's life, especially concerning the death of an older sister the very day of his own birth: " Car tu me réproveras, mon juge, ô Providence,/ Car un papillon noir, le jour de ma naissance,/ Posa sur mon berceau" (16-18). Throughout the poem, this curse of suffering which has been present since birth is part of the human experience, but the specific details make it particular to Ardouin. The details cited about family deaths and personal illness make this the most autobiographical of Ardouin's poems, and the pervasive despair is certainly more characteristic of Ardouin's than Nau's poetry. It is no wonder that the turbulence in Ardouin's life, the sickness and tragedy, bred an attraction to the melancholy and elegiac expression of Romanticism.

Interestingly, however, all of these traits could also be situated within a biblical universalism of the human condition. Preceding the poem's beginning, for example, is a quote from *Job*, the Old Testament book which recounts the suffering of a righteous man who is unable, despite his faith in God's providence, to understand the reasons for the physical and mental anguish which plague his life. Job is unaware that Satan has asked permission from God to test Job's faith by inflicting physical and emotion pain. He is also unaware that God has agreed to allow Satan to do anything to Job except take his life. The subject in Ardouin's poem, like Job, hopes for a death to alleviate his suffering, but this wish is not fulfilled within the space of the text. The poem ends with a wish for death, equated with happiness. The subject declares that no angel will come to rescue him and then concludes:

Non, de tout cela rien! Vivre ou mourir, qu'importe
Vivre jusques au jour où la tombe l'emporte [sic]
Jusqu'à ce que le cœur
Plonge sans remonter et se noie et s'abîme,

Alors c'est le repos éternel et sublime,
Alors c'est le bonheur! (25-30)

The reference and similarity to Job also works to connote the superiority of the poet, for while his experiences may represent those of humankind, Job, in the Biblical account, is also chosen by Satan for his extraordinary faith. Although overall the themes in Ardouin's and in Nau's poetry may seem rather commonplace, we can note for example that this banal title, in privileging the individual, nonetheless marks a sharp departure in the traditional focus of Haitian poetry. Emile Nau's essay simply called "Littérature," appearing in the November 16, 1837 edition of *L'Union* elaborates further on why poetry of this nature, particularly this double impulse of the personal and the universal, symbolizes an important step, a liberating force, in Haiti's literary development. Nau's central argument hinges on the premise that the verse written in Haiti since independence and still being written in Haiti at that time, verse which lacks poetic subjectivity, can no longer qualify as *poetry*. There is such an unfortunate abundance of 'oraisons funèbres' and other types of public and commissioned poetry in Haiti as to border on ridicule. There is also, Emile Nau states, the false equation between *one who writes verse* as a mere exercise and a true poet:

on se croit poète pour avoir fait des vers, et une fois qu'on se l'est imaginé, il n'est rien au monde de plus difficile que de s'en départir [...] cette idée d'écrire ces lignes nous est venue après avoir lu, en plusieurs occasions, une foule d'essais poétiques; ces poésies, en général, se remarquent par l'absence d'inspiration et d'imagination, à laquelle supplée la mythologie... de la mythologie au dix-neuvième siècle! De la mythologie en Haïti!⁸⁸

While this type of poetry may have been pleasing to the French king, Nau declares, it serves no purpose in modern Haiti. Although the personal nature of poetry, as illustrated just in the one poem we've seen so far, could easily be targeted as merely derivative of French poets, it

⁸⁸ *L'Union* le 16 novembre 1837.

is interesting to note the way in which Emile Nau, in this same essay, addresses the topic that other editors and contributors have debated, that of *imitation*. Lamenting that “l’imitation de la manière et du faire des poètes européens est plus ingrate et plus stérile ici qu’ailleurs...” his earlier comments about mythology in Haitian poetry frame the topic much differently than one might anticipate.⁸⁹ Citing Racine as an example, Nau claims with exasperation the inutility and the inappropriateness of classical poetry and mythological allusions in Haiti of his day. Not only is Nau in this way speaking against imitation of French classicism (as opposed to French Romanticism), but more covertly, he is criticizing poetry which pleases or praises a current king, president, or other Haitian leader. The rejection of writers like Racine is then a political one as well as a generational one, as Haitian intellectuals in the 1830s are looking for features to distinguish themselves from the poets born in colonial Saint-Domingue. In this way, the debate is a *bataille des anciens et modernes* reproduced in Haiti. Several interspersed comments in *L’Union* qualify these writers as belonging squarely in the seventeenth century with no relevance for nineteenth-century Haiti, and Old Testament Biblical references do not carry the same association with this previous generation of Haitian writers. As one of *L’Union*’s anonymous contributor notes “D’ailleurs, pouvons-nous être indifférents au mouvement littéraire de l’Europe [...] surtout à la littérature française...” Calling Romantic poetry “l’école poétique *moderne*,” (my emphasis) he insists that “il est nécessaire que l’on fasse connaissance avec les romantiques.”⁹⁰ It can be said that the *choice* for Romanticism was also then a choice to be *modern*, a way to modernize and to revolutionize literature in Haiti, cultivating a personal and national expression which would also be recognized and have relevance outside of Haiti.

⁸⁹ *L’Union* le 16 novembre 1837.

⁹⁰ *L’Union* le 27 juillet 1837.

The transfer in poetic purpose and inspiration, from government leader to the life and thoughts of the poet himself, was a hallmark of these first Haitian Romantics. The following quote, while cited by Michael Dash, for example to illustrate Nau's prescriptions for a national literature, also stresses the importance in cultivating poetry as *personal expression*:

Vous ne serez goûtés et n'aurez de succès qu'à la condition qu'il se trouve dans vos poésies *vos croyances* et *vos sentiments personnels*, qui, ne peuvent se rattacher qu'aux croyances et aux sentiments de votre époque et particulièrement de votre pays....⁹¹

According to this new notion of what it means to be a poet, Haiti at the present time, Nau deduces, has few real poets at all. An additional quote near the end of this essay stresses similar points: "Nous dirons enfin à nos poètes ou à ceux qui aspirant à l'être:/la source de l'inspiration est en vous et chez vous."⁹² Since the date of Emile Nau's essay and the writings of Ardouin and Ignace Nau are relatively contemporary to one another, it is difficult to know if, as most critics have believed, these served as prescriptions which Ardouin and Nau as poets attempted to follow, or if the poems they were already writing inspired Emile Nau to counsel others to do the same. Especially given the close personal connections between and among the Nau's and the Ardouin's, and between the editors of *L'Union* and these poets, it is necessary to view these theories in conjunction to the poetry written. Emile Nau, for the sake of making his point, likely exaggerates when he claims there are no real poets yet in Haiti. In reality, the poetry in Haiti in the 1830s was quite diverse; Nau and Ardouin, in their exploration of personal and national themes, constituted more the exception than the rule. Their poetry, however, not only corresponded to what Emile Nau and others were calling for, but their poetry, Romantic in style

⁹¹ Dash quoting from Nau in L'Union le 16 novembre 1837. Italics my emphasis.

⁹² L'Union le 16 novembre 1837.

and sentiment, signals the lasting direction Haitian poetry will take throughout the nineteenth century.

It was mentioned earlier that the educational situation in Haitian society of the 1830s meant that the intellectual community involved in the publication of *L'Union* was indeed a small one. It is not surprising that members of this cénacle, and poets among them, would seek commonality and would search for literary connections of sorts, with those who shared their sensibilities within Haiti. Ardouin's poem, titled and dedicated "A Ignace Nau," is an expression of such a search. This text singles out Ardouin and Nau, even within a circle of poets, as sharing similar life experiences and literary visions. Nau, whom Ardouin calls friend, is the only poet by name to appear in any of Ardouin's poetry:

Mon ami, quand l'orage gronde,
Quand l'éclair éblouit nos yeux
Et qu'une obscurité profonde
Confond la terre avec les cieux,
Sous le nuage qui les voile
Il ne scintille aucune étoile,
Et les oiseaux n'ont point de voix!
La foudre éclate dans les bois! (1-8)

The menacing storm and darkness function here as rather typical symbols of confusion and turbulence. The separation between earthy and cosmic realms is initially masked, and the noise of the storm is accompanied by an unnatural silence of the birds. The first seven verses form one syntactical unit in this description, before the last verse "La foudre éclate dans les bois!" introduces a break in the scene. An explosion of light, a natural element connecting earth and sky, can be read as the ability innate to poets to cut through the chaos and the blurred meaning of events. The second stanza sets up a similar scene, this time using the waves of the sea. The final stanza of this three part poem restates in more direct emotional terms this same troubled serenity, before projecting once again the idea of an eventual light. The lot of Ardouin

and Nau, however, identified with and as *poètes*' is nonetheless a vision of suffering and silence: "Attendons qu'il nous luisse un rayon d'espérance/Et poètes, souffrons dans l'ombre et le silence!" closes the text.

Overall, Ardouin's simply constructed seven-line poem called "A un ami" is similar enough in the image it conveys of the poet's suffering as not to merit a separate analysis. It reinforces the idea of poets as connected to the world of nature and as set apart from the rest of society:

La foule est insensible au vieux toit qui s'écroule
A l'oiseau qui s'envole, au murmure de l'eau
Pour elle le monde est toujours assez beau;
Mais nous qui ne brûlons que de la pure flamme,
Mon ami, notre monde est le monde de l'âme;
Tout n'est que vanités, que misères et douleurs;
Le cœur de l'homme juste est un vase de pleurs. (1-7)⁹³

The presence of poems such as these demonstrates that the idea of the poet not only as divine emissary but also that as a marginalized figure had taken hold with these two Haitian writers. If poets operated under the principle that "*quand la vérité vous apparaît ... que votre nationalité lui donne l'asile...*" then the fact that this vision of the poet is similar to one we might see in French Romantic poets of the same period is a positive sign of Haitian poets' similarities with poets abroad and literary interconnectedness. On one level, unique personal factors of suffering and pessimism lent themselves to Romantic expression of solitude and melancholy. On yet another level, the poets' sense of isolation can also be traced to marginalization that Haitian poets must have experienced: separated from Haiti's largely illiterate society, differentiated from the neoclassical poetry from earlier decades, and

⁹³ Ignace Nau's poetry is found in a variety of sparse sources. I have compiled the poems and included them in the appendix of this dissertation. Any subsequent footnote references by "Nau" refer to Ignace's brother Emile and the texts he authored.

geographically distanced from the French Romantic writers they were reading and admired. Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, argued that the creation of an imagined, national community was greatly facilitated through print capitalism.⁹⁴ For these reasons, these more personal poems, however commonplace they may seem, further express the dilemmas of Haitian poets and their search for community, for this simultaneous linkage, as Anderson describes it, both within and beyond national borders.⁹⁵ The journals themselves, besides establishing community among the Haitian French-reading public was also one of the few spaces where Haitians could experience international interaction. *Le Républicain* and *L'Union* contained constant information about world events, drawing on journalistic sources from Europe, the Caribbean, and the U.S. It is overwhelmingly obvious from reading *L'Union* that the economic and diplomatic isolation of Haiti was devastating to Haitian intellectuals. In the articles preceding the introduction of Hugo's *Les voix intérieures*, for example, editors lament the limited contact with Europe and the virtual lack of all political and commercial connection between Haiti and neighboring islands as well as with the U.S. Such concerns perhaps outweighed, at least at certain moments in their poetic careers, the need to promote local concerns or exhibit traces of an undeniable Haitian identity.

When it comes to literature, Haitian poems and essays are literally placed side-by-side French texts in *L'Union*. It remains a little known fact, however, that Nau and Ardouin's poems were also published in Parisian reviews like *La Revue des Colonies*, a publication edited by Cyrille Bisette, a Martinican merchant of mixed European-African descent who spent most of his life exiled in France.⁹⁶ Anna Brickhouse, in her book *Transamerican literary relations and*

⁹⁴ Anderson 35.

⁹⁵ Anderson 33-35.

⁹⁶ Cyrille Bisette, ed., *La Revue des Colonies* [Paris] 1834-1842.

the nineteenth century public sphere includes a chapter devoted to the *Revue*.⁹⁷ She qualifies it as the most radical abolitionist publication in France at the time and the first to call for the immediate emancipation of slaves in the colonies. She introduces the journal with this description:

As its name suggests, the *Revue des Colonies* was devoted explicitly to material of and about the colonies of western imperialism, largely those of the Americas. Published during the 1830s and early 1840s, the French-based journal was sponsored by a small group of Caribbean intellectuals calling themselves the *Société des Hommes de Couleur*. The *Revue* thus provided a collective forum for the literary and political dissent of its Caribbean contributors ... [it] offered an extended series of juxtapositions that encouraged its readers to see the junctures of history and literature, politics and artistry...⁹⁸

The inclusion of Ardouin's and Nau's poetry in a *colonial* French review is, at least on the surface, somewhat puzzling. Because Nau and Ardouin are included but nonetheless identified as "Haitian," Haiti's status in the review seems ambiguous, situated between that of colony and nation. One's "colonial" status, however, at least when applied to some writers, was for *Revue*'s editors less about the national than about the racial identity of the writers included. In addition to texts from English, French, and Spanish colonies worldwide, other writers of African or partly African descent were also included regardless of where they were from. Stories by the Louisiana mulatto Victor Séjour were featured, for example, as was the poetry of eighteenth century American slave and poet Phyllis Wheatley. Even more paradoxical is the fact that although Nau and Ardouin's inclusion seems largely based on race, their poems, especially those included in the journal, rarely dealt with racial issues. Such racial absence, however, was not uncommon among those texts featured in the journal. As Brickhouse points out,

⁹⁷ Anna Brickhouse, *Transamerican literary relations and the nineteenth century public sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁹⁸ Brickhouse 86.

Bisette's interest in Wheatley's poetry along with the other early "littérature des Nègres" covered in the journal was in part the same as that of his source in Grégoire: to show that people of African descent were capable of producing literature and thus, according to an Enlightenment equation of literacy with humanity, worthy of both freedom and civil rights.⁹⁹

In at least a portion of their verse, and especially in a journal which consisted of contributions worldwide, it is Ardouin's and Nau's association with Haiti which served to further Haiti's claim to sovereignty in a world which had yet to acknowledge Haiti's independence.¹⁰⁰ Haiti having poets, as Emile Nau prophesized that someday they would, was part of Haiti's claim to legitimacy. These editors believed that literary development, along with economics, history, institutions, and traditions was essential in the construction of national identity.¹⁰¹

Other poems are, however, more patriotic in nature. Given Haiti's political uncertainty with recognition, not only did Haiti need its poets for national legitimacy, but poets began to claim national belonging as part of their own literary identity. The relationship though between being Haitian and being poet was not always easily reconcilable, and in their poetry are discernable traces of this tension. Ignace Nau's excerpt subtitled "S'ils savent les oiseaux" illustrates that an understanding of poetry is not without complications or sacrifice. This text, part of a larger untitled poem, is a dialogue between the poet and Marie, the poet's beloved and a recurring figure in Nau's poetry. In this portion of the text, in which the poet muses about the innate knowledge held by these "bards of the sky," Nau ultimately suggests a likeness between bird and poet as intermediaries between physical and spiritual realms.

S'ils savent les oiseaux, ce que c'est que la vie,
S'ils ont le sentiment de la joie infinie,

⁹⁹ Brickhouse 101.

¹⁰⁰ In *La Revue des colonies*, Ardouin and Nau's poems are usually introduced with their names and the qualifier "un jeune haïtien," or "poète haïtien."

¹⁰¹ *Le Républicain* le 15 octobre 1836. One subscriber puts forth the question: "les sciences et les lettres font-elles fleurir les états, contribuent-elles à l'agrandissement des peuples?"

S'ils sont les messagers ou les bardes du ciel
Qui viennent nous chanter le poème éternel,
Si l'arbre, si la fleur, si l'eau de la prairie,
Si l'haleine des vents leur gardent des douceurs
Et des enivrements inconnus à nos cœurs...
Alors, mais non sans vous, je voudrais être oiseau (1-8)

The main interest in this poem, however, is not in such a comparison, but in the last few lines in this section which includes these verses. He says to Marie:

Rêvons, rêvons au bruit de ces chants du moulin,
Dont la brise des nuits nous porte le refrain,
Écoutons soupirer l'écluse des savanes
Et palpiter au vent l'oranger et les cannes
C'est un bonheur aussi de rêver au bonheur! (11-15)

An initial reading may suggest that the poet chooses Marie and life in the Haitian countryside over poetic ambitions: by choosing Marie, he implies that poetic pursuits and life with her are inherently incompatible. However, by inserting within the space of the poem such specific references to the Haitian landscape, Nau suggests that the nature of Haiti can figure into poetry, an initial step toward distinguishing Haitian poetry from that of France. Perhaps he is thinking of his own brother when in this same vein Emile Nau, in his considerations on how Haiti can develop a national literary tradition, wrote:

...il s'élève parmi nous quelques hommes de talent original [...] puisées a la source de notre vie, de nos moeurs, de nos passions et réfléchissent *nos localités* [...] ceux-la seront nos poètes à nous et il deviendra des lors nécessaire de les désigner d'une manière spéciale pour les distinguer de la foule de qui vivront de la vie et des sympathies européennes. Dîtes-moi, comment ne pas les appeler nos poètes nationaux?¹⁰²

Nau's poems about nature are just the beginning of an exploration of Haitian terrain which Oswald Durand will develop in the following decades.

¹⁰² Le Républicain le 15 octobre 1836. Italics my emphasis.

One of Nau's most nostalgic poems is "Basses-Pyrénées," as it is titled in *L'Union*. Biographical information about Nau in anthologies briefly allude to a trip Nau made to France at some point during his lifetime and a stay there lasting nearly two years. The title, then, appears to have an autobiographical basis and is by all accounts the first Haitian poem with exile as its main theme. The first several stanzas of the poem describe the sentiment and actions that led up to such a dramatic departure. The beginning of the poem describes with regret the day he set sail:

Comment donc ai-je fait pour vous abandonner?
Quel besoin, quel esprit a donc pu m'entraîner
Loin de vous, mes foyers, loin de vous, mes campagnes?
Quel attrait si puissant peut-elle avoir, la mer,
La mer sans frein, la mer qui se dresse dans l'air
Plus haut que les hautes montagnes? (1-6)

The title "Basses Pyrénées" tells us where the poem was written, and the poem overall conveys that this trip to France essentially constituted an abandonment of the homeland. It is only later that the speaker wonders what could have possessed him to want to leave; at this time of writing, the trip was one of incomprehensible compulsion. Such a retrospective and regretful beginning suggests that his original outlook, perhaps one of expectation, contrasts with his current realization. As later stanzas show, he can remember a series of subtle signs, like the forewarning in the birds' melancholy song prior to departure, which communicated in vain the unnaturalness in leaving Haiti. It is only the last two of the eight stanzas which are written in the present tense, as the poet, now writing in France, awaits his return home. The descriptions hone in on the lonely experience of the poet as Haitian abroad, as a stranger in this unnamed country of France:

Et me voilà jeté, moi, triste passager
Sans amour, sans amis, sur un sol étranger,
Attendant du retour l'heure lente et tardive

Ce ciel est trop désert, ce soleil sans rayon,
Ces champs, de mon pays, là-bas sous l'horizon,
N'ont point la nature si vive. (37-42)

If we read this poem as another search for community, it ends in solitude and disappointment. The experience of this Haitian in France, even as poet, is a lonely enterprise. Nature in France is different, even inferior. In this way, “Basses Pyrénées” is not just the title but indicates a lower position in the poet’s esteem. Words such as “entraîner” and “jeté” express the overall passivity of the subject, whose journey was nonetheless part of the poet’s destiny. It is exile that leads to nostalgia and national pride, to remembering the homeland, not only as “foyer,” but as a “source de rayonnement”: a central point from which to transmit ideas and a source of poetic inspiration:

Qu’il est resplendissant et d’azur et de feu
Le ciel de ma patrie, et si vaste et si bleu!
Puis, quand notre soleil voyage dans l’espace
Et, de ses rayons d’or remplit l’immensité,
Quel oeil d’aigle oserait fixer la majesté
De son orbe qui roule et passe! (43-48)

The limitlessness in Haiti’s natural beauty will in fact be a main focus in Nau’s poetry and a distinctive marker of *national* expression. Interestingly, this same poem in *La Revue des colonies* and in subsequent publications of Nau’s poetry is entitled “A ma patrie.” The visit to France incites a feeling of patriotism which would only have come through departure and which would only be possible for one who has a country.

Similarly, in the poem “Pensées du soir,” it is in France where recognition of Haiti’s beauty is realized, as Haiti’s nature increasingly takes on a superior quality. This is the only one of Nau’s poem which bears a specific date and place. Writing on a boat sailing to France in 1836, the poet in “Pensées du soir” declares:

Ah! Vous ne savez pas ce que c’est que la nuit!

La nuit dans la campagne où l'on n'entend de bruit
Que l'effort des moulins, que les chants de la danse
Et l'accent du tambour, perdus dans la distance....(13-16)

The poet seems to address foreign readers when he describes the details of a Haitian night. The speaker goes on to remember not only nature and Marie, but music, the scent of sugar cane, and the sounds of Creole, all undeniable references to a Haitian setting. In both poems by Nau, elements from the homeland are remembered and recovered in the text which time and distance have lost. Even the nostalgia felt toward the homeland, however, comes once again from the privileged position of exile; poets' separation from the rest of society could again be said to imply an elitism in their projects. Returning to this issue of *elitism*, it is significant that the opening pages of *Le Républicain* directly address this problem. Referring to this very journal as a type of book, one of the editor's concedes:

Ce livre, selon le plan qu'il se sera tracé, sera circonscrit dans un certain nombre de lecteurs, ils l'admireront, le sauveront, mais tout le monde ne le lira pas. Il y a quelque chose dans ce mot livre, un je ne sais quoi de sérieux et d'imposant qui ne sympathise point avec les masses ... quelle que soit son utilité pour une partie du peuple [...] s'il n'est au niveau de toutes les intelligences, il a beaucoup fait, mais il n'a point parfaitement accompli les besoins généraux de la société...¹⁰³

In this honest recognition of the *limited* influence of literary activity, the journal is posited as a partial accomplishment of more lofty goals. It is important to point out that such a problem was not unique to Haiti. Anderson specifies that in the early years of print capitalism in Europe, obviously earlier than in Haiti, that is to say in the 1500s, the literate population was at the onset quite small.¹⁰⁴ Even by 1840, he notes, almost half the population in France and Britain remained illiterate.¹⁰⁵ In the Western Hemisphere, between 1776 and 1838, in Spanish America for example, what Anderson calls "national print languages" were only used by a

¹⁰³ *Le Républicain* le 15 août 1836.

¹⁰⁴ Anderson 38.

¹⁰⁵ Anderson 75.

fraction of the population.¹⁰⁶ In spite of these obstacles, literate and French-speaking Haitians felt compelled to participate journalistically in the public sphere. This Haitian editor, Dumai Lespinsasse, a life-long lawyer, journalist, and editor of future newspapers in Haiti goes on to declare that this journal will be, for those who contribute to it, a way to serve their country. A people making progress, he argues, must begin to cultivate scientific and literary activity, regardless of the portion of the society who will directly partake or benefit from these endeavors:

Travaillons à nous rendre dignes de cette tâche, ne laissons point se perdre dans nos mains, le bel héritage qui nous a été transmis. Les sciences, les arts, et la philosophie dominant aujourd'hui le globe, cédon au torrent ascension du siècle [...] l'avenir de notre pays n'est pas un mystère. Haïti est une terre promise... ayons foi en cette patriotique prophétie. Les lumières et le dévouement à la patrie, voilà notre boussole, notre culte [...] chacun y apportera son modeste tribut... et toutes les pensées, tous les efforts convergeront vers un seul but, la prospérité nationale et la propagation des lumières...¹⁰⁷

Emile Nau, again in his essay on literature, acknowledged the many obstacles in Haiti to a flourishing literary development. "Public misery," he states, keeps any individual in Haiti from completely devoting himself to artistic activity. He adds:

Après la misère et l'indifférence publique, l'isolement, l'absence de l'émulation, la rareté des bons livres, et là un certain courage, non pas à vaincre les obstacles mais à lutter contre eux; celui qui n'a pas succombé dans cette lutte, [...] avec une force de volonté et une indépendance d'intelligence qui sont d'admirables ressources en toute sorte d'analyse...¹⁰⁸

In spite of the debates of the period, Haitian intellectuals in the nineteenth century were in many ways less concerned about the type of writing prevalent in Haiti than they were about writing at all. Returning to the issue of importance of personal poetry, Ardouin's poem "La Plaine," for example, which was never completed, describes the worldly misery which serves as a backdrop against the poet's plight. Despite the adverse conditions, the poet/bird takes off and

¹⁰⁶ Anderson 46.

¹⁰⁷ Le Républicain le 15 août 1836.

¹⁰⁸ Le Républicain le 15 août 1836.

sings. Another untitled, unfinished poetic fragment puts the dilemma in the form of a direct question as to what poets under adverse conditions should do:

L’oiseau dont l’oiseleur a dépouillé le nid
Et qui voit le barbare enlever son petit
Demande-t-il au ciel de ternir son plumage
Ou ne chante-t-il pas, triste sous le feuillage?

Il chante! Le vallon l’entend chanter encore! (1-5)

The second stanza affirms victory despite the obstacles. As Lespinasse’s quotes make clear, despite the elitism inherent in writing poetry in Haiti at this time, and a literary heritage tied to France, poems such as the ones viewed here nonetheless served as a prerequisite to and a component of the development of a national literature. The essence of a national consciousness rested first and foremost with important individual poets writing amidst so much literary and political change. In the aspects we have seen thus far of Ardouin’s and Nau’s poetic projects, there are traces of an awakening to a national reality which supersedes allegiance to one leader or government, and this is first manifested in an attachment to Haiti as a physical reality.

2.3 PRE-REVOLUTIONARY PASTS AND THE MAKING OF NATIONAL MYTHS

It is consistently with Haitian history, however, that editors in both publications place an emphasis when it comes to elaborating distinctive markers of national identity. Returning again to the first issue of *Le Républicain*, dated August 15, 1836, one reads in E. Z Demiveux’s article “De la nationalité, de la communauté des peuples, that “une nation se justifie par l’histoire et se légitime par la philosophie.” Addressing all Haitian readers, he also writes “Inspirez-vous de

votre histoire, conservez religieusement les traditions de la patrie.”¹⁰⁹ Two of Ardouin’s poems, one about the Taino Indians of Hispaniola and another about the African slave trade, serve to elaborate a national past rooted in pre-revolutionary events and peoples. Combining myth and history, these poems resurrect easily forgotten elements which nonetheless contribute to building a national identity. They provide an otherwise young nation with notions of antiquity, typically sought, according to Benedict Anderson, in the creation of an imagined community.¹¹⁰

If poets of this time are known as “indigenous” for their focus on local themes (*de votre pays*, as Emile Nau specified), it would seem that this label, in addition to an interest in African culture and Haitian landscape, should also encompass texts inspired by Amerindian history. Several articles in *Le Républicain* and in *L’Union* indeed indicate a curiosity about Haiti’s first inhabitants. Emile Nau in particular contributes several articles in these journals about the history of the Taino Indians, eventually developing his work in *Histoire des caciques d’Haïti*.¹¹¹ First published in Haiti in 1854, this text focused on the Taino chiefs and is the first Haitian work to elaborate a history of Hispaniola’s pre-Columbian population. Although historian David Geggus explains that there was probably little actual cultural transmission between the Indian and African cultures in Hispaniola, as the island’s Amerindian population was largely decimated by the time the slave trade began, Taino Indian culture and history held an important place in the Haitian imaginary after independence.¹¹² The word “Haiti,” chosen by Dessalines to rename colonial “Saint-Domingue” is the Taino Indian word for “high ground,” and in Haiti’s first constitution, Dessalines guaranteed Haitian citizenship automatically to all people of both

¹⁰⁹ E.Z Demiveux, *Le Républicain* le 15 août 1836.

¹¹⁰ Anderson 35.

¹¹¹ Nau, *Histoire des caciques d’Haïti*.

¹¹² Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies* 209-211. Geggus states that the Taino population probably accounted for less than one percent of Haiti's inhabitants in the early nineteenth century.

African and Amerindian descent. As Sibylle Fischer points out, the link between the Taino and the Africans who came after them was one established through the struggle for liberty and justice.”¹¹³

Ardouin’s poem “Floranna la Fiancée” is a two-part poem about the wedding celebration of a maiden in the court of Anacaona, the Taino princess and poetess who was one of the last Taino rulers during the Spanish conquest of Hispaniola.¹¹⁴ The first part begins by situating Anacaona in somewhat mystical and nocturnal setting. There is relative calm as Anacaona looks out to the night-time sky:

Anacaona, la Reine
Voyant que le ciel est pur,
Qu’un souffle berce la plaine,
Que la lune dans l’azur
Se perd, voyant sur la grève
La mer que nul vent soulève,
Mourir tranquille et sans voix ; (1-7)

In addition to rhyme, multiple examples of assonance and consonance lend these verses a higher level of musicality and fluidity than in other poems by Ardouin. This idealized scene provides an opening into a type of mythical description of Taino culture in which nature is paramount. Several entries in *L’Union* refer to the Taino as “les naturels d’Haïti” both because they were the island’s original inhabitants and because they were believed to have been lovers of nature. It is with the descriptions of nature in the poem, however, that an almost eerie stillness creeps in. Many of the words subtly express a tranquility endued with sadness and a sense of loss. The two verses beginning, “Se perd” and “Mourir” emphasize the fading of sight and

¹¹³ Fischer 242.

¹¹⁴ Other than the texts mentioned here, for information about Anacaona see a work by Kathleen Deagan and José María Cruxent, *Columbus's Outpost among the Tainos: Spain and America at La Isabela: 1493-1498* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) 207.

sound. The moon disappears and the waves are not raised up by the wind but die “without a voice.”

In the next stanza, as the Queen Anacaona calls in the maidens of her court, innocence and intimacy with nature are the primary characteristics of those in the entourage of Anacaona, whose name itself meant “la fleur d’or.” Their metaphorical description as flowers conveys their beauty and fragility:

Elle appelle ses compagnes
Les roses de ses campagnes
Les colombes de ses bois!
Elles viennent sur la mousse
Formant un cercle de sœurs ;
Chacune est naive et douce,
Et toutes, brillantes fleurs
Que perle une aurore humide
Regardent d’un œil timide
La Reine Anacaona ;
Soir voluptueux ! les brises
Des senteurs les plus exquises
Parfument Xaragoa ! (8-20)

Xaragoa was one of the five Taino Indian kingdoms over which Caonabo and Anacaona ruled, its borders carving out a small section of territory located in the southwest of Hispaniola in a region that now includes Port-au-Prince. In *L’Union*, it is Anacaona’s kingdom which is described as having the people “les plus civilisés, les plus doux” of the island.¹¹⁵ Although the setting is still somewhat vague, these details shed a bit more light on place and especially time. The poem contains no chronological markers, but generally speaking, Anacaona became “queen” as she is referred to here, only after the murder of her husband Caonoabo. In this scene, she does appear to rule alone, suggesting a time after Caonoabo’s death but prior to her own capture. In spite of her own beliefs in peace with the Spanish and the hospitality she encouraged on the part

¹¹⁵ Le Républicain le 1 mars 1837.

of her people, the result was slaughter of her people and her own death and capture several months after the murder of her husband. Although the readers must supply the missing details, this part of the poem hints ever so slightly at the loss of these “naturels.”

German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, whose late eighteenth-century works greatly influenced theories of Romantic nationalism in Europe, explored the history of mankind as a series of life cycles of particular cultures, all of which express a total humanity. As Frank E. Manuel explains in his introduction to an English translation of Herder’s *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*,

...the musical analogy came to Herder’s rescue. There were an infinite number of variations on the theme of man; each one had a finite existence, but as each came into being and was fulfilled in time, total humanity grew even richer.”¹¹⁶

This necessarily implied for Herder the individuality of each “Volk,” or agglomeration of people, as equally valuable and instrumental in its contribution to world history:

Herder not only gave status to the culture of primitives, winning the appreciation of explorers like Johann Forster for his capacity to look at these peoples from within instead of regarding them as mere objects to be converted or civilized, he also places a new value on the earliest form of expression of all peoples, the mythic.¹¹⁷

Clearly, as evidenced in *L’Union* articles as in Ardouin’s poem, the loss of the Taino and their culture, which Haitians believed to have included poetry, was to be lamented. Readers of the 1830s knew that such a tranquil scene ended in genocide:

Qu’est devenue cette poésie? Elle a disparu comme ses auteurs... tous ces chants étaient traditionnels et inscrits dans la mémoire, car [...] Nous ne savons rien absolument de leurs bardes et très peu de leurs traditions ; Tout un peuple et toute une poésie retranchée de la terre !¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Frank E. Manuel, introduction, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, by Johann Gottfried von Herder, trans. Frank E. Manuel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) xiv.

¹¹⁷ Manuel xiv.

¹¹⁸ *Le Républicain* le 1 mars 1837.

Although this part of the poem, as well as the next part, centers much more on description than action, the text serves as a reminder of the fleeting presence of Anacaona and her people. As Herder had also argued, the Taino, like every Volk, possessed its own distinctiveness, its own cultural markers in the way of folk poetry, religion, traditions, etc.

Part II begins by summarizing the chief traits of these women in their innocence and beauty. The youth and femininity of Anacaona's entourage metonymically expresses the virtue and simplicity of the Taino as it is desired to be conveyed by the poet. The following section heightens the tragedy that is known to have befallen Anacaona and the Taino culture; the reality of the future as opposed to the dream is crueler given the vulnerability and innocence of this portrayal. Now in alexandrine verse, the focus shifts to Floranna, the youngest of Anacaona's maidens.

Innocence et beauté! ---Toutes à la peau brune,
Luisante comme l'or à l'éclat de la lune !
Moins fraîche est la rosée et moins pur et le miel
Moins chaste, la clarté des étoiles du ciel !
Floranna, la plus jeune et la plus ingénue,
Laisse voir sur ses traits son âme toute nue. (21-26)

Floranna is not, to my knowledge, mentioned in any of the historical accounts of the Taino people. In the text, she is not only the youngest present, but the most ingenuous. The poem continues with the physical descriptions of Floranna in anticipation of her wedding day:

Car la vierge rougit d'ivresse et de pudeur,
Car les pulsations de son candide cœur,
Disent que Floranna, d'une douce pensée,
Comme l'onde des mers, cette nuit est bercée [...]
De là, ces battements précipites du sein,
Et ce regard voilé qui se lève et qui tombe
Et cette rêverie où son âme succombe ! (27-30, 40-42)

Generally, the purported virtue of women and their importance in national culture can also be found in Herder, who argued that the "delicate civility, and love of ornament and

decoration” make women discernible from men. In reading Herder’s text, women seem among the constant universals in all cultures. Their “gentle endurance,” in marriage and motherhood are commendable in every culture. Specifically, however, one may wonder why such a poetic rendering of an unknown Taino fiancée would be the subject of Haitian poetry at all. Again, the poem can be better appreciated by bringing other knowledge to mind, details about the Taino which would hardly be known to readers outside Haiti today, but given the multiple contexts in *L’Union* they would have been available to readers in the 1830s. Not only was Anacaona believed herself to have been a poetess, for example, but the poetry of the Taino Indians in general was called “aretyos” and was often composed spontaneously for special occasions such as weddings and funerals.¹¹⁹ With the break in the two parts of this poem, perhaps we can read this first section as Ardouin’s description of Anacaona and her court, and the second part as an imagining of this poetry itself, a rendition so to speak of Anacaona’s poetry, which may have preceded or accompanied such a ceremony.

Floranna’s anticipation brings a flurry of emotions, even fear. The poem ends with the hope that her sleep will be full of reverie and her waking will bring happiness:

Quand elle dormira, mille songes dorés
Lui monteront la fête, et les guerriers parés
Et ses joyeuses sœurs, abeilles des allées,
Lui composant un lit de ce que les vallées, [...]
Oh ! qu’un ange debout la contemple et la veille !
Qu’elle rêve en silence, et qu’elle se réveille
A la voix des oiseaux chantant l’aube du jour,
Heureuse ainsi, vivant de rosée et d’amour ! (43-50)

The poem ends with the dream of the wedding and not with the actual celebration. Since the references to Xaragua and Anacaona mean we cannot separate this peaceful scene with what we know the historical reality to be, perhaps the poem can also be read allegorically, as an

¹¹⁹ Le Républicain le 1 mars 1837.

idyllic, pre-Colombian Haiti, or more specifically, at least a Haiti prior to the complete destruction of the Taino culture and people. In this way, the description here is of the tranquility which would precede the violence, the dream before reality. Not only does that initial scene imply an impending loss, but additional meanings of various words coincide with such a reading: “bercer” from the first stanza can also suggest trickery, just as “soulever” can suggest taking away. Floranna is the most “ingénue,” meaning she is also the most free. Moreover, the idea of death, first mentioned in the word “mourir” in the first stanzas reappears with “embaumer,” “langueur,” and “succombe” in the last verses. Especially combined with the idea of sleep, angels, and “la veille,” the ending implies more than the simplicity of dream. These ideas especially ring true if we consider that Anacaona’s last days were spent organizing a welcome ceremony for the Spanish (was the ceremony a wedding?). Hoping for peace, Anacaona is instead deceived by the Spanish, captured, and hanged. In addition to all of this, it is difficult to ignore the presence of warriors at the ceremony in these verses, poised for potential battle, and the multiple descriptions of the girls and the scene as *golden*, given that the Spanish came to Hispaniola in search for gold. Overall, the femininity and passivity of this scene will be contrasted to the virility and military prowess of Haiti’s black revolutionaries. As will be more apparent in a later section of this chapter, it is not so much that African slaves are not “natural,” but that they are the modern inheritors of these *pre-modern* Taino. More than the European colonizers and conquerors who destroyed them, the African slaves turned Haitian revolutionaries are legitimized as the new people of this land..

The primary importance of such a poem, however, is less in a historical, mythical, or allegorical meaning than in its mere symbolic presence in Haitian poetry. Regardless of its actual content, merely in naming Anacaona and Xaragua, the poet evokes the memory of these

people and the link between two cultures separated in time but connected through shared experience and poetry. It is partly for this reason that I have included it in this analysis. Although it is only one poem about the Taino Indians, it is important to keep in mind that with all nineteenth-century Haitian literature, other texts may have been written which simply have not been available or are still being discovered. The poem by Ignace Nau about the slave ship, mentioned above, is another example. Moreover, a poem such as this demonstrates what themes do not continue beyond this period: Haitian literature will rarely, beyond the 1830s, focus on the Taino Indians.

As noted previously, the Taino and the African slaves have in common the oppression by European colonial powers. The fact that these people *had* poetry vindicates them from European prejudice. As Emile Nau stated in *Histoire des caciques*:

La poésie était en effet une culture et une passion pour ce peuple qui appelle “fleur d’or” l’une de ses reines, parce qu’elle était poète. Ce nom, ce mot a lui seul révèle que les Haïtiens avaient réellement le sens poétique, l’imagination délicate et impressionnable [...] Cela serait à peine croyable d’un peuple sauvage, sans l’irrécusable témoignage de l’histoire...¹²⁰

More powerfully, of course, it is poetry which links the Taino to the Haitians in the 1830s. Haitian poetry as a genre finds a local justification, rooted in Caribbean tradition. Haitian poets and historians like Emile Nau in early nineteenth century could therefore view themselves as successors to the Taino historically as well as aesthetically, recuperating the cultural losses of this civilization. “Laisser périr la pensée d’un peuple,” Emile Nau lamented, “est ce qu’il y a de plus impérissable, est un crime plus barbare encore que de détruire jusqu’au dernier rejeton de ce peuple.”¹²¹

¹²⁰ Nau *Histoire des caciques* 64.

¹²¹ Nau *Histoire des caciques* 65.

Despite the many historical references and essays by Emile Nau and others published in *L'Union*, there is to my knowledge only one other poem which features the Amerindians of Hispaniola. This is Ardouin's short poem, "Une matinée," which begins with a quote about Eden from Genesis. The poem contains a warning to an Indian girl that a Spaniard is approaching:

Cora ! Ta pirogue rapide
Arrive et t'appelle a son bord !
Apporte à l'Espagnol avide
Ces paillettes et ces grains d'or. (15-18)

With so few remnants of Taino culture having survived long-term in Haiti, and with 90% of the population of exclusively African descent, it is not surprising that poems with Amerindian themes did not survive in Haiti into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Another factor may well be the little mentioned fact of the loss of the Eastern half of the isle after Boyer's abdication in 1843. Though rarely given much critical attention, the period of the 1830s included Haiti's reign over what is now known as the Dominican Republic. Few entries in *L'Union* allude to the east, although a Dominican city is listed as one of the places where the journal can be purchased. According to Haitian professors Raphaël Berrou and Pradel Pompilus in their anthology of Haitian literature, Coriolan Ardouin spent a few years on the eastern side of the island.¹²²

Sybille Fischer in her work *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* includes a chapter on nineteenth-century Dominican literature, discussing literary activity of the Dominican Republic during Haitian rule. Overall, she concludes that "cultural life is difficult to assess" and is "full of silences, unchartered spaces."¹²³ There was no newspaper activity in the east until after 1844, but Fischer does note that remnants of popular

¹²² Berrou and Pompilus 132.

¹²³ Fischer 181-182.

poems and quotes *could* have indicated that a “Haitian-Dominican culture was emerging.”¹²⁴ In the east, Fischer explains, this would have been in the form of poems which were pro-Haitian or pro-Boyer in sentiment, as all other writing was either highly censored or non-existent. In the west, however, poets like Ardouin and Nau may have accounted for the Dominican presence through themes like nature and the Taino which would have applied to both parts of the island, to the landscape of the entire area, and the history of Haitians and Dominicans alike. Once separated from the east, there would be even less of a reason to continue to write about the Taino, and poems more focused on the Haitian Revolution and African culture would thrive as markers of national identity. Dominican literature in the nineteenth century, on the other hand, was according to Fischer very reluctant to identify with its African past and almost never mentions slavery. The Indian tradition, however, continues to prosper in Santo Domingo throughout the nineteenth-century, where

Against all evidence to the contrary, Spain and the Indians come to be considered the ancestors of the mulatto nation through fantasies that variously and in disregard for their mutual exclusivity imagined Dominicans to be the heirs of the Spanish Golden Age, Catholicism, and American indigenous cultures.¹²⁵

Fischer explains that Anacaona and Caonoabo keep reappearing in Dominican literature as part of the “nostalgic celebrations of the noble indigenous race.”¹²⁶ Like Ardouin’s “Une matinée,” there are also texts which describe how “the utopia of a new Garden of Eden gives way to the degradations of conquest and genocide.”¹²⁷ Anacaona specifically, in fact, is even more of a Dominican icon than a Haitian one. Captured near what is now Port-au-Prince, she was executed near the Dominican capital. Eventually, Hispanism and indigenism became the

¹²⁴ Fischer 182.

¹²⁵ Fischer 152.

¹²⁶ Fischer 154.

¹²⁷ Fischer 160.

two prevalent cultural ideologies in the Dominican Republic¹²⁸ The literary and cultural connections between Santo Domingo and Haiti are largely a mystery, and perhaps these “Haitian” writers, living in the west and writing in French never intended to bring Spanish Santo Domingo into the literary fold. The similarities, especially concerning a utopian vision of Taino Indian culture, however brief, nonetheless deserve further exploration during this period in history. Whether the reasons were political, racially motivated, or linguistically impeded, Haitian writers contributing to *L’Union* and the poetry available by Nau and Ardouin does not address any contemporary conflict or reflect any events concerning the eastern part of the island. As will become more apparent in the following section, it is pre-Colombian and Revolutionary history and myth which are of most concern.

Unlike poems inspired by pre-Columbian Taino culture, themes relating to Africa and slavery, the other vein of ‘indigénisme,’ did proliferate in Haiti throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Berrou and Pompilus introduce Ardouin’s “Le départ du négrier” in their anthology as the first poem in Haiti as well in the Caribbean at large to deal with “d’inspiration africaine.”¹²⁹ “Le départ du négrier,” however, is actually the last of five sections which make up the longer poem, “Les Betjouannes,” as it appears in Ardouin’s collection, *Poésies*, as well as in *L’Union*. “Les Betjouannes” presents a series of related tableaux, weaving together the story, dance, love, and capture, of an African girl named Minora. Although this title is elusive, since “Betjouannes,” does not currently exist as a French word, it is apostrophized in the poem as “les filles d’Afrique.” I will return to a possible explanation of this term when considering other references in a later part of the poem.

¹²⁸ Fischer 152.

¹²⁹ Berrou and Pompilus 159.

In Ardouin's collection, the poem is preceded by two epigraphs: the first from the Old Testament Book of *Judges*, and the second from work of Ignace Nau:

*Quand vous verrez que les filles de Silo sortiront pour danser avec
des flûtes, alors vous vous élançerez des vignes et vous enlèverez
Pour chacun sa femme, et vous vous en irez au pays de Benjamin.*
Les Juges, dernier chapitre¹³⁰

*Un négrier sur l'Atlantique
Courait sans lumière et sans bruit.*
Ignace Nau, *Poésies inédites*

Referencing an episode from the Old Testament (as opposed to the New) carries relevance in that much of the Hebrew Bible is about the nation of Israel. This quote from *Judges* refers to a decision made by the Israelites after defeating the tribe of Benjaminites in battle. According to the Biblical account, the Benjaminites had suffered the loss of many human lives, especially women, and consequently, their very survival as a tribe was threatened. In spite of the recent conflict between the two tribes, the Israelites did not wish one of the twelve tribes of Israel to be completely destroyed. Because they had previously taken an oath not to give their own wives to the Benjaminites, the Israelites decided to capture a group of women from the land of Canaan. This was to take place during a festival in the town of Shiloh. This Old Testament story refers to a time when various judges ruled, prior to Israel's formation as a nation united under one King. Preservation of a national future, however, comes at the expense of the girls of Shiloh, about whom few details are given.

Nau's citation indicates that he, like Ardouin, also broached the subject of slavery in his poetry, though I have not uncovered this particular poem by Nau in the available collections or in journals of the period. On one level, the textual proximity of these two citations works to bring

¹³⁰ This is how Ardouin quotes these Old Testament verses. However, this verse may also be found in *Judges 21:21, The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible, 1978).

together the similarities between these two pre-national histories. Separated by time and space, the two stories have in common the fact that they resurrect episodes fundamental to understanding each nation's past. The relationship between these two stories also becomes clear upon reading verse from the first scene, the poet's initial section, "La Danse":

Comme une fille demi nue
Laisse les ondes d'un bassin.
La lune que voile une nue
Laisse l'océan indien.

Joyeuse la mer sur la grève
Vient soupirer avec amour;
Le pêcheur en sa barque rêve
A ses gains ou pertes du jour.

Au loin les brunes Amirantes
Avec leur sandales, leurs dattiers,
Brillent sur les eaux murmurantes
Ainsi que l'île des palmiers [...]

Spectacle ravissant! Nombreuses
Comme les étoiles des cieux,
Les Betjouannes gracieuses
Dansent à fasciner les yeux ! (I, 1-12, 17-20)

Here it becomes clear that Ardouin will counter the silence and darkness of the sailing slave ship in Nau's quote by retelling the story of the girls in Shiloh in the context of modern slavery. In both the history of Israel and the history of Haiti, the perspectives of these victims of capture and slavery are rarely divulged. Ardouin's poem imagines an untold part of the story, giving voice to those whose tragedy is not typically recounted. In this first part, subtitled "La Danse," the Betjouannes gracefully dance in the moonlight. As in the following sections, the nearly baroque descriptions of this luminously nocturnal scene place the events in the realm of dream, reminiscent in many ways of the delicate, sensorial, and idyllic rendering in "Floranna, la fiancée." As in that poem, women are associated with a pre-modern innocence and untainted

nature; women's relationship to landscape and oneness with nature will be further explored in the next chapter on Oswald Durand's poetry. Also as in "Floranna," a subtle hint at an impending change appears. The girls at this point remain unaware that danger may be lurking:

Les sons du tambour retentissent
Et vont dans la forêt bien loin
Se perdre; les bois rugissent
Aux alentours: mais c'est en vain. (I, 21-24)

This first section ends with what is seemingly an all-knowing voice commanding the girls to dance while they still remain together:

Dancez, jeunes filles d'Afrique!
Tandis que vous chantez en chœur.
Dancez, la danse est poétique,
La danse est l'hydromel du cœur. (I, 33-36)

The second section is "Chant de Minora" which focalizes on one of the Betjouannes. It is essentially the lament of Minora who is unable to find her lover. In this part, the drum sounds are heard but not heeded: "Qu'importe à moi le tambour?" Minora asks. She speaks to the river, asking it if it knows the whereabouts of her departed lover. The course of the river, "qui a vu tant de cieux" can reach faraway lands of which she herself has no knowledge. Although once again the scene is relatively calm, the missing lover, the return of the drum, and Minora's momentary separation from the group, all signal the end of the joyful dance, freedom of movement, and harmonious community.

Changes in events are complemented by changes in form. The relative uniformity of the poem's first two sections, in quatrains of crossed rhyme and mostly octosyllabic verse, gives way to the gradually increasing metric variety in the third section subtitled "Le Bain." Minora's monologue from the previous section ends to return briefly to the girls as a collective. After only

one stanza, however, Minora is quickly separated again; she is the last to enter the river to bathe, and she comes out alone moment later in response to the return of the drum:

Un bruit lointain s'élève
Il s'éteint. Est-ce qu'un rêve?
Le bruit s'élève encore et de nouveau se perd!
La Betjouanne timide
Abandonna toute humide
Le fleuve qui s'en va plus limpide et plus clair. (III, 21-26)

Minora's question "est-ce qu'un rêve" reflects not only her own concern about the real danger behind the recurrent sound of distant drums, but since in this stanza it is not clearly Minora who is speaking, the question could also be that of readers about the reality of this distant slave past. The danger itself indeed becomes "more clear," as the dream within this dream-like sequence gradually turns into nightmare. The accelerated rhythm of this fourth section, "Les Bochimens," coincides with imminent and more certain danger; urgency is conveyed through the imperative, "fuyez fuyez," echoing yet standing in contrast to the "Dansez Dansez" which concluded "La Danse."

Fuyez, filles tendres
Fuyez de toutes parts!
Les Bochimens avides
S'élancent. Leurs regards
Sont des regards d'hyènes,
Ils viennent vagabonds,
Par les chemins de plaine,
Par les chemins de monts!
Tout en eux est farouche.
De misérable peaux
Les couvrent... (IV, 1-11)

The arrival of the Bochimens is a sudden and terrifying intrusion. I did not find any evidence that the "les Bochimens," the Bushmen or San of south central and eastern Africa, had any participation in the Atlantic slave trade. The term 'Bushmen' came from a Dutch term meaning "bandit" or "outlaw," but contrary to what the poem suggests, the San were collectively

known for their longstanding resistance to colonial and local powers.¹³¹ It is therefore likely that the term ‘Bochimens’ in Ardouin’s poem is used more figuratively, meaning that those who captured the Betjouannes were “bandits,” general “barbares,” as the poem refers to them. Perhaps already by the nineteenth century, Haitians had heard of ‘bushmen’ in a pejorative sense, with little real knowledge of Africa. In Ardouin’s text, the Bushmen are also compared to hyenas, intelligent predators native to Africa whose dominance in the food chain is surpassed only by that of the lion. According to myth in some parts of Africa, men would turn into “hyenas,” at night and ferociously hunt their prey.

Consideration of the term “Bochimens” invites the reader to reflect upon the multiple proper names which make up the poem. The poem fits into a pre-national history of Haiti specifically because of Africa as the *context*, but beginning with the title, most of the proper names in the text do not refer to any people or geography directly part of Haiti’s slave history. Returning to the title, “Les Betjouannes,” the best meaning and explanation for this term, according to Kirsten Fudeman, can be discerned with knowledge of Bantu languages.¹³² “Be” as a prefix in Bantu languages is a marker for human plural, while ‘tjouan’ could be read as the phonetically similar ‘tswan’ that we find for example in the name of the country Botswana. Made feminine in French by adding the second ‘n’ and then, ‘e,’ the term likely refers to women of the Botswana area. This explanation seems solid, given that “Bechuanland” was the former name for Botswana when it was still a British protectorate, and that other references, to the Bushmen, for example, also involve southern Africa. Southeastern African references exist as well: the word Amirantes in the first section “La danse” refers in reality to a group of islands in the Indian Ocean. At least in part, this makes the scene exotic. The ambiguous way that the

¹³¹ Sandy Gall, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001) 49-76.

¹³² Kirsten Fudeman, personal interview, 7 February 2006.

poem evokes “Les brunes Amirantes,” means that they are either another name for “Les Betjouannes,” *les filles d’Afrique*, or that the name refers to another group of girls on the Amirantes Islands. The Indian Ocean is also mentioned by name in this first stanza, and although the French did engage in slave trade in Eastern Africa and French colonists held slaves in various parts of the Indian Ocean, this region is separate from that of the West African coast and the Dahomey kingdom from which most Haitians are believed to have originated.¹³³

Although most of the poem’s references do have a historical or geographical basis in name, such a conflation of places and peoples works to inscribe the text more in the realm of myth. In addition to all the terms mentioned so far, there are many others, including the Sotor which is an ancient Egyptian reference, the mimosa plant which is native to much of Asia, the Middle East and Africa, and the “simoun” winds from the Sahara desert.¹³⁴ This imagined setting and story may, as previously suggested, reveal the lack of real connection or knowledge Haitians in the 1830s had of Africa, these ideas based on scattered European accounts or perhaps oral histories. The effect, however, perhaps intended, is that such a widespread geography mirrors how extensive slavery’s reach was, encompassing much of the African continent. In the same vein, the story of Minora and “Les Betjouannes” extends to multiple societies, not just to Haiti, whose historical legacy includes slavery.

The poem concludes with “Le départ du negrier,” which describes the slave ship as it leaves African shores. Minora has been captured by the Bushmen, forced into ‘exile’ with others. The slave ship, a cruel bird of prey, snatches up its victims:

¹³³ Robert Louis Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century: An Old Regime Business* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979) and Deryck Scarr, *Slaving and Slavery in the Indian Ocean* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998).

¹³⁴ Sotor also spelled *Soter* in English likely refers to Ptolemy Sotor, Egyptian ruler from 323 BC-283 BC and founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty. R. W. Beachley states that under the second and third Ptolemies Greek and Egyptian merchants acquired contact with the East African coast. *The Slave Trade of Eastern Africa* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1976) 2-6.

On les embarque pêle-mêle
Le négrier, immense oiseau
Leur ouvre une serre cruelle
Et les ravit à leur berceau. (5-8)

The “Betjounnes,” or “les filles d’Afrique,” are no longer mentioned by name, referred to instead in the anonymity of simply “them,” while the slave ship increasingly takes on a life of its own. The rather unpoetic “c’en est fait,” begins the poem’s last stanza:

C’en est fait! le navire
Sillonne au loin les mers;
Sa quille entend l’eau bruire
Et ses matelots fiers
Aiment sa viole blanche
Qui dans les airs s’étend
Et son grand mat qui penche
Sous le souffle du vent.
Car à la nef qu’importe
La rive qui l’attend;
Insensible elle porte
Et l’esclave et le blanc! (22-33)

The present tense of verbs throughout the poem and in this part especially coincides with the breadth of the slave trade which is not only far reaching in space but also in *time*. The destination of “La rive qui l’attend,” in fact cannot be so easily specified, given that slavery and the slave trade were still occurring throughout the Caribbean and North and South America into the 1830s. In this way, what comprises part of Haiti’s pre-national past simultaneously reflects current happenings in countless other destinations. Finally, the poem’s ideological scope is equally as broad, as this practice harms not only the enslaved Africans but the white colonists as well. The syntactical position of *insensible* means that it applies on the one hand to the ship, whose indifference to where the voyage leads essentially implies the indiscriminate nature of slavery. On the other hand, it also communicates that the white man and the slave are rendered numb, morally dead, by this horrible enterprise. In both instances, this ending insists on the

damaging ramifications of a system to which many Haitian intellectuals expressed their opposition in the pages of *L'Union*.

Minora, in this last section, is described for the last time on board the ship as “Cet ange qui nous vient dans nos rêves du soir.” In his section entitled “The Quarrel with History,” Edouard Glissant observed that in the Caribbean:

The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is however, obsessively present. The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in a continuous fashion to the immediate present.¹³⁵

“Les Betjouannes” is in fact situated following a short prose piece called “Tradition africaine,” and just prior to an article about the continued atrocities of the Atlantic slave trade. The framing of this text then too situates it between African past and Caribbean present, between tale and current events, between the realm of history and that of myth. Partly because of its “generalizing tendencies,” (like those we see in “Les Betjouannes,”) Glissant describes myth as something which “disguises while conferring meaning, obscures and brings to light, mystifies as well as clarifies and intensifies that which emerges, fixed in time and space, between men and their world. It explores the known-unknown.”¹³⁶ For both “Floranna la Fiancée” and “Les Betjouannes,” Glissant’s words about the writer in a balkanized, fragmented region of the Caribbean, also ring true for Haitian poets in the 1830s writing about remote times and places: “It is the writer’s duty...to restore this forgotten memory and indicate the surviving links

¹³⁵ Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989) 63-64.

¹³⁶ Glissant 71, 83.

between the diverse communities of the region, to demonstrate the continuity, across time and space.”¹³⁷

2.4 POEMS ABOUT THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

This quote about the writer’s role to restore forgotten memory equally applies to poems about Haiti’s founding event. The articles we referred to at the beginning of this chapter, especially those dealing with the connection between Hegel and Haiti, not only signal the on-going significance of this event in a variety of fields and prompt a reconsideration of the earliest Haitians texts. Writing in even closer proximity to this event, what can Ardouin’s and Nau’s poems, ones which predate even Haitian historical texts tell us about how Haitians conceived of their own revolution? As mentioned earlier, Haitian intellectuals beginning in the 1830s began to call for the documenting of evidence of both a literature and a history believed essential in constructing national identity. An exceptional history, furthermore, which centers on the Haitian Revolution, will be one of the marks of national distinction:

Il y a dans l’histoire de chaque peuple une page où il aime à se contempler, parce que c’est là que prennent date de vieux souvenirs de nationalitéNotre pays n’échappe point à cette observation générale. Lui aussi, il a dans sa vie un épisode magnifique [...] le baptême politique...le moment qu’il prend rang dans la famille des nations.¹³⁸

More than any other time in Haiti’s history, it is not surprising that works about the Haitian Revolution would appear around this crucial time of negotiating recognition of Haitian

¹³⁷ Glissant xl.

¹³⁸ “De la nationalité et de la communauté des peuples.”

independence. As with the bulk of the other poems in Haiti throughout the nineteenth century, these poems are not remarkable for literary innovation per se but rather for the historical and ideological information they convey. They not only elaborate a history linked to Haitian national identity which centered on successfully abolishing slavery in France's most prosperous colony, but these poems tell us *which* history, in collaboration with the editors of *L'Union*, these poets are interested in portraying. Stephen Bann in "Romanticism and the Rise of History," argues that historical consciousness is the product of the Romantic period and that historical representation in the nineteenth century had an imaginative, subjective element.¹³⁹ To some degree, understanding histories of the nineteenth century involves "suspending the universal operation of the dichotomy between 'truth' and fiction:"

Another way of presenting this significant change in emphasis would be to stress that there are two quite separate, though obviously interrelated, definitions of history with which we have to reckon at this stage—and up to the present day. One is intrinsic, and the other extrinsic. The intrinsic definition refers to the development of history as a professional, and increasingly scientific, discipline, which sets itself apart from the activity of amateurs, however, well-meaning, and rejects the wider world of historical representation as simply unworthy of interest. The extrinsic definition refers to something that is more difficult to pin down, because it is precisely the inundation of literary, visual, and spectacular forms of expression with a historical tincture.¹⁴⁰

Bann is not dealing with poetry, but his comments about history during the Romantic period will be useful when bringing historical elements from the poems to literary analysis.

Two of the three poems I will focus on in this section, "Dessalines" and "Au génie de la Patrie," both by Ignace Nau, were published in *L'Union* between 1836 and 1838, around the time of France's recognition of Haitian independence. The third, Ardouin's "Le Pont Rouge" was published posthumously but must obviously have been written prior to 1836, the year of

¹³⁹ Stephen Bann, *Romanticism and the Rise of History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995) 4-6.

¹⁴⁰ Bann 25-26.

Ardouin's death. The precise dates of composition for many of their poems, however, remain unknown, and it is therefore not possible to ascertain if the idea of writing specifically for national concerns evolved for these poets at a certain time, or if their personal and more politically oriented poems coexisted throughout their brief writing careers. Their poems about the Haitian Revolution do appear to be, in any case, the first literary texts in Haiti to go beyond the mere celebration of Haitian independence to be found in other Haitian poems both prior to and during this time. In general, critics have accorded little attention to this significant departure, and Ardouin's "Le Pont Rouge" and Nau's "Dessalines," boasting a token presence in Haitian anthologies, typically receive only cursory comments in overviews of poetry of the period. Léon-François Hoffmann's *Littérature d'Haïti*, compresses poems with such "patriotic" themes under general headings like "culte des ancêtres" which runs throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁴¹ Such a reduction tends to exaggerate a purported obsession with leaders of the Haitian Revolution and thereby underestimates the dual significance such revolutionary poems carried in Haiti of the 1830s. These poems, especially with an emphasis on the role of black slaves in establishing a Haitian national history, were both politically significant during a period of mulatto hegemony under Jean-Pierre Boyer's rule and set the course for Haitian poetry in the direction of national commitment.

Ardouin's poem "Le Pont Rouge," as previously mentioned, was likely written in the 1830s and was first published as part of a brochure by Emile Nau in Port-au-Prince in 1837 and subsequently compiled by his brother Beaubrun in an 1881 edition. Ardouin's death in 1836, however, places its composition clearly before the recognition of Haitian independence by France in 1838 and squarely in the midst of Boyer's twenty-year rule. The story the poem tells

¹⁴¹ Hoffmann 115.

unfolds within alternating temporalities: the poem's title, "Le Pont Rouge," recalls the site just outside Port-au-Prince where Dessalines was assassinated by mulatto opponents in 1806.¹⁴² This in turn serves to evoke the memory of Dessalines' declaration of Haitian independence after the defeat of French forces two years prior in 1804. Ardouin's poem unfolds within multiple temporalities, as Dessalines' demise at the Pont Rouge serves in turn to evoke the prior memory of Independence and Revolution:

C'est là qu'il est tombé dans toute sa puissance
Celui dont le bras fort conquit l'Indépendance !
Que lui faisaient à lui sa gloire et son grand nom ?
Sous son pied d'Empereur il foula cette gloire
Et du sang fraternel il a taché l'histoire
De notre Révolution ! (1-6)

Dessalines is not referred to by name until the last stanza, but here he is identified by the Emperor title he claimed for himself and as the leader associated with Independence and Revolution. An association between these two terms is reinforced through a shared position at the end of a line of verse and emphasized through capitalization. Though the consequential relationship between these two terms may seem obvious in retrospect, it is important to point out that for several decades of the late eighteenth century, the goals for various aspects of social and political change in Saint-Domingue (for more autonomy as a colony, for mulatto rights, for the abolition of slavery) *did not* include complete independence from France. The turning point came about only in the last phase of the revolution, when mulatto and black forces united in order to combat Napoleon's intention to reinstate slavery which had been abolished by the

¹⁴² It is believed that Dessalines intended to divide land more equitably among blacks and mulattos, which would have meant confiscating land owned by the *anciens libres* in Saint-Domingue from before the revolution. Nicholls 38.

Convention in February, 1794.¹⁴³ As historian David Nicholls notes, “complete independence became the goal of the black and mulatto generals fighting under the leadership of Dessalines.”¹⁴⁴ Dessalines’ glory is encapsulated in this *history*, a word which the poem specifically includes, of Revolution and Independence.

The poem does not make a distinction between Dessalines as the founder and ruler of the Haitian Republic in 1804 and the Emperor title he adopted a year later. Though no specific hypothesis for this move on Dessalines’ part seems to have been put forth by historians, the title nonetheless conveys supremacy beyond that of king and is one which would match that of Napoleon whom Dessalines had just defeated. The poem’s mention of this detail may also serve to emphasize Dessalines’ unrealized ambitions to establish an *empire*, ideally political but at the very least ideological: the self-declared “avenger of America” made a brief incursion into the eastern part of the island and abolished slavery there and is known to have regretted the inability to extend abolition to other French Caribbean colonies.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Dessalines’ 1805 constitution defined the scope of Haiti’s “Empire,” which included islands of the Haitian coast and the eastern half of Hispaniola.¹⁴⁶ As the next part of the poem more fully illustrates, Haiti’s national struggle is framed and defined within the larger context of freedom from the institution of slavery which Haitians even into the 1830s still wished to export. Articles in *L’Union*

¹⁴³ It should be pointed out, however, that lieutenant-governor of Saint-Domingue abolished slavery in the island colony in August 1793, several months before the Parisian decree. Attempts to reinstate slavery in the other French Caribbean colonies were successful. A significant but ultimately unsuccessful revolt occurred in Guadeloupe in 1803.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholls 33.

¹⁴⁵ The well-documented quote by Dessalines “I have avenged America” is one of the opening quotes in Laurent Dubois’ historical study *Avengers of the New World* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2004). Referring to Martinique, Dessalines is known to have said “I am not able to fly to your assistance and break your chains. Alas, an invincible obstacle separates us...But perhaps a spark from the fire which we have kindled will spring forth in your soul...” Nicholls 35.

¹⁴⁶ Fischer 276.

document the mission to eliminate slavery in the Caribbean, regenerate the black race, and place Haiti at the center of a new Antillean federation.¹⁴⁷

In this first stanza, however, the description of Dessalines reads ambiguously. The powerful Emperor has conquered Independence and has marked history, what had undoubtedly been primarily a Western-narrated history up to this point, but has a bloody stain been left on the past? The last verse qualifies this history as a national one, but has Haitian history been marred by a reputation of violence? Multiple readings of “il foula cette gloire” also lead to divergent interpretations: Dessalines may have merely disregarded personal glory in the pursuit of national independence, or trampled glory with ruthless actions, white genocide, suppression of mulatto claims to property, and civil war. Finally, the meaning of “du sang fraternal” is the most puzzling of all, possibly suggesting that it was by the strength of his brothers that Dessalines was victorious. In this way, the “fraternal” nature of this revolution could refer to the larger anti-colonial and race-based struggles which Haitian slaves, under Dessalines’ leadership, were the first to undertake. Conversely, these verses could also lend the reading that Dessalines committed fratricide, sacrificing whatever lives were necessary to achieve his goals. As the poem points out, Dessalines was an *Emperor* and not an elected official. Despite national pride, current historical studies elucidate Dessalines’ despotism and imposition of forced labor to maintain the plantation system.¹⁴⁸ The beginning of the next stanza seems to confirm this ambiguity, while also shifting the portrait of Dessalines in the more positive of the two directions:

*Pourtant il était beau, quand tirant nu son glaive,*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ See articles in *L’Union* from le 18 octobre 1838, among others.

¹⁴⁸ Michel Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990) 43-45.

¹⁴⁹ Emphasis added.

Il s'écria : ton jour, ô liberté, se lève !
Cri de lion qui fit tressaillir les déserts !
Cri sublime ! Et soudain les vils troupeaux d'esclaves
Deviennent les guerriers qui brisent leurs entraves
En s'armant de leurs propres fers ! (7-12)

Dessalines's greatness lies in defining moments in which his efforts combine with the mobilization of slaves to achieve freedom through their own efforts. This is the first time in Haitian literature, as it was in history, that this intensely dramatic transformation is portrayed, one which makes warriors out of those whose status had been dehumanized, when a previously directionless mass achieves political agency, joining, in verse ten, their hero-warrior. As explained in this chapter's introduction, Haitian poets from 1804 to 1825 were more interested in praising their current leaders than in focusing on revolutionary heroes; moreover, Dessalines would hardly have been acknowledged by writers in Pétion's mulatto republic. Various word forms containing the root *cri* are repeated throughout the text to express the utter rupture associated with such a vociferous proclamation, the breaking of silence as slaves make history. The fact that this transformation takes place entirely from self-determination, as already noted by Hegel, also marks a practice which will later be heralded by Fanon and other Caribbean writers for whom *granted* freedoms from colonial powers are less meaningful. Haitian poets in the 1830s not only trace the exceptional nature of this colossal event, but in doing so point out that liberty as an ideal sees the light of day not in revolutionary France but in the slave society which will become the Haitian nation.

Nau's poem continues with yet another temporal shift, going back to the events of Toussaint's kidnapping and this crucial time when the struggle for freedom from slavery was almost lost. With Toussaint Louverture no longer leading the revolutionary forces, the reintroduction of slavery and pre-eminence of French rule seemed likely to follow:

Le blanc disait: « Toussaint expire!
« L'aigle est tombé dans nos filets !
« Rage impuissante ! vain délire!
« Ils redeviendront nos sujets!

« Et nous rirons de leur défaite
De leur orgueil, de leur espoir !
La liberté n'était point faite
Pour l'homme qui porte un front noir. » (13-20)

Ardouin's poem, like Nau's poem to be studied shortly, highlights the achievements of Dessalines over those and after those of Toussaint Louverture. It seems significant that both poets would choose this hero, given that it is Toussaint who is much more frequently written about in nineteenth and twentieth-century texts within and outside of Haiti. It is Toussaint, for example, and not Dessalines, who is the subject of a poem by William Wordsworth, a play by Alphonse de Lamartine, multiple poems by Haitian poet Oswald Durand, as well as the aforementioned biography by Aimé Césaire. It is, as Césaire writes in all capital letters, « TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT LOUVERTURE ,» who is included in the verses from his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*.¹⁵⁰ When examining history, however, it would seem that Dessalines as the heralded national figure would represent more the rule than the exception; it was Dessalines who renamed Saint-Domingue *Haiti*, created its flag, and commissioned the vehement declaration of independence, severing ties with France and resisting the two hegemonic systems of slavery and colonialism. As Hardt and Negri point out in a chapter on colonial sovereignty of their work *Empire*, Toussaint's actions and speech revealed his ambitions to remain within the French colonial system, seeking liberty and equality in "an interconnected world" but not necessarily national independence.¹⁵¹ They refer to Toussaint's writings, and

¹⁵⁰ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, ed. Irele Abiola (1935; Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000).

¹⁵¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) 118.

while recognizing the possibility of rhetorical strategy, observe that “At times, however, Toussaint writes as if the very idea of freedom had been created by the French, and as if he and his insurgent companions were free only by the grace of Paris.”¹⁵² Ardouin’s verses, at least, clearly elucidate the opposite. The imagined mocking tone of the whites’ intentions seeks to portray spiteful cruelty and a refusal to extend liberty to others based on race, “pour l’homme qui porte un front noir.” Beginning this poem by highlighting the primacy of the slaves’ initiatives and then following it with the hypocrisy of French Revolutionary ideals render Haiti’s achievement even more revolutionary. By recuperating this war as one which fought for racial equality, the radical significance of the Haitian Revolution extends its import beyond just national independence. Stephen Bann states that the “desire for history” is inevitably involved in a dialectic of loss and recovery, and that various thinkers in the nineteenth century concurred that every nation needed a certain knowledge of the past.¹⁵³

Details in these last two stanzas also contextualize and rationalize any revolutionary violence with which Dessalines was associated, indicating that Haitians in the 1830s already sensed the need to justify the slaves’ revolt and Dessalines’ actions. His appearance after Toussaint’s departure reverses the power dynamic, and in a twist of poetic justice, it is now the whites, terrified and powerless, who are hanged at the gallows:

Dessalines apparut superbe, grand, immense!
Lui-même les pendit à l’ignoble potence,
Qu’élèverent pour nous leurs criminelles mains! (21-23)

It is undoubtedly Dessalines’ legendary violence during and after the Revolution (his order to massacre some 3000 whites remaining on the island) which have precluded acceptance of him as a legitimate national hero. In the poem such actions are justified in light of white

¹⁵² Hartdt and Negri 118.

¹⁵³ Bann 64-65, 67.

“criminal” behavior. The poem’s description of whites’ defeat is followed by a final description of Dessalines’ death which circles back to the beginning of the poem. In the third and final part of Ardouin’s “Le Pont Rouge” Dessalines is inscribed in a divine order, a sacred vengeance with a larger purpose which outlasts the tragic moment of his death at the bridge. The last four verses read:

Et s’il s’ensevelit sous un triste linceul
C’est qu’il faut que d’un ciel la clarté se ternisse.
Que le flot se mêlant au sable se brunisse,
C’est que la pure gloire appartient à Dieu seul. (29-32)

The mention of God in this last verse harkens back to the poem’s epigraph, two verses from the book of II Kings in the Bible: “Comment les forts sont-ils tombés? Comment la gloire des armes a-t-elle péri?” Dessalines is romanticized as a national martyr. The Old Testament book, a history of Israeli kingship, also centers on the relationship between prophecy and the fulfillment of that prophecy through historical circumstances. While both Ardouin and the Old Testament writer recount the impact that decisions of leaders had on a national history, a higher power in both texts works to fulfill national destiny and divine mission. The response to his tragic death, even thirty years after the event, can be for a call to remember Dessalines’ role within a larger context. In concluding a discussion of this poem, it bears pointing out, however, that the fact that Dessalines was ambushed by radical mulattos at the Pont Rouge is completely omitted from the poetic account. This is perhaps to reinforce the desired unity between blacks and mulattos with which Dessalines is in many ways associated both during and after the Revolution. It was under Dessalines’ command that mulatto and black troops joined forces to complete independence. After independence, he is chiefly known for declaring all Haitians “black” in Haiti’s constitution, and for planning to redistribute land more equitably between blacks and mulattos, seeking, as Nicholls explains, to eliminate color prejudice from the

country.¹⁵⁴ Dessalines' murder, however, shows that beyond the military victory this unity was never fully achieved. Black/mulatto divisions contributed to Dessalines' demise and increased after his death: As already mentioned, Haiti fragments into Pétion's mulatto republic in the south and Henri Christophe's black kingdom in the north, a political and geographical separation along black/mulatto lines which would last for twenty years. Dessalines remained symbolic of a possible but unfulfilled national unity. In the 1830s, political reunification had been achieved but black/mulatto relations under Boyer were growing increasingly tense; the dream of unity to be recaptured in Dessalines' memory represented a powerful hope in national viability.

Nau's poem actually entitled "Dessalines" will serve to reinforce many of the ideas already put forth in the preceding analysis. This poem appeared in the January 3 issue of *L'Union* in 1839 and immediately follows both an article about the ratification of treaties between Haiti and France in the previous year and an anonymous poem entitled "L'An 1838." On first page of this year's edition, Nau's poem opens by making a joint appeal to the reader and to the poet to discover "ourselves" in the name of Dessalines. The poetic subject is very much affected and responds by calling on this past leader to provide national awareness and artistic inspiration:

Dessaline!... A ce nom, amis, découvrons-nous! [sic]
Je me sens le cœur battre à fléchir les genoux
Et jaillir à ce nom un sang chaud dans mes veines. (1-3)

This poem bears a composition date of December 31, 1838, and in anticipation of independence day of January 1, it continues with a future projection of what will happen 'tomorrow':

Demain, quand le soleil reluira sur nos plaines,
Quand son disque demain ira de ses rayons

¹⁵⁴ Nicholls 37-38.

Réveiller l'harmonie et l'encens de nos monts,
Qu'au bruit de la fanfare et de l'artillerie
Le peuple saluera le jour de la Patrie,
Suspendez vos plaisirs, recueillez votre cœur,
Songez à nos héros, songez à l'Empereur. (4-10)

The military fanfare vocabulary throughout the poem and especially in this first stanza indeed suggests that this poem was written for national celebration. In this way, it seems very much in line with much of the commissioned poetry in Haiti prior to and during this time. Unlike what one might expect, however, from partisan poetry, the poem is not celebrating the achievements and greatness of the current leader. Boyer, for example, and his successful negotiating of French recognition of Haitian independence are never mentioned. Rather, the key to self discovery is located in a national, even if somewhat imagined, ideal past. The “tomorrow” then is less literal and refers instead to a future time which will rejoin these past accomplishments. The prefix “re” in words like “réveiller” and “reluira” suggests a repeating, a renewal of actions and states which have already come to pass. The ideas of *discovery* and *awakening* not only imply taking up a previous activity, a passing to action after a period of inaction, but also convey a sense of making known or exposing what has been hidden from view. In this way, the implication becomes that something located in the past and projected into the future is missing, perhaps deliberately so, in the present time. The article in *L'Union* which precedes Nau's poems indicates that its editors were celebrating not so much French recognition per se, but rather Haiti's renewed and self-appointed mission to both reclaim national identity and advance African causes. An anonymous editor writes:

Notre attention est plus particulièrement dirigée chez nous; car par le cours naturel des choses, Haïti devrait être à la tête de la civilisation africaine et devrait prendre l'initiative, et en tout ce qui concerne l'avancement de la race à laquelle

elle appartient ; mais pourquoi n'en est-il point ainsi ? C'est que, il faut le dire, nous avons méconnu notre mission.¹⁵⁵

Earlier this editor also points out that the newly established relations between France and Haiti, as guaranteed by this treaty, is the one bright spot in an otherwise miserable year. The subtle incitements against Boyer's regime frame a poem which, in calling for an awakening to national consciousness in an uncompromising leader like Dessalines, indeed works to introduce an element of Haitian identity which many believed had been suppressed under Boyer's practices. All the while conveying national unity in both poems, it is, at the same time, Dessalines' undeniable slave and *African* identity which is also remembered:

Quand cet aigle africain paru sur nos compagnes [...]
A voir l'aigle promis que longtemps il rêva,
D'un seul cri, d'un seul bond, l'esclave se leva
Et surprenant l'impie au milieu de ses fêtes
Rompit son joug de fer contre ses milles têtes. (11, 16-19)

As in Ardouin's poem, Dessalines' mythical heroism is linked to the formidable actions of the slaves, especially since these verses could also give the reading that the slave was formerly Dessalines himself. In continuing to reflect on the differences between Toussaint and Dessalines, the choice for Dessalines once more proves paramount. Historian David Geggus points out that Toussaint Louverture, born Toussaint Bréda, was part of the "slave elite" on the large Bréda plantation, that is to say a coachman who was permitted and encouraged to pursue literacy.¹⁵⁶ Freed around the age of thirty, he became part of the free-colored class and temporarily owned and rented his own slaves. While Toussaint was able to speak, read, and write fluently in French, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, on the other hand, who had been a field slave until he joined the revolutionary forces, spoke only Creole, was illiterate, and, according to

¹⁵⁵ L'Union le 3 janvier 1839.

¹⁵⁶ Geggus 16.

Geggus, “had none of the liking for the white society which Toussaint and the former domestic Christophe, shared with the anciens libres.”¹⁵⁷ As explained in this dissertation’s introduction, Dessalines’ declaration of independence was an oral one in Creole, later to be written down in French by his French-educated secretary, Louis-Boisrond Tonnerre. Somewhat anachronistically, the poem describes the scene of Dessalines’ dictation as one which came in response to the *people’s* commands. The following inscribes the orality of peasant folklore into this literary history:

-“Purifions le sol des péchés de l’impie,”
Dit le peuple, et la torche alluma l’incendie,
Et Jean-Jacques, semblable à quelque esprit de Dieu,
Dicta l’indépendance à la lueur du feu ! (26-29)

Dessalines as hero and leader among slaves becomes a more powerful means of connecting his memory with the *peuple*, the predominately black rural population of Haiti in the 1830s. As we’ll see in Chapter 3, it is during the 1840s and 1850s that the noiriste/mulatto versions of histories and politics fully develop, recovering Dessalines in their political discourse as soon as the year after Boyer’s downfall:

The frustrations of the black population, which had manifested themselves spontaneously and violently in the years following the fall of Boyer, increasingly affected the ideology of the period [...] Noiriste writers praised Dessalines and called for the complete rehabilitation of the liberator of Haiti.¹⁵⁸

Dessalines’ presence in the poetry of the 1830s, even from a strictly chronological standpoint, straddles a fine line between representing national unity and recuperating a contested black figure.¹⁵⁹ Modern enough to have pronounced the founding of the Haitian state (compared

¹⁵⁷ Geggus 26.

¹⁵⁸ Nicholls 10 and 87.

¹⁵⁹ Nicholls explains that by the 1870s, the National Black Party and the Liberal (mulatto) Party claim a black and mulatto legend respectively, with separate historical versions, heroes, etc: Culminating the divisions that had

to maroon leaders like Mackandal, for example) but less cosmopolitan than Toussaint Louverture, the use of this national figure is the compromise between legitimacy and subalternity. To summarize, Dessalines as a figure represents an urgent call for authentic national identity which can only be complete when resurrecting this forgotten African element.

I have already alluded to how the connection between national present and national past is accomplished in this poem partly through the link between *peuple* and *esclave*. The word “people” which appears several times over the course of Nau’s poem is gradually identified with the slaves of the revolutionary era. In the first stanza, this “people,” refers to those who will welcome the upcoming celebration, a present national community which is nonetheless indissociable from the memory of “Dessalines.” In the second stanza, the arrival of the Dessalines, referred to as the “aigle africain” is accompanied by the rising up of the “esclave.” It is in the third stanza that the link between “people” and “esclave” then is directly made, as it is *from slaves that this people is born: Et ce peuple nouveau qui d’esclaves naquit, /Fier des libertés que sa force conquiert.* Beyond positing the locus of Haitian identity as definitively slave, the valiant character of a people and potential for national renewal and future accomplishments are all emphasized. “Ce peuple nouveau” underscores the youth of the Haitian nation as well as the novelty of a phenomenon in which slaves create nations. The choice and place of verbs like *rompre* denote the utter break with past notions of nation and reinforce the exceptional nature of the Haitian Revolution.

These poems represent in turn a break in literature which is not only one between generations of poets, but even among contemporary ones. Some poets continued to write celebratory poems for official government occasions, or wrote commissioned poetry for funerals

already been in the making for decades, “...these two parties battled for supremacy in the electoral, military and intellectual fields.” 108.

and other ceremonies. In light of these poems about the Haitian Revolution, the question remains, however, as to why mulatto poets like Ardouin and Nau would write about a figure like Dessalines, or why they would articulate the Revolution as one of slaves with no mention so far of mulatto struggles for equal rights or their own military victories. Why would mulatto poets, at a time in which they were gaining French recognition but still seeking it internationally (from the United States, for example), not promote more compromise internally and externally, hail Toussaint or even Boyer over Dessalines, urge peace with whites, celebrate the sharing of universal freedoms, portray Haiti as another emerging new world nation, another group of “Creole Pioneers?”¹⁶⁰ These are fundamental questions, especially considering that the largely illiterate and non-French speaking majority of Haiti’s population could not read these poems. As the journal was published in Port-au-Prince, the audience was clearly the Haitian mulatto elite.

A number of possible answers exist in response to these questions. One to which I have already alluded involves a potential subversive intent that these poems may have had towards Boyer’s policies or other factions of the mulattos in charge. The calls by various Haitian statesmen and by Henri Dumesle in particular, as published in *L’Union*, increasingly highlighted Boyer’s abuse of power and demanded, in the name of popular interests, that more decision-making rest in the hand of elected representatives and senators. Boyer, also, eventually forced the journal to shut down. Another possibility may involve practicality, as a nation cannot survive long-term by ignoring the contributions of the majority of its people. Poems about black revolutionary heroes could serve as a useful reminder to the country’s elite as Haiti enters into a new era of continuing the fight for recognition and establishing its presence in the international

¹⁶⁰ Benedict Anderson’s chapter of New World nationalisms focuses on the efforts of Creole elites (Creole meaning those born in the New World) in establishing independence from European colonial centers. As in the example of the American colonies, these elites, however, are not racially, culturally, or linguistically different from their European counterparts.

sphere. If, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot demonstrates, nations are defined by a determining culture feature, then a shared history may have been the least contentious and most compelling means of imagining for all Haitians.¹⁶¹ Or, could the answer be the most powerful one, the one which makes Ardouin and Nau not only truly “national” poets but historians before history so to speak, who did not want the events and significance of the Haitian Revolution to be forgotten? Given the importance accorded to history in the Romantic period, is this how Haitian poets decided to intervene discursively in a story of the past?¹⁶² Did they sense that the story of the Haitian Revolution, which prevented the return of slavery to the island and resulted in the world’s first black republic and the second independent nation in the Western hemisphere, could be lost to future generations? Moreover, could Haitian poets have realized, as Susan-Buck Morss puts it in interpreting the Hegelian dialectic, that it is the *slave* who becomes the agent of historical progress?¹⁶³

The slave is characterized by the lack of recognition he receives. He is viewed as “a thing:” thinghood is the essence of slave consciousness –as it was the essence of his legal status under the Code Noir. But as the (Hegelian) dialectic develops, the apparent dominance of the master reverses itself with his awareness that he is in fact totally dependent on the slave. One has only to collectivize the figure of the master in order to see the descriptive pertinence of Hegel’s analysis: the slave-holding class is indeed totally dependent on the institution of slavery for the “overabundance” that constitutes its wealth. This class is thus incapable of being the agent of historical progress without annihilating its own existence. But then the slaves...achieve self-consciousness by demonstrating that they [...] are subjects who transform material nature.

Part of this transformation, as the ending of Nau’s poem reveals, relates to landscape. After the slaves’ uprising and Dessalines’ declaration, the poem concludes by returning to

¹⁶¹ Trouillot, Haiti: State Against Nation, 23-24. This is especially the case, I would argue, considering all the other apparent differences between Haiti’s elites and the larger population, including French/Creole language, Vodoo/Catholic religions, and rural/urban living.

¹⁶² Bann 81.

¹⁶³ Buck-Morss 847-848.

nature briefly evoked at the poems beginning: “Demain quand le soleil reluira sur nos plaines” The renewal of the land, the possession of nature, and the general hope for future purity and harmony all come into play in the poem after recounting the expulsion of the foreign enemy and the victory of the people in verse 38. The celebration then centers on the promises of this new era:

--Oh demain le soleil se lèvera plus pur
Et plus majestueux dans sa courbe d’azur
L’oiseau nous chantera des chants d’amour encore,
La voix de nos forêts redeviendra sonore,
Et nos fleuves taris jailliront en torrents,
Et nos lacs rouleront des flots plus transparents
Et toi, peuple héroïque, et toi, mon beau génie,
Demain vous saluerez une ère d’harmonie ! (32-39)

Much has been made about Nau’s use of nature in his poems, integral to his identity as an “indigéniste” poet. In this poem, however, the vitality of the landscape is tied to history and community. For both blacks and mulattos, territorial possession is central to sovereignty, much more so than freedom, not only at the time of Revolution but again in the 1830s; the news of recognition ideally meant that Haiti’s land, agricultural and commercial, would not pass again into foreign hands. In a land of competing political ideologies, linguistic divisions, and black/mulatto strife, a shared landscape as much as a shared history could represent national unity. Moreover, in the last few verses, it is Haiti’s natural beauty along with a heroic people and poetic genius which ushers in new promises for a new era. Haiti as the site of revolution and a freed land is also the site of a renewed poetic confidence, of *sound, song, voice, and harmony*.

The last poem to be treated in this section on revolutionary poems is, among other things, about the national role of poetry itself. In “Au génie de la patrie,” also by Ignace Nau, the subject declares his deliberate intention to now turn his focus toward the nation: “C’est à toi

maintenant que s'attache ma muse." It is this spirit, one which at different points in the poem seems to refer to a genius that is military, national, and artistic; each of these will help the poet restore a lost faith, personally and politically. In many ways, reading this poem would recall the observations made so far. The exploits of past heroes are praised, abundance is promised to the land, harmony is sought, and calls are made to reawaken the current generation from rest, shame, and vice in order to restore the former glories of the nation's birth. God's destiny for the nation will ultimately come to prevail. A renewed faith in the "génie de la patrie" is the only answer to the country's current problems as well as to the poet's despair. A middle section of this poem (some of which is not legible in the print copy) contains the following plea:

Et, c'est le doute alors qui vient oser son prisme [...]
Mon front bout sous leur flamme...oh hâte-toi, Génie,
Oh ! viens sauver mon cœur de l'athéisme impie !... (33, 41-42)

Non ! non ! –et si contr'eux il surgit dans la vie [...]
Quelques hommes méchants, aimant la calomnie,
Envieux de la gloire et du bonheur d'autrui [...]
Alors toi seul, Génie, allumant ton flambeau. (43, 46-47, 51)

Appearing in the April 14, 1837 issue of *Le Républicain*, this long poem of over 100 lines of verse has long been thought to have been unfinished. Anthologies and collections claim that this would-be masterpiece was interrupted by Nau's death.¹⁶⁴ It ends with the poet announcing a vision in which Pétion is mentioned. This is the final stanza according to this collection of Nau's verse.

Voici. ---Moi, j'eus hier de douces visions
Où mon cœur un instant bercé d'illusions,
Pressentit les beaux jours promis à ma Patrie,
Entouré dans le ciel d'une foule chérie [...]
De son mol édredon d'azur et de nuage
Pétion arrêtant ses regards sur la plage. (82-85, 88-89)

¹⁶⁴ Berrou and Pompilus 98.

The poem as it is appears in *Le Républicain*, however, contains a remaining 32 lines and seems to come to a close. The missing part in anthologies is in many ways what distinguishes it from “Le Pont Rouge” and “Dessalines:” the revolutionary leader and former mulatto president (1806-1821), Alexandre Pétion, speaks for the next twenty lines. It is he who embodies the efforts not just of slaves but of all national ‘martyrs’ from the revolutionary period. In this part of the poem it is Pétion’s voice, surfacing from the past, which summons up the génie in this time of need:

Prends ton casque, ô Génie, ou flotte un noir cimier [...]
Et de tes regards d’aigle embrassant nos campagnes...
Et l’immense archipel, du haut de tes gradins
Veillent sur nos enfants et leurs jeunes destins ! (102, 105-107)

Throughout the poem’s descriptions, the past and present are conflated, and the vision of Pétion’s presence on the beach mingles with images of current national weakness, revolutionary victories, and accomplished freedoms. In response to the other poems then, this text demonstrates that mulattos, if cherishing national unity and committed to racial equality and the abolition of slavery, still have a voice. It is important to point out that the Pétion envisioned here is not the one later claimed by mulatto historians as the legitimate Haitian leader of the republic in the years of Haiti’s political and geographical division after Dessalines’ demise. Rather, he is portrayed here as a national leader interested in transnational relations and extending freedoms throughout the hemisphere. This is the war hero who served under and united with Dessalines to secure victory in the last phase of the Haitian Revolution and who sought to promote freedom in South America through aid to Simon Bolivar.¹⁶⁵ The last image of Pétion in this poem reveals him folding the blue and red Haitian flag, the original flag created by Dessalines, which was

¹⁶⁵ Pétion allowed Simon Bolivar to seek solace in Haiti during the Latin American wars for independence. He also provide Bolivar with money to continue his fight, with the stipulation that once free from Spain Bolivar would abolish slavery in Spain’s former colonies.

maintained during Pétion's rule.¹⁶⁶ The very ending of the poem, however, returns to the poet, whose dream has conjured up this national spirit and this meditation on the memory of revolutionary martyrs. Poetic vision has made this renewal and call to unity possible:

Sur tes jeunes martyrs des révolutions
Tes lèvres murmurent des bénédictions ;
Puis, d'un vol tu revins vers la terre bénie
Que ton cœur lui promet de veiller, ô Génie ! (118-121)

All three poems are literally revolutionary in the way they portray the nation's founding event. We can again ask the questions, not only of why mulatto poets feature black leaders and slaves, but why they stress mulatto commitments to African causes, and ultimately why they write about the Haitian Revolution in the terms that they do. Returning to Sybille Fischer's study, we are reminded of how the significance of the Haitian Revolution was denied in the accounts that shaped Western modernity. Referring to Haiti's Revolution, and to the slaves in particular, Fischer writes that in Western histories: "Slaves vanish, first literally, through the institution that cloaks them with invisibility, and then conceptually, in the abyss between the social and the political. Revolutionary antislavery is a contradiction in terms. *Haiti becomes unthinkable.*"¹⁶⁷ Given what we know of this period, surely it was not inconceivable to Haitian poets in the 1830s that such a disavowal of Haiti's Revolution, were the silence not broken, could happen even in Haiti where the events had occurred. Although one can always point out what these Haitian poets were not writing (descriptions of the Haitian peasant, for example), it seems more productive to focus on what comprises the writings which are available. Among the

¹⁶⁶ Haiti's flag changed numerous times during the nineteenth century. King Henri Christophe, for example, adopted a flag with two horizontal colors of yellow and red. The original flag created by Dessalines was the French tricolore with the middle white strip removed...symbolizing the removal of white rule and the unity of blacks and mulattos (red and blue). This flag was maintained by Pétion in the years of Haiti's division (1806-1821).

¹⁶⁷ Fischer 9.

themes discussed in the chapter, historical representation of past events and leaders was perhaps the most indispensable element in constructing and legitimizing national identity.

Poets throughout the nineteenth century will continue to recast the on-going meaning of the Haitian Revolution at different phases in Haitian history. These last three poems especially demonstrate the beginning of national consciousness less marked in other Haitian poems prior to and during this same period. Turning to Romantic expression, Ardouin and Nau are among the first in Haiti to shift the role of the poet from that of social entertainer to national spokesperson. Moving to the next few decades, and beyond the demise of poetry in the 1840s and 1850s, many issues relating to personal lyricism, landscape, slavery and revolution, will be picked up again and again, while others, like Taino history will bear few traces. Undeniably certain, however, from this point on, is the fact that poetic practice in Haiti will be increasingly dedicated to national causes.

3.0 HAITI'S NATIONAL BARD WRITERS NATURE, LOVE, AND NATION: THE RIRES ET PLEURS OF OSWALD DURAND

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Haitian Romanticism during the 1830s referred to the collective efforts of several writers, and of Coriolan Ardouin and Ignace Nau in particular, to inaugurate a national literature at a pivotal time in domestic and international politics. Their poetry coincided with the various theories on nationalism and reflections on aesthetics expressed in the journal *L'Union*, censored by President Boyer in the later months of 1839. Poetic production declined during the political turbulence of the 1840s and 1850s following the fall of this regime, but the Romanticism which resurfaced in the 1860s continued to characterize the general style and sensibility of poets writing between *L'Union* and the end of the nineteenth century. These Haitian writers, still embracing the role of the poet as divine emissary and national spokesperson, expand the personal lyricism and national commitment first explored in the 1830s. Haitian anthologies and other texts providing an introduction to Haitian literature tend to classify these independent poets, some of whom devoted their poetry to patriotic themes, under labels such as “romantisme et

patriotisme” or “l’épanouissement du romantisme.”¹⁶⁸ Generally accurate in this categorization, critics nonetheless fall short of providing any in-depth analysis of the individual poets writing during 1860s, 70s, and 80s.

In this chapter, I will focus on the poetry of Oswald Durand (1840-1906), arguably Haiti’s most prominent poet in the second half of the nineteenth century. Durand’s poems began to appear in regional journals decades before his collection of poetry, *Rires et Pleurs*, was published in Paris in 1896.¹⁶⁹ Durand’s poem entitled “Dédicace,” which appears at the beginning of *Rires et Pleurs*, is dated 1869, indicating that Durand envisioned submitting a collection of poems early in his writing career. The eventual compilation of poems would be in two volumes with many of the over 160 texts dated from the 1860s and spanning into the early 1890s. Twentieth-century Haitian writers René Depestre and Jacques Roumain have praised Oswald Durand’s authentic expressions of Haitian culture and have paid him homage as a precursor of Haitian *indigénisme*.¹⁷⁰ In this same vein, discussions of Durand’s poetry consistently highlight the 1883 poem, “Choucounne,” recognized as the first poem in Haitian Creole of Haiti’s literary history. It is only one of two Creole poems found in *Rires et Pleurs*. Little consideration has been given, however, to the rest of Durand’s collection, the overwhelming majority of which was written in French. In general, the poems in *Rires et Pleurs* illustrate the various reasons Durand was hailed as Haiti’s national poet both during his lifetime and after his death. Durand’s ambition to give specific expression to social relationships in

¹⁶⁸ The former is used by Léon-François Hoffmann, in *Littérature d’Haïti*, a source referenced in the previous chapter. The later is used by F. Raphaël Berrou and Pradel Pompilus in *Histoire de la littérature haïtienne illustrée par les textes, Tome I*.

¹⁶⁹ Durand.

¹⁷⁰ As mentioned in the previous chapter, this movement which began in Haiti in the 1920s valorized the traditions, language, and religion of the Haitian peasantry. One source for Depestre’s mention of Durand can be found in *Pour la révolution, pour la poésie* (Montreal: Leméac, 1974) 59. The other by Roumain can be found in *La Revue Indigène* (Port-au-Prince, le 3 septembre 1927).

Haiti, to Haitian nature, and to national history while using universal poetic topos is unparalleled in ambition among his Haitian contemporaries. Compared to his predecessors, a more pronounced subjectivity of this self-declared “barde national” is found in the vast themes of love, land, slavery, and revolution. Most importantly, Durand’s poetry deserves attention for the questions it evokes: If Haitian poets like Durand are writing in French and with the same literary conventions one would find in the French tradition, how does one claim the specificity of the Haitian poet? How does a Haitian poet achieve legitimacy without watering down indigenous values, especially when national identity in Haiti becomes increasingly predicated on race? Various Haitian and French texts, on aesthetics and poetry as well as on theories of racial equality, will further elucidate the complexities of these questions. I intend to explore key texts in Durand’s collection in order to illustrate how the effort to inscribe a national and racial specificity within the aesthetic norms of French Romantic (and to a lesser extent, French Parnassian) poetry enriches as much as it complicates his poetic project.

Understanding the political changes in Haiti since the 1830s and the general international and national climate of the second half of the nineteenth century is indispensable to a reading of Durand’s texts.¹⁷¹ The revolution which overthrew Jean-Pierre Boyer in 1843 was followed by decades of instability. Historians point out that Haiti had twenty-two heads of state between 1843 and 1915 and that only one of these remained until the end of his elected term. Haiti lost land and prestige in the ensuing chaos, as the eastern part of Hispaniola, united with the western part of the island from the beginning of Boyer’s rule in 1822, broke away to declare its independence. It officially became the Dominican Republic one year after Boyer’s downfall in 1844. The subsequent Haitian governments of Philippe Guerrier (1844-1845) and Faustin-Elie

¹⁷¹ As in the previous chapter, the historical information for this period in Haitian history is taken from David Nicholls’ From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti 108-122.

Soulouque (1847-1859) began the “politique de doublure” whereby the power of a black president was orchestrated behind the scenes by the mulattos in the government. Black and mulatto relations grew increasingly divisive with the emergence in the late 1860s of two political parties largely formed along color lines. The predominately black National Party, headed by figures like Demesvar Delorme, Lysius Salomon, and Louis-Joseph Janvier, claimed populist interests and believed in a strong head of state and militarism in government. The Liberal Party, mostly made up of mulattos, believed in a strong legislature and civil government as opposed to military rule. They had as their slogan “government by the most competent,” understood to be found in an educated, mulatto elite. The associations between color and political affiliation were not, however, always clear cut: Frédéric Marcelin was a mulatto who belonged to the National Party, just as Anténor Firmin, a black, belonged to the Liberal Party. Some politicians and military generals switched camps based on the leading figure of the time, and divisions surfaced within both parties with the rise to power of certain leaders.

Not coincidentally, many Haitian historians in the second half of the nineteenth century began detailing black or mulatto versions of the past which would mirror the increasing polarization of these two groups in Haitian society. Thomas Madiou, Haiti’s first historian, had published the first of twelve volumes of his *Histoire d’Haïti* in 1847. Although a mulatto, Madiou’s work was for numerous reasons considered out of step with the more official mulatto view of Haitian history. Proponents of the mulatto ideology turned instead to histories written after Madiou’s, specifically to the works written in the 1850s and 1860s by Beaubrun Ardouin and Joseph Saint-Rémy. These historians emphasized the mulatto role in Haitian independence. This version of the past included highlighting the martyrs of mulatto rights in colonial Saint-Domingue, Ogé and Chavannes, and emphasizing the policies of mulatto Haitian Presidents

Pétion and Boyer. In contrast, Louis-Joseph Janvier in his 1886 book *Les Constitutions d'Haïti* addressed what he saw as numerous errors in Ardouin's 1865 *Etudes sur l'histoire d'Haïti*. According to Janvier, for example, Jean-Jacques Dessalines was the true founder of Haitian independence and defender of the rights of black peasants.¹⁷² The “noiristes” in Haiti sought to rehabilitate the contested figure of Dessalines and believed that Haiti's black majority should assert its power and interest. Mulatto and black leaders could each find justification for their views within these different histories which only deepened divisions between the two political parties. David Nicholls argues that this internal strife intensified between blacks and mulattos to such a degree as to endanger once again the independence of the country.¹⁷³

These internal difficulties coincided with negative responses internationally to Haiti's experience as a nation. European writers capitalized on Haitian events to promote racist ideologies. In the second half of the nineteenth century, much of this negativity can be traced to the regime of black Haitian leader Faustin Soulouque. Joan Dayan in her book *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, details much of the criticism leveled in the European press against Soulouque when two years into his presidency he assumed the title of Faustin I, Emperor of Haiti, in 1849. Dayan explains that when Louis Napoléon declared himself Emperor in 1851 (two years after Soulouque had done so in Haiti), he was often compared to and accused of having imitated the barbarous Soulouque.¹⁷⁴ As Dayan also mentions, Sir Spenser St. John, a British statesman who resided in Haiti, generalized the example of Soulouque's despotism in his sensationalized travelogue *Hayti or the Black Republic* published in 1889. These actions, he concluded, were

¹⁷² Although all of the texts mentioned may be consulted individually, this general information about them is relayed by David Nicholls at various points in *From Dessalines to Duvalier*.

¹⁷³ Nicholls 77.

¹⁷⁴ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 12. Dayan refers to comments made about Soulouque by Karl Marx and the American abolitionist orator Wendell Philips, among others. Her arguments bring out the irony of the slander against Soulouque, as it is purportedly the imitative Haitians who are to blame when a French leader follows the example of a Haitian emperor.

only typical of black leaders who inherently thirst for absolute power.¹⁷⁵ This belief was echoed in perhaps the most well-known of European racist text of this time, Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau's 1853-1855 *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* which specifically cited Haiti's difficulty in sustaining a stable political environment as proof of the inferiority of the black race:

The history of Hayti, of democratic Hayti, is merely a long series of massacres [...] The power that remains unchecked is the true spirit of these people. According to the natural law already mentioned, the black race, belong[s] [...] to a branch of the human family that is incapable of civilization.¹⁷⁶

The fact that de Gobineau's text was met with detailed rebuttals by Haitian essayists indicates that Haitian intellectuals were indeed aware of European racist perceptions; one of these Haitian responses will be explored later in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to state that the repercussions of such ideology cannot be underestimated, as the positing of Haitians as uncivilized by Western writers meant continuing to question Haiti's right to sovereignty throughout the nineteenth century. Although the Haitian Revolution was over half a century old by this time, a general sense of a fragile and incomplete independence can be attributed first to the Western refusal to recognize this independence and then to the non-committal periodic involvement in Haitian affairs by these same nations. Colonial rule had formally ended, but the continued practice whereby a state controls the sovereignty of another through political collaboration or economic and social dependence meant that Haiti remained a target of imperialism for the entire nineteenth century.¹⁷⁷ Intervention by Great Britain, France, and Germany, seeking military or economic advantage, was sometimes even invited by Haitian leaders either to defeat a competing regime within Haiti or to secure protection from one of the

¹⁷⁵ Spenser St. John, *Hayti or the Black Republic* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1889) 95.

¹⁷⁶ Joséph-Arthur De Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Races*, trans. Adrian Collins (Torrance, CA: The Noontide Press, 1983) 49-50.

¹⁷⁷ This definition of imperialism is cited by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) 9.

other powers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the United States was the last of the Western powers to recognize Haiti's independence in 1862, but the years of Haiti's essential non-existence for U.S. foreign policy meant that the Monroe Doctrine had in fact done little to shield Haiti from European interests. American interest in Haiti had remained distant until the United States tried to secure the promontory of Môle St. Nicholas in Haiti as a strategic naval base in the Caribbean in 1891. Negotiations for this area failed, and the United States obtained Guantánamo Bay in Cuba as a naval base in 1903. Franklin Knight calls the United States a "reluctant imperialist" in terms of Haiti but specifies that the United States nonetheless wanted hegemonic power in a dependent hemisphere.¹⁷⁸ The precarious nature of Haiti's economic and political viability which marked the last decades of the nineteenth century would eventually culminate in the nineteen-year-long American Occupation which would begin in 1915.

Haitian intellectuals who wrote amidst such domestic instability and international prejudice were generally united when defending Haiti to the outside world. Although distinctions between blacks and mulattos were frequently made within Haiti in reference to Haitian heads of states and even in reference to some historians, the same is rarely true for essayists, prose writers, and poets writing after 1830. David Nicholls sets up a definition for *race* and *color* which will be useful when discussing these complexities in Haitian society. He explains that Haitians of both *colors* (black and mulatto), even from the time before the Haitian Revolution when they were lumped together as "non-white," accepted that they belonged to the African or black race. He explains the racial unity that Haitians often embraced against the West:

¹⁷⁸ Franklin W. Knight, The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 224.

[...]their racial consciousness stemmed from this recognition and from a determination to combat theories of racial inequality; they wished to demonstrate the capacity of members of the black race to achieve progress [...]Race was throughout the nineteenth century a unifying factor among Haitians.¹⁷⁹

This explains why many poets from Haiti will hence claim to be black poets even if their partly European ancestry may more rigidly classify them as mulattos. In Oswald Durand's poems, the subject identifies himself as a "poète noir" or "le barde noir." The same is true of Jacques Roumain, whose interests in the 1930s and 1940s remained with the African-based traditions of black peasants, or of René Depestre, who as recently as 1992 declared his long-standing position as a "poète noir."¹⁸⁰

For nineteenth-century Haitian poets, it is often difficult for scholars to obtain even basic information about family history. Some important biographical information about Oswald Durand is available in anthologies and other texts, but there are many details about his life which remain difficult to trace. Pradel Pompilus, the Haitian professor who researched Durand's works more extensively in the 1960s, often refers to his own lack of findings surrounding certain aspects of Durand's life.¹⁸¹ It is known that Oswald Durand was born in 1840, just three years before Boyer's downfall in the northwestern city of Cap Haitien. His father, Louis Dolcé Durand, was a mulatto, born to a French father and African mother. Little, however, is known about Durand's mother Aricie, except that she was the daughter of the mulatto writer Pompée Valentin de Vastey (1735-1820). This famous secretary of Haitian king Henri Christophe is credited with writing the first non-European critique of colonialism in his 1814 essay, *Le système*

¹⁷⁹ Nicholls 202.

¹⁸⁰ René Depestre, *Anthologie personnelle* (Arles, France: Actes Sud, 1992) 2. Paul Laraque, introduction, *When the tom-tom beats : selected prose and poems* by Jacques Roumain, trans. Joanne Fungaroli and Ronald Sawyer (Washington D.C. : Azul Editions, 1995).

¹⁸¹ Oswald Durand and Pradel Pompilus, *Poésies choisies, avec une étude biographique et littéraire, des notes explicatives, des jugements, des questions et des sujets de devoirs* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie des Antilles, 1964).

colonial dévoilé. This means that the Baron de Vastey, as he is also called, would have been Oswald Durand's grandfather. The baron died before Durand's birth, but Durand does mention his connection to the Vasteys in an article he wrote about his family origins in the turn-of-the-century Haitian journal, *Haïti littéraire et sociale*.¹⁸² Although he never personally knew Pompée Valentin de Vastey, this knowledge of his genealogy, having been born into a literary elite, surely had an impact on the awareness he had of himself as a writer. Durand also mentions Alexandre Dumas père, the French playwright whose name is also referenced in Durand's collection of poetry. Oswald Durand was distantly related to the Dumas family because Aricie de Vastey was a cousin to the father of Alexandre Dumas père. It is Durand's connection to these two important writers, Pompée Valentin de Vastey and Alexandre Dumas, that Pradel Pompilus refers to when he speaks of Durand's "illustre parenté."¹⁸³ This dual literary legacy, Haitian and French, will later be addressed in analyses of Durand's collection.

I did not, in my research, find any specific information about the career paths or economic status of Durand's parents. He did have access to education throughout his youth and childhood. Durand's mother died when he was two years old after which he lived with a grandmother in northwestern Haiti and attended primary school in nearby Cap Haitien. Dantès Bellegarde's history of Haitian education states that the 1843 constitution had declared education free but not obligatory to all Haitian children; he does not specify what percentage of Haitian children actually went to school.¹⁸⁴ Undoubtedly, it was Durand's years at the Lycée Philippe Guerrier in Cap Haitien that are most significant, as it was during this time that he became acquainted with Demesvar Delorme, a teacher and co-founder of this school who would strongly

¹⁸² *Haïti littéraire et sociale* [Port-au-Prince] le 20 novembre 1905: 404.

¹⁸³ Durand and Pompilus 12.

¹⁸⁴ Bellegarde 223-226.

influence his career as an educator and poet. Durand worked in the tin industry in the years immediately following high school and entered into the teaching profession in the early 1860s. In 1867 he became the director of a school in Gonaïves when Delorme was the Minister of Public and Religious Instruction. Durand later went on to other government posts, eventually presiding over the *Chambre des représentants* in 1888. His focus, however, was clearly poetry, and he published his poems in Haitian journals throughout his lifetime. In addition to Delorme, the other person of mentionable significance was Durand's wife, Virginie Sampeur, a fellow poet and teacher whom Durand met while teaching at the Lycée du Cap Haïtien. Sampeur is known as the first Haitian poetess and appears to be the only woman poet in Haiti in the nineteenth century. The couple, who married in 1862, divorced after nearly nine years of marriage, but her impact on Durand's poetry is noteworthy and will be discussed in more detail. Durand was named Haiti's national poet at least as early as 1879 in the Cap Haitian journal *Le Vigilant*.¹⁸⁵ He was officially recognized as such by a government subsidy in 1905, just a year before his death.¹⁸⁶

3.2 FRAMING A POETIC PROJECT

Durand's *Rires et Pleurs*, which is divided into two books, was first published by the Imprimerie Editions Crété in France in 1896. Although I have not uncovered any specific

¹⁸⁵ *Le Vigilant* [Cap Haïtien] le 15 avril 1829.

¹⁸⁶ Durand continued to author individual poems between 1896 and 1905, many of which I am still finding. For this purposes of this study, however, I have chosen to focus only on the poems found in the 1896 collection, *Rires et Pleurs*.

information about the circumstances which led to its publication, it does seem likely that Durand's friend and mentor, Haitian diplomat, journalist, and essayist Demesvar Delorme, had a hand in this success. Prior to and subsequent to this publication, Durand's poems appeared only in regional and national journals of Haiti, two of which were edited by Delorme, *L'Avenir* and *Le Vigilant*. Durand did not spend significant time abroad, and his only documented overseas trip was a three-month stay in France in 1888. Delorme, on the other hand, to whom Durand dedicates *Rires et Pleurs*, spent much of his life away from his native Haiti, either in official diplomacy or in political exile. Delorme's own literary prestige, which is referenced in Durand's poetry, was due to the many works that he had published in France in the 1870s and 1880s and to the contact he enjoyed with several French writers, including Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo.¹⁸⁷ On diplomatic missions to Europe while Haitian President Florvil Hyppolite was in office from 1889 to 1896, Delorme was in Europe at the time of the publication of *Rires et Pleurs*. Although Delorme made a few brief trips back to Haiti during the last decade of his life, he continued to reside primarily in France until his death in Paris in 1901.

Three texts in *Rires et Pleurs* precede the two books of poetry and frame much of Durand's project: the two dedications and a preface in poetic form, "Sonnet-Préface." The first dedication is also in verse, "Dédicace d'il y a vingt-cinq ans," addressed to Delorme in Paris in 1869. The second text of the collection is a short prose reiteration of the first entitled "Nouvelle dédicace," written to Delorme in Berlin in 1893. The "Dédicace" poem is a tribute to Delorme's influence, identifying him as Durand's teacher and mentor. Durand credits Delorme with the inspiration for his poetry. Durand begins the poem with this opening stanza:

¹⁸⁷ Information about Delorme's life and career, including his contact and correspondence with French writers can be found in Ernest Trouillot's study, *Demesvar Delorme, le journaliste, le diplomate* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie N. A. Theodore, 1958).

Votre élève d'hier, aujourd'hui vous convie
A faire un bon accueil à ses Rires et Pleurs ;
A les prendre en pitié, quoique dans votre vie,
Les rires aient souvent fui devant les douleurs. (1-4)

Durand goes on to elaborate on Delorme's fondness for French poetry and for Lamartine especially, which he in turn imparted to all of his students. Only ten years apart in age, Durand and Delorme would have shared a common literary heritage which emphasized nineteenth-century French poets, many of whom Durand also quotes as epigraphs in the collection. Delorme had written about his view of literature in his essay *Les théoriciens au pouvoir*, a text which investigates in the form of dialogue the renowned intellectuals of Greece, Rome, and France. In this work, Delorme states that literature provides a type of "second vision" into the world's beauty and is capable of guiding the development of civilization and transforming societies. Citing Greece and France as his prime examples, Delorme then discusses the primordial role of literature in establishing national greatness:

Elle [la littérature] gouverne ainsi à sa manière, et elle agit sur les peuples plus effectivement que les gouvernements eux-mêmes [...] Ce sont les hommes de lettres qui ont rendu la Grèce, dans le temps, la capitale et l'école de toutes les nations; ce n'est pas sa politique, c'est sa littérature qui a mis la France à la tête du monde. Sa grandeur et son influence sont le fait de la succession non interrompue de ses penseurs, depuis Abélard jusqu'à ce jour.¹⁸⁸

The importance Delorme accords to literature represents a slight shift from prescriptions outlined by Emile Nau in *L'Union*. Since so many historical texts had been authored by Haitians in the preceding decades, Haitian intellectuals like Delorme refer less to the need to write history than they do to develop literature. This does not mean that literature cannot reflect or even reconstruct historical events, or that versions of history were not contested. However, that the significance placed on literary texts is greater during this period. Given the political instability in

¹⁸⁸ Demesvar Delorme, *Les théoriciens au pouvoir* (1870; Port-au-Prince: Editions Fardin, 1979) 202.

Haiti compared to the relative calm during Boyer's rule, it is no wonder that Haitian thinkers look more to literature for national identity and legitimacy and less to the political workings of the nation-state. In this way, the importance of literature is both a response to now having written histories and a reaction to current political crises.

Delorme's comments about literature also help to contextualize what French texts in particular may have represented for Haitian writers in the second half of the nineteenth century. An admiration for French literature stems not only from an appreciation for specific works or poets but also for the continuity of expression which over time has resulted in a national canon. France has no monopoly on literary greatness, since Greece preceded France in this achievement at an earlier time in history. As stated in *L'Union*, however, it is because of a shared language that Haitian writers had access to French literature as a recent example of an established literary tradition. Without specifically saying so, Delorme seems to indicate that there are universal qualities in literature of all times and places. In light of this observation, it is useful to bring in Jean Paulhan's 1941 essay *Les Fleurs de Tarbes*. Paulhan explores how writers have traditionally used accepted topoi whose established association with literature makes them appropriate and even necessary for new poetic endeavors.¹⁸⁹ Paulhan writes against condemning *a priori* the use of certain rhetorical conventions which since the advent of Romanticism have been reproved by literary critics. The similarity between topics in Durand's collection and other recurring themes in French poetry reveals a means through which Durand can frame his own project. Paulhan's text can also help to explain why, for example, a poet might use such clichéd terms to describe a sunset. Durand's "Sonnet-Préface." opens with this quatrain:

¹⁸⁹ Jean Paulhan, *Les fleurs de Tarbes; ou, La terreur dans les lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941).

Ainsi qu'à l'occident, lorsque le soleil pâle
S'amincit par degrés et plonge dans les flots,
Des flocons empourprés, brillant au ciel d'opale,
Y forment un instant de ravissants tableaux; (1-4)

In this poem, colorful images of an evening sky, conveyed as a ravishing painting, are directly compared to the momentary inspiration of this collection of poetry. As Paulhan would explain it, the natural beauty of a sunset is inherently poetic. It is therefore understandable why it may find its way into Haitian and French poetry alike:

Pour banal que soit un lieu commun, il peut toujours avoir été inventé par qui le prononce: il s'accompagne même, en ce cas, d'un vif sentiment de nouveauté [...] Il arrive à chacun de nous d'observer quelque jour: 'Si l'on voyait ce coucher de soleil sur un tableau, l'on dirait que ce n'est pas vrai.' [...] Ainsi les mêmes contes, les mêmes dictons semblent être nés à la fois dans les pays les plus éloignés et y renaître indéfiniment – mais non pas nécessairement sans effort, ni joie d'imagination.¹⁹⁰

Delormes's comments about literature's role in creating great nations and the consideration that Paulhan gives to poetic topoi serve to contextualize Durand's poetics. These insights, however, also complicate what it means to be a Haitian poet in late nineteenth-century Haiti. If Haitian poets like Durand are writing in French and with the same literary conventions we would find in the French literary tradition, is there to be no specificity defining the Haitian poet? The relevance of this question is especially acute for Haiti's first self-declared and publicly recognized national poet in the nineteenth century. In light of these questions it is useful to return to those beginning verses of Durand's "Dédicace" and to the descriptions of nature which frame his work:

¹⁹⁰ Paulhan 193.

J'ai chanté nos oiseaux, nos fertiles campagnes,
Et les grappes de fruits courbant nos bananiers,
Et le campêche en fleurs, parfumant nos montagnes,
Et les grands éventails de nos verts lataniers. (5-8)

As Durand's emphasis on Haitian landscape throughout his collection will illustrate, Durand concurs with Delorme in theory but less in practice. Durand's focus on natural beauty coincides with Delorme's theory that literature is that which conveys an "attrait du beau," and an "élévation au bien."¹⁹¹ Additionally, much of Durand's collection, beginning with the "Dédicace," coincides with aesthetic and thematic norms typically associated with Romantic poetry. However, it is also important to note that Delorme's prescriptions for national literature do not necessarily include rooting themes in local sources. Delorme's own fiction, which includes three novels, has nothing intrinsically to do with Haiti; his novel *Francesca*, for example, is a romance set in Italy. Delorme shares his convictions with many other Haitian theorists and writers of his time: promoting Haitian literature is less about the content and more about Haitians participating in the authorship of texts which will express universal notions of beauty. In Durand's collection, however, it is not just nature and beauty but *Haitian* nature and beauty which provide inspiration. Durand joyfully expresses the vitality and openness of his poetic project in the second stanza of his "Dédicace" with an emphasis on Haitian terrain. The descriptions cited earlier, of budding trees and fertile land, continue as figures of rhetoric. The third stanza of the poem reads as follows:

J'ai chanté notre plage où la vague se brise
Sur les pieds tortueux du raisinier des mers ;¹⁹²
Nos sveltes cocotiers, qui prêtent à la brise
Des sons purs qu'elle mêle au bruit des flots amers. (9-12)

¹⁹¹ Delorme 202.

¹⁹² According to one dictionary, a "raisinier" is an "arbre d'Afrique tropical (fam. Anacardiacees) aux fruits comestibles ressemblant à des raisins [...] raisinier d'Amérique ou Antilles fr./ raisinier bord-de-mer : arbre tortueux (fam: polygonacées)." "Raisinier," Dictionnaire Universel Francophone, 1997 ed.

By focusing on elements of the *Haitian* landscape, Durand reveals a distinct source of poetic inspiration which Delorme and many of Durand's contemporaries did not pursue.

These verses constitute a prelude of other poems to come. Poems about the flora and fauna of Haiti are to be found primarily in the second book of *Rires et Pleurs*. In anticipation of further analysis, one can already note that the descriptions of Haitian landscape serve as a sign of national commitment. Durand's nature poetry expands the tradition of an indigenous literature as envisioned by the writers of *L'Union* and more thoroughly explores nature as a poetic theme, begun by Ignace Nau. In the time in which Durand was writing, this geographical specificity is even more paramount as Haiti is constantly a contested territory. The words *tortueux* and *amer* with their negative connotations suggest that writing about nature will not always be celebratory.

By the poem's end, Durand no longer speaks merely for other grateful students of Delorme, but this collective voice is now posited as a national representative. Delorme is addressed as a compatriot living away from his homeland. The book of poetry takes on added significance, serving as a nostalgic reminder of Haiti to a friend in exile:

Les flots vous poussent loin de la rive chérie,
Mais de nos cœurs, ami, rien ne peut vous bannir.
Je vous offre ce livre, écho de la patrie,
Dont l'exil rend encore plus cher le souvenir. (41-44)

It is near the end of the "Dédicace" that Durand invokes the names of four Haitian writers from the early nineteenth century. Sixty years after independence, he cites what he already sees as the makings of a Haitian literary tradition. Besides the two early Romantic poets from the 1830s, Ignace Nau and Coriolan Ardouin, Durand also names Jules Milscent, founder of Haiti's first literary and political journal *L'Abeille haytienne*, and finally Boisrond Tonnerre, the author of Haiti's 1804 *L'Acte d'indépendance d'Haïti*. Durand's mention of these Haitian writers

prefigures the quotes of Haitian poets to be found at the beginning of several poems in the first book of *Rires et Pleurs*. As mentioned earlier, Durand cites both Haitian and French poets in epigraphs and dedicates many of his pieces to Haitian poets in former or current generations. It is with the 1887 poem “Chant National,” located about three-fourths of the way through the first book of *Rires et Pleurs*, that these epigraphs and dedications serve to establish Durand’s own importance as a poet. He literally inscribes his own poetry within these two literatures. Before beginning “Chant National,” Durand quotes *himself*. He selects the following verse from his poem “Aux Cubains,” found earlier in the collection: “Derrière la charrue, au travail résignée,/ Marche à grands pas la liberté!” and adds in parentheses “O.D.” Durand has outlined the progression of Haitian literature which ends in this work. It began with the document declaring national independence, continued to develop within the broader trends of Romanticism, and boasts uniqueness rooted in Haitian landscape and history. The deliberate references to both French and Haitian literary icons reveal Durand’s intent throughout *Rires et Pleurs* to shape his poetry by these *two* vectors of influence. Highlighting French poets permits Durand to reference literature which would be recognized by a wider readership and one which, as detailed in Chapter Two, had undoubtedly influenced Haitian literary trends. Simultaneously, it is by referencing Haitian poets that Durand asserts his commitment to continuing a national poetic tradition. The textual proximity of these French and Haitian sources in Durand’s “Dédicace,” as within the entire collection, works to reduce the distance between the two literatures on a formal level and thereby eliminates the hierarchy that would privilege European originality. While this does not mean that Durand envisioned the French and Haitian traditions as identical, he powerfully suggests that as national literatures the two can coexist in equality and distinctiveness.

Durand's French and Haitian references attest then to the dual nature of his writing as he reconciles the established French tradition of poetry with a committed choice to write for Haiti. This does not mean, however, that his project is without contentions. Despite the joyful expressions about the contribution his poetry makes to literature, Durand predicts with some degree of accuracy that decades of personal and national poetry will ultimately be forgotten. In the "Sonnet-Préface," the fleeting beauty of the sunset, like his poetry, will inevitably fade; the colors of the evening sky will give way to a shadow of oblivion. These two tercets conclude the sonnet:

Ainsi les humbles vers de cet humble volume
Où l'inspiration, pour un moment, allume
Un reflet fugitif aux ardentes couleurs,

S'éclipseront demain. L'oubli, cette nuit sombre,
Sur les vers du poète étendra sa grande ombre
Et nul ne parlera de ses *Rires et Pleurs*. (9-14)

The word "humble" repeated twice in the first verse is frequently used by Durand to describe his own poetry as unassuming and unimportant. This humility with which Durand portrays his own collection in these introductory texts also functions as a topos, but the question remains as to why Durand chose to contextualize his work in this way. Other books of poetry for example begin by claiming their own insignificance and paying tribute to a much great writer. Baudelaire, at the beginning of his 1857 *Les fleurs du mal* offers his "fleurs malades" to the "poète impeccable," and "parfait magicien des lettres françaises," Théophile Gautier.¹⁹³ José-Maria Heredia dedicates the collection *Les Trophées* "tel qu'il est" to Leconte de Lisle in 1893 and says to his mentor "...mon titre le plus sûr à quelque gloire sera d'avoir été votre élève bien

¹⁹³ Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal* (Montreal: Variétés, 1944) 1.

aimé.”¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the tone and purpose of Durand’s “Dédicace” are reminiscent of Victor Hugo’s preface to *Les Contemplations* of 1856, in that both poetic voices speak for a larger entity. In *Rires et Pleurs* this collective is all of Delorme’s students and finally other countrymen, and in *Les Contemplations*, it is humanity at large: “Est-ce donc la vie d’un homme? Oui, et la vie des autres hommes aussi [...] Ma vie est la vôtre, votre vie la mienne....”¹⁹⁵ Knowing the prejudicial climate of the time and understanding the obstacles Haitian writers faced, it is also important to ask if the assumed modesty and perception of futility were also somehow related to racial and national identity. This brings us back once again to what makes Durand’s project distinctive and to how such distinctions hindered poetic reception or inspired Durand’s ambitions. How does Durand’s poetry negotiate potential reservations *having to* reflect cultural realities with the simultaneous desire to culminate the prescriptions of *L’Union* whereby poetry expresses a national ethos? How does being a Romantic poet and a Haitian poet enrich or complicate Durand’s poetic project? Is Durand to be considered first and foremost as a Haitian poet, a Romantic poet, or as a writer outside these paradigms? These are just some of the questions which will resurface upon closer examination of select poems in *Rires et Pleurs*.

¹⁹⁴ José-Maria Heredia, *Les Trophées* (1931; New York: AMS Press, 1979) III.

¹⁹⁵ Victor Hugo, *Œuvres Poétiques*, vol. 2 (Tours: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1967) 481.

3.3 THE MAKINGS OF A NATIONAL POET AND THE VICISSITUDES OF A COLLECTION

Durand's collection as a whole remains difficult to classify. The words "rires" and "pleurs," in the last verse of "Sonnet-Préface" are frequently repeated in different contexts in several poems. This antithesis will play out in the alternating tones of celebration and despair, again related to the collection's main themes of love, nature, history, and nation. The two opposing sentiments, juxtaposed into a title, also constitute a topos and succinctly tied together the diversity of three decades of poetry. The subtitles of the two books further indicate the variety of style and theme: Book One includes *Poèmes, élégies, satires, odelettes*, and Book Two, containing the more playful descriptions of love and nature, has as its subtitle, *Fleurs des mornes, Refrains, Nos payses, Contes créoles*. I will begin my analysis with two of Oswald Durand's longest poems, both located in the first book. They stand out among the rest in a variety of ways. These two poems illustrate the thematic and stylistic diversity of the collection in terms of alternating versification and differing content even within the space of a single poem. The shifting poetic voices also contemplate what should constitute national poetry in Haiti at this time. The questions these poems raise, like the ones posed at the end of the introduction to this chapter, relate to understanding Oswald Durand's mission as a poet and the challenges of defining a Haitian poetic project.

The first of these two poems, "La voix de la patrie," is dedicated to Massillon Coicou, a poet whose political activism resulted in his assassination in 1908 and whose poetry is the subject of this study's final chapter. Coicou, twenty-seven years younger than Durand, began to write in the 1880s. Coicou's poems affirmed unwavering commitment to patriotic themes. It is no surprise that of all poets, Durand would associate Coicou with a poem bearing this title.

Durand's lengthy poem begins as one poet invites the other to come away with him to dream. This invitation includes communion with nature and then, recalling Baudelaire's "Elévation," emphasizes fleeing worldly concerns:

Quand le palmier, sous le vent qui l'effleure,
Agite ses verts rameaux,
Allons ensemble, ô poète! c'est l'heure
De rêver sous les ormeaux!

A notre esprit, qui plane solitaire
Dans l'idéal et l'azur,
Qu'importe, ami, cet affreux terre à terre
--Ce monde où tout est obscur? (1-8)

Contrary to how others experience ephemeral notions of happiness, these poets will aspire to lasting peace found in metaphysical truths. This introduction, composed of four quatrains with alternating decasyllabic and heptasyllabic verses, is suddenly followed by a break in the text and then a change in tone and verse. One of the poets speaks, engaging in a song-like dialogue with nature:

--- Salut, ô plaines!
O verts gazons!
Fraîches haleines!
Bleus horizons!
Et vous, prairies
Toujours fleuries,
Causons, causons! (17-23)

Although the interlocutors in the poem are not directly specified within the text, the long series of interjections could very well read as an exchange between Durand, Coicou, and finally, "La voix," an anonymous voice who speaks at the end of poem. It is presumably Durand, then, who looks to share the pursuit of poetry with Coicou, a pursuit which begins by seeking inspiration in nature. Durand, as the more mature poet, takes the lead, composing his own lyrical verse which will go on to include the gentle winds, idyllic climate, and horizons canvassed with

mango and palm trees. Nature certainly belongs more to Durand's semantic field than to Coicou's. The descriptive details in later stanzas when evoking the palm tree as the emblem of liberty bear striking resemblances to those in other poems by Durand which I will examine later in this chapter. The verses of just four syllables cited above, which begin with "Salut, ô plaines!," are also common in some of the sketches of the Haitian landscape in the second book of *Rires et Pleurs*. After these verses, however, another shift occurs, for despite a preference to delight in nature, the reality of the country's miseries inevitably surfaces in the following sections. It thus seems to be Coicou, who as the more exclusive patriotic poet, now seeks to reconcile a series of contradictions, wondering how this paradisiacal island could also have been the locus of slavery. He wonders if poetry could be the antidote for past suffering and eventually finds solace in the Haitian Revolution. The heroic feats of Haitian revolutionaries led to repossessing the land and founding a new nation:

Qui nous inspirera?... –Sera-ce Dessalines
Dont le hardi courage a chassé l'étranger?
Qui nous légua ton sol et tes vertes collines
Où fleurit en tout temps l'élégant oranger? (57-60)

Coicou's epic poetry rests frequently with the revolutionary leaders like Dessalines and Toussaint Louverture, without whom the natural beauties of the island could never have been claimed. After both Durand and Coicou have spoken, however, the "voix," who speaks as a national muse, rejects what both poets have offered. Instead, this voice declares that poetry should reflect the tragic reality of the country's *current* strife. She responds to their questions in a long diatribe that begins in this way:

Non! Mais faites vibrer vos cordes argentines
Sur les hideux tableaux qu'offre notre pays,
Et, racontant à tous nos guerres intestines
Parlez de ces tyrans des valets obéis! (66-69)

These verses articulate what Haitian poetry is not addressing. The muses' indictment within this poem conveys that poets knew about specific political problems and yet still chose not to focus on this topic in their poetry. The reasons for this remain speculative, but they may include general fear of reprisal or a preference for subjects less divisive in terms of national unity. In any case, Haitian poets remained aware of the scope and deficiencies of their own projects.

In "La Voix de la Patrie," the voice of the muse continues to signal the economic disparities among Haitian citizens, the exploitation of the poor, and the mockery of a justice system which condemns many Haitians to death and forces others into exile. Perhaps it would be better, she suggests, for the poets to throw away their lyres completely; if they are going to write at all, then only satire would be appropriate. The voice ends her long series of suggestions but without a definitive answer. She doubts whether or not she should attempt to change the course of their poetry. Reluctant to spoil their visions of a poetic ideal, she leaves the decision to the poets. The poets contemplate what they have just heard, and together they return to the blue horizons, budding flowers, and green prairies from the poem's beginning: "Salut! ô plaines!/ O verts gazons!"

Whether these last verses indicate a "hail" or a "farewell" to nature poetry is part of the poem's ambiguity. Given, however, that this refrain is always followed by "causons, causons," I will base my interpretation on the first possibility but will explore a second interpretation in light of an intertextual reference in one of Coicou's poems in the final chapter of this study. In addition to being ambiguous, this poem's ending is also abrupt. It therefore offers multiple interpretations of how to conclude the debate between the two interlocutors and between the poets and the "voice." On the one hand, it is Durand's poetry which has the last word, as the

poets affirm the primacy of nature in poetic inspiration. Regardless of the country's turmoil, the commitment to pursue traditional conceptions of poetry prevails, even when other types of literary works like satire may more accurately reflect national realities. By ending the poem with these verses, Durand also expresses the desire to shield poetry from political debasement. On the other hand, a return to nature at the poem's end rings empty in light of the numerous concerns raised in other verses. These simple evocations of trees and plains are disconnected in form and content from the rest of the poem. Nature as a topos may seem evasive as the poem brings to light the stubborn refusal of poets like Durand and Coicou to focus their efforts on the current problems which threaten national survival. Finally, because these last verses are a repetition of those found earlier in the text, they do not really mark any type of definitive conclusion. While the sense is that while the poem stops here, the conversation could very well continue with any of the three voices. Several questions remain unresolved and therefore perpetuate the ambivalence inevitable in Haitian poetry: Should poetry reflect national concerns? Is nature's commonplace quality to be embraced or avoided? Within the realm of "national poetry" itself, should the work of poets insist on the distinctive features of local color or celebrate the glories of national independence? And who or what will constitute "la voix de la patrie?" The poem does not resolve these dilemmas. The only definitive conclusion is that poetry will be written out of such inquiries. In Haiti of the nineteenth century there may always be a conflict between a poet's desire for poetry and his sense of political commitment. The intense feelings of patriotism repeatedly conflict with the reality of corruption and suffering. National pride will be simultaneously met with despair.

The poet's nostalgia for his past and the misery of the present are contrasted in another lengthy piece, "A la ville de Saint-Marc." This text centers similarly on a dialogue, this time

between one poet and his muse. The poet addresses this “ville de poète où la brise est si douce!” that he associates with many joyful memories from the past. He recalls the beauty of the city’s bay in northwestern Haiti and the time he spent there when he was young and in love. Whereas nature and romance originally defined his poetry, Durand’s refrain contrasts this poetic past with the muteness of the present:

Faut-il que ce beau temps qui me rendait poète
Ne soit plus, ô cité! qu’un lointain souvenir,
Et qu’aujourd’hui, ma lyre à ce point soit muette,
Qu’avant de commencer mes vers doivent finir! (9-12)

This transition from personal to political themes and from lyric to epic modes of poetry initially leads to silence. In another phase of the poem, poetry undergoes a transition as inspiration extends to include the nation’s history:

Adieu, beau pont de pierre et tes eaux si limpides!
Adieu ! mon luth, pour vous, n’a plus que des soupirs.
Je chante maintenant la gloire de nos pères
Le joug de l’étranger par leurs fers abattu. (23-26)

In time, however, this topic is also abandoned. The poet and his muse decide to leave undisturbed the events of Haiti’s revolution to return once again to nature, youth, and love. Like “La voix de la patrie,” the poem is composed of varying verse, breaks in stanzas, and vacillating sentiments of both the poet and his muse. Changes in temporality, as shown by verb tenses and historical references, also allows the poet to move in and out of the recent personal past, the distant colonial past, and the present. One of the last movements of the poem brings the solemn recognition that both personal happiness and national victories belong to another time. The poet, returning to Romanticism’s notion of lyric poetry, believes poetry must now reflect and even be enriched by such grief:

--Nul n’est poète sans un pleur.
Tous les grands hommes de génie

Ont eu cette larme bénie,
Et Musset dit que l'harmonie
Est la fille de la douleur. (163-167)

In the next section of the poem, the poet compares the exploration of memory to the danger of landing on these islands' shores. In doing so, he conveys that for the Haitian poet, the risks associated with comparing the present to past memories are too great to overcome. Dwelling on the painful discrepancies between the various temporalities and the differences between poetic ideals and current suffering can ultimately lead to a shipwreck of sorts and ultimately a cessation of poetry. The muse herself is shocked at these dramatic changes in the verse of the poet and interjects: "Quoi! –dit-elle,-- où sont donc ces joyeuses ivresses, /Ces instants où mes vers étaient mélodieux...." The ending echoes the refrain at the beginning of the poem, but it is pronounced this time by the muse. Her final declaration specifies that poetry cannot in fact be sustained by such sadness. Subsequently she decides to abandon the poet and leave him once and for all in silence. In the end, the poem is less about personal and national recollections than it is about the loss of poetic ideals. Poetry at the end of this piece is reduced to memory and shows no signs of beginning anew.

These two poems, as revealed in the selected quotes, illustrate the thematic and stylistic variety of Durand's collection. It is not accidental that "A la ville de Saint-Marc" and "La voix de la patrie" are among the many poems left undated. The sentiments they express and the complexities they unveil about Haitian poetry remained characteristic of Durand's verse throughout his career. At least in the case of "A la ville de Saint Marc," the recollections of youth and of poetry previously written would seem to indicate that a more mature poet, looking back over his life and career, composed the verses either over time or in a period later than most poems in the collection. The dates included after some poems, along with other details about

Durand's career, do suggest he was initially a poet who wrote extensively about love and nature, mostly during the 1870s. Only later did Durand devote many more poems to national themes. Other dates reveal, however, that these broader trends are not absolute and reflect not an evolution in Durand's poetry over a thirty year period but rather an expansion of style, content, and thoughts about poetry. Attempting to date "La voix de la patrie" shows how difficult it is to establish with certainty a chronology of Durand's poems. Since this poem is dedicated to Massillon Coicou, one might conclude that it was written at the earliest in the 1880s when Coicou began writing poetry. However, two editors of Haitian anthologies specify that this poem had *already* made Durand famous during the mid 1870s, but Coicou himself would not have been more than twelve or thirteen years old at the time of composition.¹⁹⁶ I have not located any manuscripts of Durand's texts, but given this information, he likely wrote this poem early in his career and that later, in a revised form, dedicated the verses to Coicou. If, "La voix de la patrie" was written in the 1870s, it certainly did not, as its ending might suggest, signal an abandonment of political poetry. Several of Durand's most strikingly political poems, such as "La mort de nos cocotiers" and "Chant national" indisputably date from the 1880s. During this decade, Durand's poetry most resembles Coicou's in terms of style and theme. Rather than a steady progression, whether in terms of subject matter, tone, or versification, Durand's work can best be chronicled as a series of fluctuations at different political, personal, or artistic moments.

Durand's early period can be considered to include the Romantic poems he wrote in the mid to late 1860s. Two poems in particular which do bear specific dates demonstrate that Durand rather early in his career had a conception of the poet's role which is consistent with that of the French Romantic tradition. The first of these is "Ducas Hippolyte." Durand composed

¹⁹⁶ Berrou and Pompilus 424-425.

this poem to commemorate the life and works of a Haitian poet about whom little information is available in current texts. According to Pompilus' research, this poem was widely publicized as an *oraison funèbre* at Hippolyte's death in 1868.¹⁹⁷ At this time, Durand was working in a government post as *secrétaire au Conseil des Ministres*. It is the only poem in *Rires et Pleurs* followed not only by a specific year but also by a day and month; the inscription of "le 27 novembre 1868" indicates the day of Hippolyte's public funeral. The praises throughout the poem are meant as a mournful and reverent tribute to the poet whose divine inspiration has brought glory to his nation:

A la couronne d'or que la sainte patrie
Réserve pour le front de ses nobles élus,
En voyant se glacer cette tête chérie
Elle vient d'ajouter une perle de plus. (21-24)

All of Haiti witnesses this departure to a celestial sphere where only poets are called and where other Haitian poets also reside; three of the Haitian poets mentioned from other generations, Ardouin, Milscent, and Ignace Nau, are the same as those in Durand's "Dédicace." Hippolyte's young life, however, left much poetry to be written, and he took his place too soon among the nation's departed elect. This poem suggests fulfillment of earlier ambitions, those of the 1830s generation to have *poets* in Haiti. Hippolyte and Durand are part of this growing tradition. As the poem progresses, the tone becomes less formal, and as the speaker shifts from using "vous," to "tu," he addresses "Ducas" in the final stanza as a renowned poet and as an intimate friend. In this way, the poet commissioned to write the funeral oration becomes more intimately aligned with the poet whose memory is celebrated. As a result, Durand's own poetry

¹⁹⁷ Pradel Pompilus and Roland Thadal, *Pradel Pompilus: Textes Réunis* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Editions des Antilles, 2002) 15.

could be encapsulated in the memory of the then well-known Ducas Hippolyte. As Pompilus points out, this very public poem indeed contributed significantly to Durand's own notoriety.

Although a few other poems in *Rires et Pleurs* also appear to have been written for specific events or people, their presence in no way diminishes the importance accorded throughout Durand's collection to the sacred role of poets and the incomparable qualities which set them apart from the rest of humanity. "A l'Auteur de Nella," a series of three sonnets dedicated in 1867 to a minor Haitian poet known as B. Basquiat, begins with a refusal to write poetry on demand. Poetic material cannot be dictated by others but sensed by the poet alone. The poet's role is so *sacred* that others may not determine what is fitting for poetic expression.

C'est en vain qu'on me dit: "Chante ceci, poète:
C'est beau, noble, élevé; c'est bien fait pour le vers;
Mais que devant cela, ta muse soit muette:
La rose a sa chenille et le fruit d'or, ses vers!"

Tout me plait [...] (1-5)

It is evident from the debates in "La voix de la patrie" and "La ville de St. Marc" that poets in Haiti are not immune to societal pressures. The poet's supreme quality, however, rests with his ability to transform any matter into a subject worthy of poetic expression. Whether in Ancient Greece, Renaissance Europe, or nineteenth-century Haiti, poets are described as those who are profoundly and involuntarily inspired by the variety of themes they read in humanity and in nature. They are, as Homer and Shakespeare, "les colosses de génie en qui le beau respire" (37).

The reality of the poet's plight, in spite of lofty ideals, is expressed in poems like "A Delorme," which begins with this question: "Ne saviez-vous donc pas qu'ici bas le génie/Est crée pour servir de proie aux ignorants?" (1-2). Awareness of his own talent amidst an ungrateful and hostile society means the poet is wrought with pessimism reminiscent of a Romantic spleen.

The poet is alienated from the very community for whom he claims to speak and so in this instance intends to connect with Delorme, his soul-mate. The following verses conclude “A Delorme:”

Tu le sais, mais qu’aussi l’on rencontre en ce monde,
Pour mille cœurs d’acier, quand même une âme soeur,
Qui comprend l’idéal; qui, sur la foule immonde
Jette un regard fier, plein de magique douceur:
Qui te mord les talons; pour ces milliers d’ingrats,
Je voudrais t’aimer seul, te consacrer ma vie,
Et seul reconnaissant pour toute ma patrie,
Te louer, te bénir!...Dis, ne le sais-tu pas? (27-34)

The poem, “Chanteur des rues” provides another profoundly pessimistic and disparaging view of the poet’s condition, as the poet is reduced to a mere “chanteur des rues,” condemned to amuse the crowd for what little money he earns. “Chanteur des rues,” which is not dated, begins with a quote by Musset, one very similar to the first two verses of the first stanza:

Puisque c’est ton sort, chanteur misérable,
D’amuser la foule avec tes chansons;
Puisque pour ton cœur rien n’est préférable
Aux joyeux oiseaux de nos verts buissons; (1-4)

In the following verses, the poet is not only misunderstood by the rest of society but also mocked by it. A poet who communes with nature is ridiculed in light of the verses which follow, as the talents of the poet degenerate and his voice lacks harmony. Any celebration of nature, as in the “Dédicace,” is stripped of aesthetic qualities. Society views him as a mere performer of sound and not as an author of poetry. In these poems, Durand discloses his own priorities for and conflicting sentiments about poetic expression. This Romantic view of the poet as national representative, divine emissary, and pariah in his own land resurface in Durand’s poems throughout his career. Many poems which date from the early 1890s are virtually indistinguishable from earlier poems in this way. The vacillation between poetic ideals and

societal realities, the *rires* and *pleurs* of a poet's existence, is not so dissimilar from the poet's condition outside Haiti. The importance of establishing Durand as a poet per se will take on additional relevance later in this chapter.

Before concluding this section, I would like to highlight a neglected aspect of Durand's poetics. The Romantic poems examined here, while representative in tone, verse, and sensibility of many of Durand's poems, do not account completely for the flexibility of Durand's poetics. Sections of "La voix de la patrie," for example, which interpose short tributes to nature, point to other poetic possibilities. This poem signals sources of inspiration and other forms and verse also characteristic of Durand's corpus. The first poem in Book Two, "Génie-inspireur" exemplifies the light-hearted descriptions of love and nature so characteristic of this second part of the collection. One stanza begins:

Dis-moi des strophes d'amour
En ce jour,
Des refrains pleins d'harmonie,
Chante le ciel, la clarté
La beauté,
Cette fleur sainte et bénie! (1-6)

Much of Book Two reflects moments of poetic confidence. Its focus is on the beauty of Haiti's land, the simple joys found in descriptions of nature, and portraits of youthful love. The varied versification in the poem above recalls the freedom of poets' technique. The theme reflects the diverse possibilities of poetic inspiration summarized in "A l'Auteur de Nella." Very few of the poems in this second book are dated, but it appears that they were written during or shortly after Durand's travel through the Haitian countryside during several months of 1874-1875. In a series of articles that Durand submitted many years later to *Haiti littéraire et sociale*, he explains how the arrival of a French tourist led to his own exploration of the Haitian

countryside.¹⁹⁸ He offered to be the tourist's guide but also found the experience in the southern and eastern parts of Haiti to be a time of legitimate discovery for himself. As a native of Cap-Haïtien, Haiti's second largest city located in the northwestern part of the country, Durand explains that he was not previously familiar with these more rural and distant parts of Haiti. These months appear to have immersed him in a rural environment. As a thematic study will indicate, Durand was equally impacted by the traditions of the Haitian peasantry. In these articles he explains how he came to consider the trip a "Tournée littéraire" because of the numerous poems it inspired. Several poems are titled after places he visited on this journey. These poems also coincide with the 1870s date for an initial version of "La voix de la patrie." The poems in Book Two therefore represent at least a temporary shift from the poems which seem to dominate the 1860s. Moving away from the messianic visions of the poet or metaphysical concerns, Durand expands his project to include depictions of the simpler, physical elements of Haitian landscape and culture. Contemplating features of the local landscape was part of Romanticism's discovery of the nation, and the connection between Romantic notions of nationhood and the importance of a region's nature will elucidate Durand's interest in Haitian flora and fauna.

Those short verses calling to nature in "La voix de la patrie," like other verses in this second part of the collection, also indicate an expansion of the broader trends which influenced Durand's poetry. Specifically, his affiliation with Parnassian poetry also carries importance. Théodore de Banville's "La Terre," published in the 1878 edition of *Le Parnasse contemporain* serves as an example of similarities in content and versification between Durand's poetry and that of French Parnassian poets. Banville's poem begins:

¹⁹⁸ Haïti littéraire et sociale le 20 novembre 1905: 404-406.

Soumets la Terre,
Les fleurs, les bois,
Lyre! À ta voix.
A ton mystère. (1-4)¹⁹⁹

Michael Dash, briefly alluding to the Parnassian aspect of Durand's poetry, finds that it is the plasticity in some of Durand's descriptions which are akin to Parnassian technique.²⁰⁰ He quotes from two of Durand's poems, one of which is entitled "Idalina." This poem about a Haitian woman includes the following physical description:

Sa légère chevelure
A l'allure
De nos joyeux champs de riz
Quand ses boucles sous la brise
Qui les frise
Bondissent en petits plis... (33-38).

This preview of Parnassian influence will carry greater import in the section on Durand's nature poems. In my introduction of this aspect of Durand's poetry, I merely intend to mention this neglected aspect of Durand's writing in anticipation of more precise interpretation. Critics understandably vary in their opinion as to what constitutes the Parnassian moments in Haitian literature. Due in part to the diversity of French Parnassian poetry itself, it is difficult to pinpoint the extent of Parnassian influence on Durand's poetry. As a literary trend, it connoted among other characteristics impersonality and formal perfection, characteristics which would apply to the examples of Durand's poetry as cited by Dash. Much of Durand's poetry was indeed contemporary to French publications of Parnassian poetry: *Le Parnasse contemporain* spanned three volumes in 1866, 1871, and 1876, and José-Maria Heredia published his collection *Les Trophées* in 1893, just three years before Durand's *Rires et Pleurs*. Durand greatly admired the French Parnassian poet, François Coppée, who once introduced Durand at the *Société des gens*

¹⁹⁹ *Le Parnasse contemporain* (Genève: Slakine, 1971).

²⁰⁰ Dash, *Literature* 18.

de lettres in Paris in 1888. Durand frequently read from Coppée's works at "soirées littéraires" in Cap Haitien in the 1870s, appreciating in Coppée's poetry the representations of the Parisian working class which were part of late nineteenth-century popular poetry.²⁰¹ Durand dedicates to Coppée his 1891 poem "Contraste" a series of short poems which contrasts the idyllic warmth of the Haitian countryside to the cold and industrious French capital and in which he reveals solidarity with the French laborers. Above all else, it important to specify that the use of the term Parnassian is very broad in the Haitian context, used to denote poetry which is no longer entirely personal or overtly political. Naomi Garrett, in *The Renaissance of Haitian poetry*, also cites Durand and concurs with Dash that Parnassian influence in Haitian poetry is most visible in the descriptive presentations of rural scenes or natural settings.²⁰² I generally concur with their understanding of the term, but find that its usefulness is more aptly appreciated in light of historical context and in consideration of rural cultural practices.

3.4 NATURE

Given the uncertainties of chronology and complexities of literary trends in Durand's corpus, the best means to access such a diverse project is through its dominant themes. Even this organization, however, will not be completely cohesive, since many of the themes overlap in various poems and one poem may lend itself to multiple themes. Returning once more to Herder's theories of nature and national culture may help to explain the importance Durand

²⁰¹ Le Vigilant le 15 avril 1829.

²⁰² Naomi Garrett, The Renaissance of Haitian Poetry (Paris: Présence africaine, 1963) 42.

accords to the Haitian countryside in both books of his collection. The impact of Herder's scholarship on Romantic notions of nationalism was explored in general terms when examining Ardouin's poem about the Taino Indians in the previous chapter. One of Herder's additional arguments is that the foundations of national culture rests with a people's serenity and satisfaction with its environment.²⁰³ In Durand's poems, especially in Book Two, customs, beliefs, and stories indeed unfold in the context of love and nature unique to the Haitian rural experience. Many poems which sketch these brief scenes include explanations, either in the text or in footnotes, about the cultural significance of topics or items mentioned. "La branche d'amitié," for example, is the title of a poem which describes a rural custom. It is the name of a flower in Haiti that when thrown into the woods and found again indicates reciprocal fidelity in a couple's relationship. Several poems of this sort begin with a variation of the phrase "Il est dans notre contrée...."

In nineteenth-century Haiti, as seen in "La voix de la patrie," nature is literally the terrain on which to write national poetry. Nature not only represents an alternative to writing about a nation otherwise characterized by civil instability and uncertainty about sovereignty, but this claiming of land so integral to initial independence must also be reclaimed during this time. It is during the period of Durand's writing that nature embodies one of the last vestiges of any national viability. Dash comments on the use and significance of nature in nineteenth-century texts in the Caribbean:

Nature is used poetically because in it are perceived the harmonies [...] The articulation of nature as the key to authenticity, self-possession, and mastery of the national terrain is a significant feature of early nationalist thought in the Caribbean.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Johann Gottfried von Herder, Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 39.

²⁰⁴ Dash, The Other America 47.

Dash also argues, however, that this “cartographic impulse” is problematic because the Haitian space being mapped “had already been fixed in the modernist imagination as a utopian, bountiful world” and owed too much to the influence of European Romanticism.²⁰⁵ Durand considered this poetry important enough to have devoted nearly his entire second book to the nature of Haiti, but ambiguity expressed in devoting poetry to nature in “La voix de la patrie,” indicates that Durand was very well aware of how his nature poetry could be viewed as unoriginal or evasive from other national concerns. At the same time, it is by consistently rooting his poetry in *local* landscape that Durand furthers his project as a national poet and distances his inspiration from European literature. He hinges his descriptions not only on nature and on tropical nature but also on the descriptions of *specific* flowers, trees, or birds uniquely found in *Haitian* or Antillean space. The flora and fauna which the poet chooses to celebrate and delicately describe are part of the local scene, the significance of whose names and characteristics are tied to other elements of Haitian culture or language. These include, for example, poems about the flowers called the “passiflore” and the “frangipane blanche” or birds called the “ouaga-négresse.”²⁰⁶ This local specificity within the universal appreciation for nature’s beauty can also be traced to Herder’s tendency to see the particular in the universal and to value individual and unique expression as part of the global environment.²⁰⁷ Flowers are described more than any other element in the Haitian landscape; the poet elaborates on their natural simplicity and beauty which, while seemingly insignificant, is revealed to be poetically

²⁰⁵ Dash, *The Other America* 47.

²⁰⁶ I have not located “ouaga-négresse” in any current or nineteenth-century French dictionary, leading me to believe it is either Durand’s coinage or a local Haitian term. “Passiflore,” however, is defined as follows: “1808, Jour. de botanique, genre de plantes originaires de l’Amérique tropicale et de l’Asie [...] et qui doivent leur nom à la forme de leurs fleurs, dont les organes évoquent les instruments de la Passion (couronne d’épines, clous, etc.). The definition for “frangipane” is: ‘fruit du frangipanier, arbre ou arbrisseau originaire de l’Amérique tropicale dont les fleurs ont un parfum voisin de la francipane.’ *Grand Larousse de la langue française en six volumes*, 1971 ed.

²⁰⁷ Herder xi.

worthwhile. Even the smallest of flowers takes on great significance when beloved by the poet.

The sonnet entitled “La Fleur de Campêche,” ends with these two tercets:

Tout ce qui fut créé, dans l'éternel mystère,
En émanations pour les cieux, pour la terre,
--Celles d'un front de femme, ou bien celles des fleurs, --

Ne vaut pas l'humble odeur que répand ma fleurette,
Quand, au matin, la brise, en secouant ses pleurs,
Fait trembler dans les airs sa gracieuse aigrette. (9-14)

Metaphorically representing the budding of national cultural in Haiti, the many flowers described in Book Two are simple, idealized, hardly disturbed by modern progress. In and of themselves, the poems about flowers may not at all be related to national issues, unless this poeticized Haitian landscape can, in Herder's view, be opposed to the oppressive workings of the state. Herder considered the state a destructive force which crushes cultural flowers in bloom.²⁰⁸ This interpretation will be most plausible when examining poems about the on-going meaning of the Haitian Revolution and the symbolism of nature in these texts.

As mentioned earlier, those simple evocations of nature in the quatrains of “La voix de la patrie” also recall the verse of French poets associated with Parnassian poetry, such as Verlaine, Gautier, or de Banville. While the diversity of the Parnassian movement is difficult to consider fully here, many elements in Durand's nature poems may also be traceable to his knowledge of nature poetry outside the influences of Romanticism. I find that the attraction and application of these Parnassian moments in Durand's poetry lies in the emphasis it gives to the cult of beauty in the *visible world* as opposed to the invisible world of Romanticism. Although Haitian land increasingly became the site for devalued crops, foreign ownership, and loss of independence, the visible elements of nature, however threatened, were still *present*. Describing these elements

²⁰⁸ Herder xxi.

becomes a way of recording and preserving in writing the traces still remaining of the Haitian landscape. The interest in physical description of natural elements in the verse of poetry can partly be understood by reading a poem like “Le sans-cesse,” which describes a local flower:

Comme la fleur jolie,
Notre amour pur, Julie,
Fleurit;
Mais ce siècle de prose
Voit la fleur blanche et rose
Et rit. (19-24)

Most dictionary definitions of *prose* include mentioning that which is *not poetic*. Poetry itself is associated with harmony, lyricism, and beauty. The time in which Durand was writing was certainly not poetic, given the conflict and instability which characterized the period. Several of the European texts mentioned in the introduction, by Gobineau, Spencer Saint-John and others, portrayed Haiti as anything but *poetic*, relating instead what was sensationalized as the savage violence of the Haitian Revolution, the mental deficiencies of a brutish population, and the repeated failures at self-government. Haiti had been associated with these slanderous negatives and *not* with the idea of a tropical paradise used to describe other locales traveled to by Europeans in the nineteenth century. Depicting the beauties of the Haitian countryside allows Haitian poetry to be written in the traditional sense and works to portray *Haiti* as a poetic entity. One of the goals of Parnassian poets was to be faithful to the “art pour l’art” theory which had preceded and inspired Parnassianism. It advocated that literature should be independent of and not subservient to political and social concerns. Therefore, a Parnassian influence in Haitian poetry rests partly with the emphasis given to physical descriptions of natural elements. It is through nature that Haiti becomes autonomous and separate from the political, social, and economic problems of late nineteenth-century Haiti. It is also independent of European representations of Haitian reality. Within Haiti, the Haitian landscape is shared by all, and no

other topic could better function to express national identity. Critics have highlighted how the rural parts of Haiti house the customs and beliefs unique to Haitian culture and most sheltered from outside influence. These rural areas provide Haiti with the concept of a hinterland and reservoir of cultural resistance. Writers of Haitian indigénisme in the early twentieth century view rural Haiti as a source of Haitian literary expression.

The theme of nature in Haitian locales leads to another important point about Parnassian poetry. Although trends in Caribbean literature are often seen as derivative of their European counterparts, the connection of several *French* Parnassian writers to tropical environments demonstrates the reciprocal nature of such influences. Leconte de Lisle spent much of his youth in La Réunion where he was born, José-Maria Heredia was originally from Cuba, and another Parnassian poet, Léon Drieux was from La Réunion. Once in Europe, the nostalgia for the island of their youth imprinted their poetic sensibility. It is interesting to note that Haitian critics in the nineteenth century claimed José-Maria Heredia as a Caribbean poet:

José Maria de Heredia est né sous notre ciel brûlant, sous ce ciel où, comme il le dit lui-même,

Les Antilles bleues

Se pâment sous l'ardeur de l'Astre occidental

C'est à Cuba, dans l'île sœur dont un accident géologique déjà lointain nous sépara, qu'il vit le jour, et qu'il a passé ses premières années ...²⁰⁹

It could convincingly be argued that elements of French Parnassian poetry began in island territories, even though few verses about tropical nature in Parnassian poetry actually specify the locale. Nature is usually distant in time and space, part of some “là-bas,” or a “pays lointain.” Durand’s depictions are much more specific. Since he distinguishes his project from the exoticism of his European counterparts by rooting his descriptions of nature in the

²⁰⁹ Haiti littéraire et sociale le 20 novembre 1905: 711.

specificities of the Haitian landscape, Haitian writers and journalists coined parts of Durand's poetry as "Le Parnasse *haïtien*." ²¹⁰

The most important aspect of Parnassian poetry which impacted Durand's work does not deal with descriptive realism, mastery of poetic techniques, or nature. It rests with the vivid portrayals of various Haitian cultural practices. There are the few poems in *Rires et Pleurs*, which unlike any of the other poems mentioned, speak of Haiti and its religious culture with a type of ancient mystique similar to civilizations portrayed by Leconte de Lisle in *Poèmes antiques*. These verses from Durand's poem "Sur le morne lointain" are about Haitian voodoo practice:

Sur le morne lointain, semé de blanches cases
Le tambour qui rugit le chant mystérieux
Du magique vaudoux aux divines extases,
Où l'on immole un bouc, où l'on brise des vases,
Enivre les papas, qui battent, furieux,
Le tambour qui rugit le chant mystérieux
Sur le morne lointain, semé de blanches cases (1-7)

The alexandrine verse of the poem transposes the topic into one worthy of high poetic expression. Although voodoo was widely practiced, it is understandably not a common theme in Haitian poetry. Not only would voodoo be seen as detracting from modernity, but any realistic account of voodoo in poetry would only have reinforced the stereotypes of the barbarity of Haitians and especially of the country's black peasants. Speaking of voodoo as distant, ancient, and mysterious, however, subtly but safely details the religion constantly threatened during anti-voodoo campaigns of various mulatto governments and condemned by the Roman Catholic Church throughout the nineteenth century. The poem describes what during Durand's lifetime could well be the future projection of lost traditions and ancient folklore.

²¹⁰ Haïti littéraire et sociale [Port-au-Prince] mai: 1906: 354.

Images of island landscape and discussions about Parnassian poetry also evoke visions of the palm tree. More than just tropical décor, this recurrent presence is also an important national symbol in Durand's poetry as it is in the Haitian imaginary. The center of the Haitian flag has born a coat of arms with a palm tree in the center since Pétion's new design of the flag in 1806. Durand's poem "Les forts" compares the unwavering palm tree to the stoicism of revolutionary leader Toussaint Louverture whose serene memory has outlasted the temporary adversity he met in deportation, imprisonment, and death:

Comme ce haut palmier qui devint le symbole
De notre liberté; -- fier quoique foudroyé, -- ... (35-36)
Toussaint qui semblait né d'une femme de Sparte...²¹¹
Resta toujours debout dans sa sérénité (39- 40)²¹²

In some of these poems about Haiti's Revolution, the tree is described with a type of Parnassian permanence despite the death of other vegetation or the fading significance of national memories. The gradual degradation of landscape, linked to the disappearance of national heroes, suggests the end of these themes on which to center national poetry. Many of these explicitly national poems are more Romantic in sensibility because they no longer portray what nature still remains. Rather, the poet ponders the degradation and disappearance of nature and its meaning for national independence as for national poetry. Durand's well-known "La mort de nos cocotiers" connects a present state of affairs to an eventual end of the nation, an end conveyed by the death of one of Haiti's national symbols. The occasion for this poem was the

²¹¹ Toussaint has been referred to as the black Spartacus. C.L.R. James mentions this when he imagines Toussaint reading Raynal. "...he came in the end to believe in himself as the black Spartacus, foretold by Raynal as predestined to achieve the emancipation of the blacks. The labourers in their turn worshiped him as a direct servant of God." 250.

²¹² In Toussaint's legendary quote, it was upon deportation that he compared himself to a tree, stating that although the tree has been cut down, it will grow again because the roots were well planted. One of many sources to cite this is in Laurent Dubois's work, 278.

outbreak of a disease that affected coconut trees near Cap Haitian in the 1880s. The poet begins with describing this “mal inconnu.”

Dîtes-nous, phalange fidèle
Pourquoi tombez-vous le premier?
Votre mort annoncerait-elle
La fin de nos autres palmiers?
Et si nul de vous ne résiste,
Mourra-t-il aussi le palmiste,
L’emblème de la liberté,
--Cet arbre dont le temps et l’âge
Embellissent le vert feuillage
Et qu’ils couronnent de fierté? (17-26)

The symbolism, of course, is quite clear, as one only has to recall the importance of nature to national identity in the Caribbean to understand how erosion of natural beauty would reveal a nation in peril. In Durand’s time, Haiti’s legacy of freedom and independence is gravely endangered. “La mort de nos cocotiers” and “Les forts,” along with others similar in inspiration, are heralded as Durand’s most “national” poems and are consistently featured in anthologies or surveys of Haitian literature. An observation by Dash serves to explain how Durand’s poems of the 1880s embody national concerns:

The period between the 1880s and the landing of the U.S. marines in 1915 witnessed in Haiti the collapse of the dream of the progressive modern state of the early post independence years [...] In both a literal and figurative way, Haitian space had become devalued. Nationalist discourse in Haitian reality were now seriously contested.²¹³

This poem in particular demonstrates the acute awareness Haitians had that the heroism of the nation’s past is no longer sufficient to sustain Haiti’s present and future viability. Haitians who contemplate the Haitian Revolution know it can no longer be a purely celebratory moment, and they already understand it as history. The address the poet makes to the trees momentarily

²¹³ Dash, The Other America 53-54.

shifts to the heroes of the Revolution. Finally, the poet speaks to Haiti's present-day citizens who must face Haiti's current battles in order to preserve past ideals:

Et fils de ces hommes sublimes
Ne pouvant pas, faibles aiglons,
Franchir comme eux les hautes cimes,
Ne restons pas dans nos vallons!
Il est encore d'autres batailles
Qui sont mieux faites pour nos tailles. (63-68)

The stark contrast in stature between revolutionary heroes and Haiti's present-day citizens towers over Haitian ambitions in both negative and positive ways. The Haitian Revolution, because of its magnitude, one which Haitian writers repeatedly contemplated, overshadows other struggles and haunts later generations by sheer virtue of the fact that it cannot be duplicated. There is nonetheless urgency to act and engage in the smaller battles of the current time period. The way to preserve and honor revolutionary ideals is through present action. In the original version of "La mort de nos cocotiers" an appeal is also made for a different type of tree, an "arbre saint de progress" and "les choses utiles" to remedy this current sickness. Specifically, the verses below call on Haiti's engagement in the international community and a cessation of prejudice which has hindered Haiti's development. These verses, in Durand's original 1896 edition, are rarely included in anthology versions of the poem:

Quand nous aurons ouvert pour la franche accolade
Nos bras longtemps fermés aux étrangers, aux blancs; ...
Quand les vieux préjugés, la haine de l'esclave
Pour le maître, fuiront devant l'égalité ... (107-108, 111-112)

Dessalines had effectively eliminated the white presence on the island following his declaration of independence, reinforcing Haiti's claim as an exclusively "black" republic. Since then, Haiti witnessed numerous debates on the long-standing prohibition of foreign ownership of land. While it would be misleading to see these verses as an endorsement of greater foreign

involvement in Haitian affairs, the poem urges Haitians to move beyond colonial hatred and expand what was originally an anti-slavery revolution and reconsider an anti-white identity politics. Haiti's original revolution can assume a leading role in professing universal equality that gives *renewed* meaning to Haiti's national project. In light of these verses, Haiti can embrace the idea of equality and promote peace among the races.

The continued relevance of Romanticism remains evident in both "Les forts" and "La mort de nos cocotiers," as it is Haiti's existence as a Romantic subject which takes prominence. The nation, suffering from an unknown disease, is replete with the contradictions intrinsic to Romanticism. Haiti is simultaneously glorious but grievous, admired but isolated. The beginning of "Les forts," evokes this solitude immediately:

Comme ennuyé de son impeccable beauté,
De la perfection de son stipe, un palmiste,
Droit, dans la solitude immense, jaune et triste...
...Sa flèche d'or trouait les hauteurs vides. (1-4)

These verses convey the majesty of the tree but also the emptiness which surrounds it; the grandeur of its existence remains in a sort of meaningless void. The tree's established uprightness here and in other verses alludes to its old age and implies that the poet is referring to Haiti in a *post*-independence state, alluding to the very time in which Durand was writing. Although Haiti's political isolation would be implied, given that Haiti was alone its in independence in the Caribbean and surrounded by Western powers, the poem's progression also suggests a separation more temporal in nature. With the third and final part of the poem, the shadows of past heroes surface to explain more concretely the present description of this tree:

La nature est avare en hommes héroïques,
Et le siècle n'est plus des antiques géants...
Où sont les vieux martyrs, les lapidés stoïques,
Les colosses debout au bord des océans? (27-30)

Solitude of the palm tree is hence better understood against the backdrop of Haiti's monumental past. This poem then does not so much portray Haiti's isolation from the modern world but rather Haiti's distance from its own heroic history. Memories of a past subjectivity are resurrected to attempt to fill what is lacking in this present space. Haiti's glory, rooted in the past, becomes the very source of its present "ennui."

3.5 LOVE

3.5.1 Love made him a poet

Other poems with various themes also convey the inevitable complexities in writing Haitian poetry in the late nineteenth-century. Love may in fact seem the least "national" of all themes, but it nonetheless accounts for more poems than any other topic in the *Rires et Pleurs*. It also intersects frequently with the topic of nature. In "A la ville de Saint Marc," love is the first memory with which the poet associates his past poetry and happiness. Most of the poems that concern love, located in the second part of the collection, are indeed cheerful descriptions of romance and exaltations to Haitian women. Others, more somber in sentiment, reflect personal disappointments or the social conditions which prevent love from freely flourishing.

I will begin by mentioning Durand's poem, "La Jalousie" the first poem in Book One of *Rires et Pleurs*, coming immediately after "Sonnet-Préface." "La Jalousie" serves as an additional but nonetheless important example of the many commonplace themes which comprise the collection. It also carries anecdotal significance. This poem relates the myth of how jealousy

entered the world. After Adam and Eve's fall in Eden, their only consolation was love for each other, so God introduced jealousy as their final punishment. This poem is frequently mentioned in both nineteenth and twentieth century texts about Haitian literature because it was reportedly read at a meeting of the *Société des gens de lettres* during Durand's visit to France in 1888.²¹⁴ A variety of Haitian sources recount a similar story in which François Coppée read the poem aloud at the meeting, and after the applause Coppée surprised the crowd by announcing, "Cette poésie n'est pas de moi mais de mon illustre confrère noir." In this case, the anecdote not only demonstrates how the choice of Durand's content and his style of verse meant that the poem was acclaimed according to poetic norms at the time, but it also suggests the barrier which racial or national identity may have posed to its success. The fact that such details remained hidden benefited the poem's reception. Durand and Haitian poets intuitively employed the same rhetorical figures as writers elsewhere, and because poems like "La Jalousie" are rooted in common Western mythology and universal themes, their presence in a collection like *Rires et Pleurs* works to establish Durand as a poet *per se*. In the case of Haitian poets writing in the nineteenth century, the absence of traceable identity through distinguishing themes or styles may also be desirable. Anténor Firmin and Louis-Joseph Janvier, Haitian essayists and contemporaries of Durand who both wrote rebuttals to Arthur de Gobineau's *L'inégalité des races humaines*, analyze the *strategic* value of employing such conventional rhetoric in Haitian poetry. They do not employ literary terminology but argue that the existence of literature in Haiti is a powerful response to European accusations. Firmin makes this general statement in anticipation of the writers he will discuss:

²¹⁴ I have not located a French text which mentions Durand's presence at this meeting. However, many Haitian texts cite it anecdotally, such as Berrou and Pompilus, 323.

I believe indeed that the small Haitian Republic, a shining buoy in the Antilles archipelago, will provide sufficient evidence in support of the idea of the equality of the races in all its ramifications. There mulattoes, griffes, all the different hybrids of Black and White, and Blacks themselves exhibit all the intellectual and moral aptitudes which arrogant and recklessly exclusionary Europeans have always recognized only in Caucasians. Those Haitian examples will put an end to a theory which has survived for so long only because no positive evidence has ever offered to counter it.²¹⁵

Firmin then focuses on Haitian poets, many of whom Durand also quotes or dedicates poems to in *Rires et Pleurs*. Firmin lauds the diverse qualities apparent in various Haitian texts, such as fluidity and transparency, erudite style, and historical accuracy in portraying past events. He also praises the personal and political accomplishments of the writers themselves. The presence of such qualities, along with the mastery of the French language, positively render these Haitians indistinguishable from French poets. When addressing whether or not Haitian poets should draw inspiration from national realities, Firmin concludes that the answer would be the same for poets everywhere: “Suffice it to say that if the freedom of all individuals is to be respected, the freedom of the poet is sacred.”²¹⁶ Louis-Joseph Janvier, also discussing Haitian poets in his 1883 book “*La République d’Haïti et ses visiteurs*,” specifically names Durand as one of the poets who brings dignity to his people through the beautiful verse he composes. According to Janvier, who became one of Durand’s great admirers and political protectors, Durand expresses “les sensations les plus intimes et les plus délicates du cœur en extase devant le beau, devant la nature, ou gonflé d’amour....”²¹⁷ Both Haitian essayists argue that the Haitian poets vindicate the entire black race from accusations of inferiority. They stress that it is the

²¹⁵ Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, trans. Asselin Charles. (1885; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 295.

²¹⁶ Firmin 301.

²¹⁷ Louis-Joseph Janvier, *La république d’Haïti et ses visiteurs (1840-1882); réponse à M. Victor Cochinat de la Petite Presse et à quelques autres écrivains* (1883; Port-au-Prince: Editions Fardin, 1979) 27.

notion of poetry which attests to a general humanity denied to those of the black race in much of nineteenth-century Western thought.

It is interesting to point out that Firmin also discusses along with these Haitian writers Alexandre Dumas père, whose name also appears in *Rires et Pleurs*, and who is the only non-poet among the French writers whom Durand quotes in his collections. The choice for both Firmin and Durand is far from arbitrary, for many Haitian writers have long pointed out that Dumas' paternal grandmother was a slave from the Haitian town of Jérémie. Firmin points to Dumas as a "remarkable example of métissage," whose literary talent obviously disproves the theory of racial degeneration through hybridization.²¹⁸ A series of articles on Alexandre Dumas also appeared in the first edition of the journal *Haïti littéraire et sociale* in January 1905 in Port-au-Prince. Its editor Frédéric Marcelin begins a series of articles on Dumas with this introduction:

Je n'ai la prétention de refaire ni la biographie de Dumas fils, ni celle de son père et de son grand-père. Toutefois le monde entier sait – et sans doute aucun Haïtien n'ignore – que sans la négresse de Jérémie cette glorieuse trinité n'eut pas existé. Ces trois grands hommes sont donc de notre sang.²¹⁹

Durand himself points out in an article he wrote for the same journal that he and Dumas shared this relative in common, Marie-Cessette Dumas. Durand praises this Haitian woman without whom he and Dumas would never have existed. While literary traditions have established Dumas' status as a French writer and Durand's as a Haitian one, these discussions begin to blur the lines of distinction enough to provoke questions about how nations claim writers and about the categories used to classify them. Haitian poets and journalists in this way anticipate the French/francophone debate more than a century before such fields formally

²¹⁸ One of Gobineau's arguments, which Firmin refutes and exploits, is that pure races degenerate physically, intellectually, and morally, through their contact and subsequent offspring.

²¹⁹ *Haïti littéraire et sociale*, janvier 1905: 25.

existed. Is the decision to be French or Haitian up to the writer? Is national belonging determined by language, family history, or theme? Did Haitian intellectuals claim Dumas and Durand because of race or because of literary success? At least for Durand, it seems that being a Haitian poet implies that the notions and structure of poetry per se work in combination with nature, social relationships, and history specific to the Haitian experience.

Beyond “La Jalousie,” Durand expands the theme of love to include personal experiences. Durand’s own love life included many romantic relationships and two marriages, the first of which, to Virginie Sampeur, ended in divorce. Virginie Sampeur, named Haiti’s first poetess in several anthologies, was compared to Marceline Desbordes-Valmore and the Greek poet Sappho in the Haitian press of the late nineteenth century.²²⁰ The only Haitian woman known to write poetry in the first 130 years of Haiti’s independence, she never published a collection of her works. Between the few poems cited in anthologies and ones she wrote for the turn-of-the-century Haitian journal *La Ronde*, less than a dozen of her works remain accessible today.²²¹ It is therefore difficult to devote a study to her poetry alone. As several poems in *Rires et Pleurs*, illustrate, Durand’s marriage to Sampeur carries more significance than a cursory review of Durand’s poetry would indicate. It cannot be ignored, for example, that the years in which the couple was married, from 1862 to 1871, coincide with the period in which Durand wrote his earliest poems and before he was known as a national poet. Many poems in both books of *Rires et Pleurs* elaborate on the strong connection between love and poetry, and the abundance of poetry is often tied to former moments when the poet was captured by

²²⁰ Christophe Charles and Virginie Sampeur, *La Poésie Féminine haïtienne: histoire et anthologie de Virginie Sampeur à nos jours* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Choucounne, 1980).

²²¹ Louis Morpeau believes an album of Sampeur’s poetry was lost prior to attempted publication. Sampeur reportedly wrote an autobiographical novel, *Angèle Dufour*, which was also never published. *Anthologie d’un siècle de poésie haïtienne, 1817-1925, avec une étude sur la muse haïtienne d’expression française et une étude sur la muse haïtienne d’expression créole* (Paris: Bossard, 1925).

romance. The phrase “l’amour le fit poète,” from Durand’s poem, “La Fiancée,” resonates throughout the collection. Conversely, poems like “A la ville de Saint Marc,” mourning the loss of an ideal past renders the poet nostalgic for both the eloquence of poetry and the joys of love. The evidence is that their relationship continued to provide inspiration for both poets. One of the bitterest poems is Durand’s “Le Divorcé,” a rebuttal to the poem, “L’Abandonnée,” which Sampeur published in a regional journal in 1876.

In *Rires et Pleurs*, Durand dedicates his poem “Le Divorcé” to “Estelle,” a name which recurs as part of a series of characters throughout the collection. At first glance, relating Sampeur to the fictional Estelle remains hypothetical, based solely on the biographical knowledge surrounding this poem. Another poem, however, entitled “Le rêve d’Estelle,” includes the note “*Pour V.S.*” and makes the connection unmistakable. The poet recounts a dream in which he had too much love for a frivolous but beautiful and fragile butterfly and how in an attempt to keep her, he clips her wings. Although the poet is remorseful, the dream interpreter understands the ending as the poet’s desperate efforts to hold on to the creature during this moment in time. The capturing of these moments relates to much of the underlying sentiments in poems in Book Two of *Rires et Pleurs*, where the poet affectionately sketches a series of joyful instants of love. Although many of these memories recall those in love as being light-hearted and carefree, others inevitably attest to the ephemeral and inconstant aspects of romantic affection. If poetry is composed of and dependent on such moments, it also becomes a fleeting enterprise. This correlation comes to light in another poem entitled “Estelle.” After an epigraph by Victor Hugo, the poem begins with this recollection of the poet’s former happiness:

Il répétait joyeux, quand il aimait Estelle,
Ces vers du grand poète, aux sublimes accents;
Il faisait du bonheur une fleur immortelle,
Une lyre aux accords sans cesse ravissante:

Puis la fleur se sécha sous un vent délétère;
Le luth vit s'envoler ses sons mélodieux. (1-6)

The poem goes on to describe these two figures whose lives, emotions, and voices were deeply entwined: “C’est qu’ils étaient deux luths, deux vrais cœurs de poètes,/ Deux harpes aux sons purs vibrant à l’unisson.” In the end, the text suggests that for Estelle, her verse took a decisive turn toward grief and silence after the rupture. As for the male poet, he would continue to write, but his work would bear the traces of their separation. Opposing terms which denote happiness and grief, first used to qualify the two characters (“l’un riant, l’autre sombre”) but also used in other contexts in the poem, unmistakably evoke the title of Durand’s collection. In this way, the two lyres or the two poetries not only refer to Estelle and the poet but also allude to the dual subjectivity within Durand’s poetry.

Durand in no way pays tribute to Virginie Sampeur as overtly as he does to Demesvar Delorme. As these poems indicate, this could be due to the conflicting emotions which surround her memory, so that any import she had as a poet is largely overshadowed by her role as a lover. Unfortunately the paucity of detail on Durand’s and Sampeur’s personal and professional relationship may leave the extent of her influence greatly underestimated. It is known, however, that Sampeur began publishing her poems in regional journals eight to ten years *before* Durand submitted any of his works; at least initially, she would have been the more established poet. Durand created and edited in 1901 a short-lived Haitian literary journal called *Les Bigailles*, and in one issue he includes an article about Virginie Sampeur’s poetry and discusses the importance of developing a feminine voice in Haitian letters.²²² This entry and the poems about and for “Estelle” represent the subtle ways in which Durand acknowledges her influence on his poetry.

²²² Oswald Durand, *Les Bigailles* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l’Abeille, 1901). Page numbers not included.

3.5.2 Love on the Plantation

Estelle is only one of many recurring female figures who find their way into *Rires et Pleurs*. The other women, however, who inspire much of the poetry in the second part of the collection primarily do so by way of sensual beauty as opposed to spiritual kinship. As he does in “Idalina,” the poet by way of hues and shapes highlights the physical traits of the many Haitian women whom he has loved. The *noires prunelles*, *front bruni*, *oeil de jais*, *cheveux d’ébène*, and *peau luisante* are among the many rich and colorful words used to convey the warmth and radiance of these current and past lovers. Their outward appeal is further complemented by their interactions with the poet which express their authenticity, affection, playfulness, and simplicity. In the poem “Nos payses” the poet cheerfully admits that for all of these reasons his preference is for Haitian women when seeking poetic inspiration:

Si la muse, un jour, me demande
Des vers, --une ode, un triolet --...
Je n’irai pas, quittant le Nouveau Monde,
Monter mon luth pour la blanche aux yeux bleus...

Mais à ma négresse
Dont la folle caresse
Verse en mon cœur l’ivresse,
---Vers aux doux sons,
Chansons! (1-9)

The poet’s realm is not just the new world and the nation of Haiti, but more specifically the Haitian countryside. The word “payse” refers in French to the (female) person *of the same*

country (a compatriot). It also recalls the word with which it shares its root, “paysanne.”²²³ It is Haitian peasant women, embedded in rustic settings, who are so closely linked to the land in Durand’s poetry. The primacy given to portraits of black women in rural Haiti is unprecedented in Haitian letters and works to refute accusations that nineteenth-century Haitian writers completely ignored the Haitian folk. The “négresses” in these poems stand out among the many other types of women portrayed and for more than just the sheer frequency of their presence in Durand’s poetry. Historically a term indissociable from slavery, “négresse” through its contextual and syntactical associations becomes nearly synonymous with the “maîtresses” of the poet’s mind and verse. Writing about love as writing about women may represent the most commonplace of themes, but the specificity and locality of “*nos*” *payses* inscribes them into a national project. Circumventing the need for an elsewhere, a foreign milieu from which to draw inspiration, the Haitian poet discovers that material for beautiful poetry thrives in his own homeland. The title of the poem “Vénus-Arrada,” is the name of the woman the poet attempts to court. This black Haitian woman is likened to Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty, as well as to Léda, the Spartan queen. Comparing women to ancient divinities and mythological figures may come to the pen of any writer familiar with such traditions. The Haitian poet, however, finds her in his homeland and claims her as his own:

C’est dans mon pays, dans l’île charmante/...
C’est dans le pays d’Anacaona
Que je vins un jour...à ma belle maîtresse...
C’était un volcan que *ma Vénus noire* (1, 6, 7, 39-40),
Ma Vénus de jais, ---Vénus-Arrada!

²²³ The feminine form of “pays,” *payses*” is found in a dictionary entry as a “personne qui est née dans le même village, dans le même canton ou dans le même contrée” Grand Larousse de la langue française en six volumes, 1971 ed.

I was unable to find a clear referent for “Vénus-Arrada.” Since I have only seen it in Durand’s poetry, it is either a local name or a term used by Durand specifically. The poet equates her to Baudelaire’s beloved, often referred to as his “Vénus noire.”²²⁴ Durand’s love poetry is not limited to black women of the rural provinces but celebrates women of other *colors*, many of whom also reside in the Haitian countryside. The poem “Nos payses” while emphasizing the “négresses,” concludes by praising all Haitian women:

Pour vous, mes maîtresses,
Griffonnes et négresses,
Et jaunes mulâtresses,
Vers au doux sons,
Chansons!
Payses, je vous donne
Les fleurs de ma couronne...(45-51)

By singing to all of Haiti’s beauty, the poet is not participating in the color divisions that plague his country. Rather, he unifies these variations into a national chorus. The poet who is a lover of Haitian women of all colors is thereby a lover of his country. In Durand’s poems, women, like nature, are a fragile but fertile ground on which to write national poetry. This allegorizing of women and nature is an expansion of the phenomenon observed in Ardouin’s poem about Anacaona’s maidens in the previous chapter. Durand makes the link between women, history, poetry and landscape of the Taino Indians to the women and nature of his time and in his poetic expression.

The primacy of nature can be traced to Romantic notions of nationalism. Nature, in Herder’s text, is consistently described and personified as a *feminine* presence, and women are

²²⁴ Baudelaire uses this phrase in *Les Fleurs du mal* when referring to the woman who inspired much of his poetry, Jeanne Duval, a mulatto whom he met in France after his return from the Indian Ocean. Peter France, ed., *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 70. There is some speculation that Duval was from Haiti. The italics in verse 39 suggest Durand intentionally makes this reference to Baudelaire.

likened to perishable flowers.²²⁵ Moreover, Herder specifies that “there is no circumstance [...] which so decisively shows the character of a man, or a nation, as the treatment of women.”²²⁶ Throughout Haitian poetry of the nineteenth century, the history of the Haitian Revolution, its warriors, and defeat of slavery are definitely masculine endeavors. This very different, peaceful expression of a national soul is found in femininity and in nature. The Greenlander or the Negress, may have different customs, Herder argues, but both incarnate a necessary component of a complete national development:

How then can these nations be deficient in sentiments of true female humanity, unless perhaps want and mournful necessity, or a false point of honor and some barbarous heredity custom, occasionally lead them astray? The germs of every great and noble feeling not only exist in all places, but are universally unfolded, as much as the way of life, climate, tradition, or peculiarity of the nation will permit.²²⁷ [sic]

Manoune la noire, Matoute la griffonne, and Anna la mulâtresse, characters which reappear in Book Two of the collection are also part of the “Sonnet des Femmes. This is the title of one poem in which the poet mentions fourteen women in the span of its fourteen verses. He summarizes the lifetime of women loved and includes along with Manoune, Anna, and many others, white women like Bertita and Rose. In this poem, race and color have no bearing on true love, and all women are remembered equally by the poet with great fondness. Although the few poems in the collection which mention Rose, Bertita, or Louise do not include nearly the amount of physical or other detail found in other poems in Book Two, they nonetheless demonstrate that the poet’s devotion to black or mulatto women neither implies racial prejudice nor negates the belief in the spontaneous and universal nature of love.

²²⁵ Herder 61-62.

²²⁶ Herder 63.

²²⁷ Herder 67.

The poet also defends the ideal of love in poems which focus on foreign white women even when speculation about the future of their relationship seems less than promising. The poems “Ne pleure pas,” and “Tristia,” for example, feature French women living in Haiti who miss their homeland and desire to return. The poet, however, tries to convince them that the love of a Haitian man, some “brun jeune homme,” will form a new “patrie” and replace their longing for a distant land if he can only convince them to stay. However, both poems end with the women choosing to return to France. Attachment to one’s nation is stronger than cross-cultural love, and love cannot in fact be the new country. In “A une étrangère,” the poet seemingly upholds the ideal and embraces what these French women have rejected. He declares that he would gladly leave his own country to be with Rose, the woman he loves. However, a series of exaggerated offers in the poem hint at a playfulness that make his declaration seem less than sincere. He begins by saying he would give his life if she would just look at him, but he later diminishes the offer by suggesting it is probably too little to offer so little:

Pour un regard de tes yeux
Si bleus qu’ils feraient envie,
A l’azur de nos grand cieux,
Je voudrais donner ma vie...
Mais n’est-ce pas qu’il est tard
Pour t’offrir, Rose
Si peu de chose
Pour un regard?...(1-8)

The poet offers to surrender all of his joy for just a piece of her hair and abandon his family for a mere kiss. Both times the refrain repeats “si peu de chose.” In the final stanza, however, he says that for her love, “Je laisserais la patrie,” which he specifies, unlike his other offers, is “beaucoup de chose/Pour ton amour...” Not only does this slight change indicate that indeed abandoning his homeland is too much to offer, but nothing in the poem hints that their love would be reciprocal. The fact that she likely would never have accepted makes the offer an

easy if not an empty one to make. When the Haitian poet says he would leave his country for a foreign, white woman, chances are that he does not mean it. “A l'étrangère” works once again, like “Tristia” and “Ne pleure pas” and even “Nos payses” to elevate the supremacy of national commitment.

A more realistic picture is to be found in the poem “Fils du noir.” The subject is the son of a black father and a white mother. He remembers his parents as happy and in love, their colors forming a “doux contraste.” Now that he himself is in love with a white girl, he hopes for a similar union. The poem predictably ends with her rejection: “Le fils du noir fit peur à la fille des blancs!” Although the *poet* is able to love across color and racial lines, and the pure notion of love outside all constraints must still be expressed, the taboos in a country still very much divided by color prevent the mediating quality of love to take hold. It is not that the white women are stereotypically unattainable for inherent qualities they might possess, but that the social conditions of a post-colonial society occasionally inhibit the free expression of love across the boundaries of race, color, or class.

The Haitian male poet, like many of these women, is a recurrent character in *Rires et Pleurs*. He frequently goes by Paul or more often, Pierre. With all of these names, the reader begins to associate an array of details with each character and carries this information over from one poem to the other. An additional poem, which serves as a transition to the ones dealing more concretely with the legacy of colonialism and slavery in matters of love, is “A qui croire?” which features Manoune and Pierre. Manoune, the black woman, has been seduced by the handsome and eloquent Pierre. He is described as having black hair, but his brown face is lighter than her own skin, suggesting that he is a mulatto. Pierre has been away for quite some time, and when he returns, this difference in skin color appears more pronounced and signals that something has

changed: his hands, as he holds hers, are now “presque blanches.” An eerie transformation has indeed taken place and involves along with physical changes an unwelcome difference in speech:

“Manoune” –me dit-il; --et ses douces paroles
Me faisaient frissonner sur mes genoux tremblants!—
--Il laissait, ce jour-là, le patois des créoles,
Pour me parler, hélas! Le langage des blancs!
“Manoune, tu sais bien que j’ai rêvé la gloire
Pour la mettre à tes pieds! Et qu’une heure, avec toi,
“Seul à seul, loin des yeux, vaut tout le ciel pour moi!”
-“Maintenant s’il m’oublie, à qui donc faut-il croire?” (25-32)

This question of forgetting is later followed by the question of abandonment. Although Pierre consistently claims that his ambition is to bring her glory, Manoune sees his actions as nothing other than disloyalty. Under the pretense of love, this “ingrat” has only brought her suffering. The refrain of the poem warns Manoune not to trust the fleeting nature of love and to be wary of its superficial and capricious declarations.

This poem is unusual in *Rires et Pleurs* for the way in which it highlights the devastation which can result from a poet’s betrayal. Pierre in this poem is shown to be a shifting figure whose capacity to transform in different milieus and to posture various identities can work to bestow honor or to cause disillusionment. If Pierre is not to be trusted, then who is to be believed? If the poet cannot sustain his loyalty to Haiti when seduced by outside influences, then where is the hope for someone like Manoune? Although politicians may waver in their alliances, the poetic subject in Durand’s collection has, from the onset, claimed commitment to the nation. Moreover, Haitian intellectuals since the 1830s and through the late nineteenth-century cite the importance of Haitian poets in helping to create national identity and in bringing prestige to their nation. The power the poet holds stems from the great need for these national representatives, as Firmin and Janvier see it, but also from the ability the poet possesses to choose or not to choose the beneficiaries of his talent. This poem overtly addresses the issue of language and the

realization that writing in French is clearly not the language of Haiti's rural community. As Pierre suggests, however, it is impossible to bring glory to Manoune and to the nation if writing in Creole means others outside Haiti will not recognize his efforts. On so many levels, this poem underscores the dilemmas, contradictions, and varying perspectives on Haitian poetry.

Love is shown to be most painful in poems in which the white male intruder possesses the power to interfere between the black male poet and the Haitian woman he loves. Only two poems in the second book of *Rires et Pleurs* are specifically set in colonial Saint-Domingue, prior to independence and hence prior to the abolition of slavery. These two sonnets are both called "Amour d'esclave," although the title comes to reveal the contradiction of the terms as there is no love between the slave and her master. In the first sonnet, the female slave speaks about the violence which accompanies her master's passion. This "love" story is recounted in all its perversion by a woman who is naïvely indifferent to the perpetual violence which plagues her life. In the second sonnet, the slave woman is very aware of her situation and is almost complicit. The white plantation owner promises that her children will be free as part of this exchange. Hiding in the dark, however, is Tembo, a black male slave ready to kill the master when the time is opportune. Trickery, abuse, and bribes for freedom all work to stage the inequalities in these power relationships that make the exercise of real love impossible in such settings. These two poems clearly find their way into Durand's collection for reasons Edward Said cites in *Culture and Imperialism*. These dynamics, set in a previous period, are part of an investigation to see if what happened in the past is indeed still happening.²²⁸ Allegorically speaking, these poems again imply how foreign powers seduce the Haitian nation and that Haitians do not always resist this corruption. Other poems in Durand's collection cast this same scenario in the shadow of

²²⁸ Said 3.

imperialism. Foreign powers in the late nineteenth-century still threaten Haiti and contaminate the pure and innocent expressions of love. Durand's poem "Epître," for example, is one in a series of poems in which the subject deprecates his own qualities and minimizes his own importance in matters of love as in politics. "Epître" positions the poet, who is black, poor, and powerless, against a German man who is the husband of this Haitian woman whom he loves. The letter reveals the poet uncovering his own contradictions. He admits to being humble but rebellious, having great resolve but taking no action, being a poet but incapable of expression: "—étrange animal/Que le poète!..." The poem's final stanza includes these verses:

--Pauvre, je décline la lutte
--Contre vous, prévoyant ma chute.
--Que me reste-t-il? --Implorer...
Grâce! l'on est dans l'indigence! (35-38)

The poem ends with the poet's defeat, reiterating at once his economic poverty and emotional exhaustion along with the poetic impoverishment of his own text. In "Choucounè," to be examined in more depth in the next section, a similar dynamic has a similar outcome. A Haitian "marabout" leaves the black poet for a French-speaking foreigner.²²⁹ As a song, this piece became popular during the American Occupation of Haiti when Haitian women were involved romantically with American soldiers. In both poems, the poet is left only to mourn his loss and continue to long for the love he cannot have. The increasing German population in Haiti at the end of the century, the impending imperial interest in Haitian affairs by the United States, and the vestiges of racism from French colonialism and slavery all make these poems highly reflective of the social hierarchies and relational problems endemic to Haitian communities of the time.

²²⁹ Michael Dash defines a 'marabout' in Haiti as a woman who has dark skin and flowing hair. Dash, The Other America 50.

The problems associated with love reveal better than any other topic how Haiti is still caught between the ideal of an independent nation-state and the reality of a society trapped in the dynamics of plantation space. Love between Haitian men and women is still upset by the old structures in which white men constantly assert their power.

3.6 THE CAGED BIRD AND A POET IN CHAINS

It is interesting to note at this juncture that Haitian responses to theories of racial inequalities, like those of Firmin referenced earlier, were contemporary to Durand's writing and came incredibly close to deconstructing race altogether. In responding to de Gobineau's text, Firmin calls it a "pseudo theory" which upon close scrutiny has no scientific basis. In the end, however, and almost surprisingly, Firmin concludes that perhaps skin pigmentation *is* the only reliable racial distinction.²³⁰ Durand's poetry demonstrates that it is the undeniable social realities in Haiti which make discarding the issue of race so impossible. In poems about love, the subject is most understated precisely when his racial oppositions create social divisions, and not always in the realm of love. This understated subjectivity is a defining feature of Durand's poetry.

Parenthetically, I'd like to highlight another poem outside this latest theme but one which nonetheless deals with pervasive hierarchies and the poet's position in Haitian society. One of the most overt comparisons between the white male foreigner in Haiti and the black poet is to be

²³⁰ Firmin 115 and 145.

found in the poem “Les deux bouts de l’échelle.” In this text the Haitian poet Pierre, once again a name which in several of Durand’s poems is synonymous with the poetic subject, has a conversation with an American planter from New York named John who employs four hundred peasants on his land.²³¹ The first two verses set up the opposition, contrasting physical appearance, personal attributes, and race. Economic class is most accentuated of all the characteristics, as show in the placement of “riche” in verse 2:

Nous étions deux sur le chemin; lui, gros, fier, blond
Et riche; moi, fluet, noir, pauvre, humble et très long. (1-2)

Life is difficult for Pierre with the recent death of family members and with the small amount of money he earns for food. He also downplays his poetry, using the derogatory word “rimaille” to convey the writing of bad verse. The sympathetic John offers to house and feed Pierre who can, in turn, write poetry for him. Even as a rich person, John admits to occasional sadness. His well-intended offer, however, in no way changes the system at the root of the inequality. The poem suggests another means by which to alter the dynamics of the hierarchy, for the black poet to move within the liminal space of the ladder. The “understated” description Pierre continues to give of himself, one which mentions the words titling Durand’s collection, expands to his poetry:

Je répondis: Moi, je suis le rêveur;
Je m’en vais doucement, côtoyant la double arche
De vos ponts, l’oeil baissé, car j’ai peur, quand je marche,
D’écraser un insecte ou bien quelque humble fleur.
Je butine, en passant, ou le rire ou le pleur,
-Car la vie, ici-bas, a toujours ces deux choses ... (11-16)

The Haitian poet, largely because of race, is in the margins of modern civilizations; he dreams while Americans build, his inferiority, then, felt in terms of modernity. His respect of

²³¹ Although increased American interest is noted in Haiti in the late nineteenth century, I did not find any specific references in historical texts to Americans owning land in Haiti on any large scale.

nature though is admirable. Pierre states later in the poem that he is in fact happy to commune with nature and to compose verse, specifying this representative role reminiscent of Durand's "Dédicace." Pierre declares: "j'écris –pas trop mal, pas trop bien, --/ des lettres pour ceux-là qui n'ont pas eu de classes..." The reality of the situation leaves Pierre no choice but to admit the obvious discrepancies in their condition, discrepancies which fate has dealt to him. He nonetheless declares his preference for this lot and voluntarily assumes his role. The poem ends with this verse, set off from the preceding stanza: "Et je lui répondis: «J'aime mon sort; merci! »" By ending the dialogue on this note, the seemingly downtrodden black poet from Haiti trumps what the imperialist superiority has to offer, and the poem proves to be an ironic recognition of the global politics at work. The poet ultimately asserts his power by choosing and thereby elevating the lesser condition. This maneuvering is part of the specificity of the Haitian poet and makes Durand's project distinctive even from his Haitian counterparts.

In Durand's poetry, it is through social realities more than through political crises that the Haitian poet articulates his concerns. For the most part, Durand is a poet of the nation and of national unity and rarely becomes overtly political in his poetry. This is especially true concerning the policies of various Haitian governments. The dangers of political engagement, first through writing and subsequently through action, are illustrated in the next chapter on Massillon Coicou. There are two poems, however, which representing the exception rather than the rule, were born out of Durand's political persecution. Durand spent brief time in prison on two occasions for perceived loyalties to competing regimes. It was during these periods that he composed two of his best known poems, "Chantez oiseaux" and "Choucoune," both of which date from the 1880s. Haitian historians recount the political involvement of other writers in the nineteenth-century. The relative paucity of information on Durand's imprisonment suggests to

me that his affiliations were more circumstantial than intentional, and that he was not directly involved in political change. We do know, according to Pompilus, that the first time Durand was imprisoned was briefly in 1883 for apparent opposition to the noiriste President Salomon.²³² From simple geographic position, this fact is not difficult to accept. Durand was from Cap Haitian, a city in which Salomon had very weak support. According to historian David Nicholls, violent opposition to Salomon's regime was suppressed by his government in several large Haitian cities in 1883, and eventually, Salomon was overthrown by a northern alliance of several key politicians. Durand refers to one of these cities in his poem "Adieu à la ville de Jérémie," a poem in which lament over Jérémie's civil strife could be seen as sympathetic to Salomon's opposition. Durand's imprisonment was short-lived and followed by a dramatic turn-around in events when politician Louis-Joseph Janvier intervened on Durand's behalf to secure Durand a post in Salomon's government. Janvier was an important leader of the National Party and supporter of noirisme in addition to being a prolific essay writer whose texts defend Haiti to the outside world. In an article published in *Haiti littéraire et sociale* just after Durand's death, Janvier suggests that this perceived opposition to Salomon was indeed false. Durand went on to serve as deputy of Cap Haitian and then presided over the Chambre des représentants in 1888, both during Salomon's regime. Salomon is the only president to whom Durand addresses a poem, the "Sonnet au Président Salomon," an elegy that appears to have been written at the time of Salomon's death.

Durand's second stint in prison occurred on his return from France in 1888, when President Légitime came to power after Salomon's demise. It was likely Durand's service in Salomon's government that triggered suspicion. Pompilus dates Durand's poem "Chantez

²³² Durand and Pompilus, *Poésies choisies* 15.

oiseaux” to this time period, and an end-note reads “Cachots du Port-au-Prince, 11 juillet 1889,” a precision which is rare in Durand’s poetry. “Chantez oiseaux” begins with a refrain in which the poet calls to his birds, *mes oiseaux*, as well as the nation’s birds, “oiseaux de palmists.” Their songs can be heard by the prisoners; their songs are joyful because of the liberty they enjoy. The first half of the poem elaborates on the opposition between these “free birds” in nature and the “caged birds” behind the bars. Although the confined prisoners long to breathe the same air as these birds, death becomes the only means through which the birds will soar to freedom. In the third stanza, however, those in prison do discover their own song of sorts: “...forts de notre conscience, chantons encore dans nos dures prisons...” (14, 16). In the last stanza of Durand’s poem, it is not physical death that is the real threat but the death of the soul and the death of the song. The prison in Port-au-Prince becomes a metaphor for Haiti in general, where songs are dying and the soul is dead:

O mon pays! ô my belle patrie!
Pourquoi faut-il que des hommes méchants
Trouvent leur joie à voir l’âme meurtrie
Et leur délice à voir mourir nos chants? (20-23)

These verses are simultaneously the most explicit and the vaguest of the entire poem: they are an outcry for Haiti in peril, but the men who endanger the country, these “hommes méchants/mé-chants, “(these mean men/ men with a bad song) are not specified. A hostile and unpredictable political climate certainly prevented Durand from direct accusations. Not naming, however, neither the “nous” for which the poet speaks nor these enemies of the country allows for multiple interpretations. A number of factors may threaten societal freedoms, national sovereignty, and poetic expression. The last stanza ends with impending death, as the martyr prisoners brace their arms “en croix.” The poem ends on a victorious note, however, when the songs continue. A refrain nearly similar to the refrain found earlier in the poem reads as follows:

Mes oiseaux palmistes,
Chantez là-bas, dans les tamariniers!
Chantez! Nous sommes tristes;
Egayez donc les pauvres prisonniers! (29-32)

The difference in the first and final refrain is subtle. Rather than stating that the birds sing, [ils] *chantent*, the poet in this stanza uses the imperative, [vous] *chantez*. The refrain is no longer a mere statement, since the subject dictates what poetry should express.

The other poem, “Choucounè,” recounts the story of how a poet loses the Haitian woman he loves to a French-speaking foreigner.²³³ It was set to music during Durand’s lifetime by the Haitian musician Mauléart Monton and survives today as a famous Haitian folk song. While both its linguistic achievement and provocative theme have ensured its on-going popularity, its place within *Rires et Pleurs* remains overlooked. The poem, alluded to at different points throughout this chapter, is the one text which seems to draw on all the themes one would associate with Durand’s poetry. It deals with romantic love, love of country, the role of the poet, nature in the countryside, imperialism, and racial politics in a post-colonial society. The poem begins as the poet declares his love for Choucounè, whom he plans to marry. They have the blessings of her family, and even nature sings of their love. The conflict arises when suddenly a “petit blanc” arrives.²³⁴ The reasons Choucounè leaves the poet are simply stated: “Il trouve Choucounè jolie, / Il parle Français... Choucounè l’aime.” She also becomes pregnant by the white foreigner. At the end of each stanza, a refrain contrasts the past story with the painful emotion of the present. Since the day Choucounè left, the poet laments “mes deux pieds sont

²³³ A French translation of this Haitian Creole poem can be found in Louis Morpeau’s *Anthologie d’un siècle de poésie haïtienne, 1817-1925, avec une étude sur la muse haïtienne d’expression française et une étude sur la muse haïtienne d’expression créole* (Paris : Bossard, 1925).

²³⁴ In colonial Saint-Domingue, the ‘petits blancs’ were the white, merchant class as opposed to the large plantation owners, the ‘grands blancs.’ The pejorative connotation of it in this poem, however, cannot be ignored.

dans la chaîne.” The sadness of the poem’s ending, however, is less about abandonment than the continued longing of the poet for the woman he still loves.

Michael Dash concludes that this poetic failure is about the impossibility to possess the Haitian landscape and about the need to go beyond a nationalist script in Haitian poetics.²³⁵ Dash qualifies this statement by explaining that the poem’s overriding message is that the black male poet cannot freely love the Haitian woman and therefore cannot completely claim the Haitian landscape, even in Creole. I do not disagree with this assessment. However, it is precisely this *opposition* between Creole and French which merits further analysis, especially considering that “Choucounè” is the only one of two poems in *Rires et Pleurs* written in Haitian Creole. If within the poem speaking French represents a foreign and unwelcome presence, one which interferes with the poet’s pursuits, then is Durand’s entire poetic project, by extension, undermined by his use of French? Is Durand in fact implying that Haitian poetry will never be free of this French presence and will always be a poetry in chains? Given what we have seen of Durand’s poetry as a whole, it seems difficult to accept that in the space of a single poem he would relegate his entire collection to poetic failure. If we consider, however, that this poem, as others we have seen, can also reveal a certain irony when it comes to the poet’s subjectivity, a certain power in this helplessness, then the poem’s message is certainly more complicated.

I have not uncovered a precise explanation for why “Choucounè” was composed in Creole, especially at a time when Creole was not a written language and had no official orthography. Perhaps the problem exposed is so serious a manifestation of imperial power that putting the words in French, like in the poem “A qui croire?” would constitute too much of a betrayal. On one level, it could be argued that some matters, especially those which so pervade

²³⁵ Dash, *The Other America* 49.

the daily life in the Haitian countryside, cannot in fact be translated. Additionally, the use of French in this particular type of circumstance is too intimately associated with the former colonizer to be the language of the poet's expression. The constancy of the poet's feelings, however, in both poems confirms that such ideals, regardless of the obstacles or outcome, must still be expressed. Each poem also ends in a sort of warning, indicating that the effects of these circumstances will not be felt by the poet alone. In "Epître," *on est dans l'indulgence*," just as in "Choucounè," it is the unborn baby, the next generation, which is also "in chains."

At the conclusion of Choucounè, the poet still sings of his love and loss. As with the other poems which have been examined, the "understated" subject exists on two levels. On the one hand, the poem's ending testifies to Haitian poetry's dependent status on French influence and to Haiti's on-going struggle for complete independence. On the other hand, the poet takes advantage of this inevitable reality not only to affirm his choice to *write* in French (or in Creole) but also to allow this Creole poem to do what the French-speaking foreigner does in "Choucounè": invade the French collection. Does this poem represent a moment in which Durand wills his text opaque to a French-reading audience? Finally, the product of this union between the white foreigner and Choucounè is specifically named. He is an enchained petit *Pierre*, the familiar character from *Les deux bouts de l'échelle*, as well from other poems in the collection. In this way, Durand links the committed poet with the helpless child. Similarly, the various poems of the collection bring together the humble poet with the poet of revolution, the poor black poet with the powerful "barde noir."

3.7 RECASTING THE REVOLUTION

The “bard noir” is in fact most empowered when referencing the Haitian Revolution. One explicit reference to the poet’s identity as the “bard noir” within *Rires et Pleurs* is in Durand’s “Aux Cubains,” in which the poet speaks to Cubans as black brothers fighting against the oppression of slavery. Haiti’s national heroes are specifically those in whom the black race will continue to prosper and achieve freedom:

A vous qui combattez depuis nombre d’années
Pour conquérir la liberté... (1-2)
Et qui nous rappelez les combats héroïques
De Toussaint, le géant des noirs;
A vous, frères Cubains, qui, contre un joug infâme...(7-9)
A vous, le bard noir vient répétez: “Courage!” (13)

Here, the poet’s authority comes from his national belonging, a proud connection to this ancestry of black, revolutionary heroes. Haiti’s revolutionary ideals are grounded in its national past and expand to hemispheric concerns and racial solidarity. Toussaint is not just a giant for the Haitian nation but for the black race, taking on the tremendous historical significance of Haiti’s Revolution which Firmin had cited in “L’égale des races humaines.” The following chapter will illustrate how Haiti’s solidarity with those of the African diaspora takes on more pronounced significance in Massillon Coicou’s poetry.

Another poem which centers on Haiti’s Revolution and the notion of equality is “Chant National.” The poem’s refrain, which appears four times in the poem, contains some variation of these verses: “L’Indépendance est éphémère/Sans le droit à l’égalité!” The date of the poem is not known, but Pompilus includes a note that it was made into a presidential hymn by Haitian

composer Occide Jeanty sometime in the late nineteenth century.²³⁶ This poem recounts the incredible transformation of Haiti's ancestors who fought against oppression for their own freedom. In the telling of the epic independence story, this poem emphasizes various players and their prominent roles. Nameless black slaves fight with legendary black heroes such as Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines. Equally important are the efforts by mulatto leaders like Chavannes and Ogé who appealed to Paris legislatures for mulatto rights in colonial Saint-Domingue. In reality, mulatto leaders, many of whom owned slaves, were not typically concerned with the rights of blacks. These two groups only came together in the last phases of the Haitian Revolution to defeat Napoleon's plan to reoccupy Saint-Domingue and reinstitute slavery, a move which may also have restricted mulatto liberties. "Chant national" strategically elides these differences to emphasize this final unity without which this defining moment of the birth of a nation might never have taken place. Memory of the revolution will thereby recreate a sense shared of identity, giving meaning to the past battles as well as to struggles of the present time:

A l'œuvre donc, descendants de l'Afrique
Jaunes et noirs, fils du même berceau
L'antique Europe et la Jeune Amérique
Nous voit de loin tenter le rude assaut.
Bêchons le sol qu'en l'an mil huit cent quatre
Nous ont conquis nous aïeux au bras fort.
C'est notre tour à présent de combattre
Avec ce cri: "Le progrès ou la mort!"(53-60)

Within the space of the poem, mulattos are not an opposing political party or elite group in control of Haitian affairs but rather partners in preserving Haitian heritage and national strength. The common thread which binds these two diverse groups is their shared *African* ancestry which also made them the common target of all racist policies in colonial Saint-

²³⁶ Durand and Pompilus, Poésies choisies 18.

Domingue. This reframing of alliances recalls Dessalines' efforts at national unity when the Haitian constitution referred to all Haitians as *noir* and invited anyone of African descent to receive Haitian citizenship. "Chant National," calls for first and foremost for equality *within* Haiti, gradually alluding to the expansion of revolutionary ideals temporally as well as globally. Haitian intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century viewed the success of the Haitian experiment as vital to the hope of Africans everywhere as the entire world had its eyes fixed on Haiti. The verses above also portray the events of the Haitian Revolution, now as in the past, as going beyond national boundaries to capture its significance in this new world space. Through dynamic interaction of these three presences (Africa, America, and Europe) in this event, the Haitian Revolution moves from the margins of world history to re-center its impact on Caribbean and world events.

The "barde noir" was not just a defender of Haitians and Cubans. It may in fact seem contradictory that Oswald Durand, Haiti's national poet, could also write poems like "Ode à la France" and "Jeune air" in defense of France. Durand himself felt the need to explain his thoughts on France as he published an article entitled "Une Explication Nécessaire," in his journal *Les Bigailles* in April 1902. For Durand, France in part represents "cette terre qui a fait 89 et qui a vu naître Hugo. Tout homme a deux patries, dit le proverbe, la sienne et la France --- Donc, la sienne d'abord." While making it clear that Haiti comes first, Durand still admired France for its own revolutionary ideals and the greatness of poets like Victor Hugo. There was no apparent conflict between the devotion to his own country (*la sienne d'abord*) and affection for France whose literary tradition greatly impacted his own poetry. The same could apply to the references Haitian writers frequently made to Greek and Roman poetry. Some of Durand's

poems attest to his ability to separate these celebrated aspects of French history and culture from France's practice of slavery and Napoleon's efforts to reinstate it:

J'ai montré dans mes écrits le profond amour, le culte même que je voue à cette noble contrée. Après 1871, c'est en pleurant que j'ai composé mon ode à la France; qu'on lise *Ces allemands...mes adieux au capitaine Portier, mon salut de bienvenue à M. Frédéric Febre....*²³⁷

The historical context of these poems is also important to consider: two of these, "Ode à la France" and "Ces allemands," are related in circumstances in that both concern German aggression. "Ode à la France" appears to have been written during or shortly after the Prussian War, based on the references to battles and generals mentioned in the poem. The poem reveals strong support for France in the conflict and expresses hope that France will recover her former glory. "Ces allemands" was written in 1872 after what Haitians know as the Batsch affair in which a German commodore seized two Haitian warships in the harbor of Port-au-Prince and defaced the Haitian flag. According to Michael Heintz, Haiti's support for France had not gone unnoticed by the Germans. This incident "was ostensibly a debt-collecting foray on behalf of German merchants, but was in fact a reminder to Haiti as to who had won the Franco-Prussian War."²³⁸ The idea of Germany as a common enemy of both Haiti and France is reflected in "Ces allemands" at the beginning and here at the end of the poem:

Mais ainsi qu'à la France, à la bande guerrière
--Allemands, doublés de Prussiens --
Nous jetâmes l'argent, le front haut, l'âme fière,
Ainsi qu'on jette un os aux chiens! (29-32)

In these poems the mutability of Durand's writing comes to focus, as he alters his message according to events as well as to the times. He postures as more of an *anti-imperialist*

²³⁷ Oswald Durand, *Les Bigaillies* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'Abeille, 1901--?).

²³⁸ Michael Heintz, *Written in Blood: the story of the Haitian people, 1492-1995* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1996) 243.

in the late nineteenth century than as an anti-colonial writer, all the while maintaining a focus as *national* poet. Durand's defense of Haiti against the Germans is not surprising, and his defense of France is not radically different from that of the Cuban slaves in the poem "Aux Cubains." His status as a Haitian poet enhances the universal import of his poetry which speaks against the suppression of liberty and foreign oppression even outside the Caribbean. Just as Michael Dash would argue about Anténor Firmin, Durand also represents "a way of being Haitian that was not isolationist but enmeshed in the global interconnectedness of the modern world."²³⁹ His identity, tied to the radical universalism of Haiti's revolution and the on-going meaning of its notion of *equality*, denotes poetry powerful enough to be able to say in the poem "Jeune Air": "J'aime autant la France éternelle."

I will restate at this juncture that this power as a poet also comes from humility which constitutes much of his subjectivity. In "Ode à la France," for example, the subject declares the need to borrow the pen of other writers:

Que ne suis-je un de ceux que le monde contemple,
Que la postérité
Fait asseoir le front fier, tranquille, dans le temps
De l'immortalité?

Barbier, Rouget de Lisle, oh! prêtez-mois vos ailes,
Votre hardi coursier!
Faites rugir mon luth en strophes immortelles
Sur des cordes d'acier! (5-12)

This stated insufficiency in status is not because the poet is writing about France, as throughout Durand's collection the poet refers to his modest talent. The first poem in the collection to portray the poet in this light is the third poem in the collection, "La Brune Jardinière," where he begins by asking Sainte-Beuve to lend him a lyre so that his own poetry

²³⁹ Michael Dash, "Nineteenth-century Haiti and the Archipelago of the Americas: Anténor Firmin's Letters from St. Thomas," *Research in African Literatures* 35.2 (2004): 51.

will flow more beautifully and easily. Poems about the Haitian Revolution can only be told if the poet had the plume of *Dante*. He implies that his Haitian identity prevents him from recounting the heroic events he nonetheless goes on so powerfully to describe. The subject in Durand's collection is less overtly revolutionary than the Revolution he so heroically portrays, but throughout the collection the inferiority felt by the black, Haitian poet, seems to be at times both *real* and *ironic*. The coexistence in Durand's poetry between the powerful bard noir and the poor black poet leaves undisturbed the portrait of the Haitian poet as economically inferior and socially disempowered. The very dual nature of this subjectivity, however, powerfully indicates that inequality is not, as Firmin would also argue, intellectual.

3.8 LEGACY AND CONCLUSION

Such tensions in Durand's poetry reveal how complexities in Haitian texts were inevitable and intended in nineteenth-century Haiti. Although rooted in Romanic modes of poetic expressions, Haitian writers like Durand struggled to work against but also within the pervasive racial theories of the era. It is undoubtedly the combination of all of these poems and more which led to the government decision in 1905 to award Durand a government pension of 250 gourdes a month to subsidize his writing. Although the poems most tied to Haitian political and cultural realities seemed most significant to this decision, other Haitian intellectuals cited different reasons for such merit. Frédéric Marcelin, editor of *Hàiti littéraire et sociale* in 1905, had this to say about the pension:

Si j'avais l'oreille des grands...si j'avais l'honneur d'être député [...] j'irais même jusqu'à demander qu'elle soit de 300 gourdes, voulant marquer par là que cette pension, pour services rendus à la littérature....

Je me contente donc de saluer en Oswald Durand le poète national, le barde ailé qui fit entrer triomphalement dans l'alexandrin Toussaint Louverture, Capois-la-Mort, Jean-Jacques Dessalines...Il a chanté, il chante chaque jour nos vallées, nos montagnes, nos arbres, nos oiseaux, le Mistral haïtien...et c'est par eux qu'il a compris sa gloire.²⁴⁰

In an article commemorating Durand's death just one year later, Haitian poet Antoine Laforest pays homage to Durand with a different emphasis:

Le lecteur se rappelle le séduisant article que M.F. Marcelin consacra, dans cette Revue, à Oswald Durand, notre illustre collaborateur, le maître du Parnasse haïtien...la consécration éclatante du Talent, du Mérite littéraire...Nul autant qu'Oswald n'a honoré les lettres haïtiennes. On peut dire qu'il n'a jamais vécu que dans un saint amour, une divine passion du Beau...²⁴¹

Toward the end of this eulogy, Laforest alludes to only two poems by name which could not be more opposite in terms of theme, inspiration, and even language, but yet the two for which Durand was most known at the end of his career: "La Jalousie" and "Choucouné." The first earned him respect abroad for being indistinguishable from a French poet, and the second demonstrated an awareness of rural social dynamics, the complexities of love, and the conflict over language in postcolonial Haiti. It is precisely the dichotomy of poetry which in simplest terms can be said to be national and universal, elite and popular, French and Haitian, which brought him such recognition in Haiti during his lifetime and at his death.

²⁴⁰ Haïti littéraire et sociale [Port-au-Prince] avril 1905: 9.

²⁴¹ Haïti littéraire et sociale [Port-au-Prince] mai 1906: 354.

4.0 NATIONAL POETRY AND FATEFUL POLITICS: THE WORK AND LEGACY OF MASSILLON COICOU

4.1 INTRODUCTION

To begin this chapter I return to the bicentennial publication I referenced in my introduction, the series of articles on Haitian literature, history, and culture, published in 2006 under the title *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks* and edited by 2004 conference organizers Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw.²⁴² These editors reflect in the study's introduction on the events in Haiti of 2004 which included not only bicentennial celebrations but also the political upheavals which ultimately resulted in President Aristide's exile. National failing, unending violence, and cyclical instability, they note, once again seemed to characterize the Haitian plight.²⁴³ Munro and Hackshaw-Walcott rightly observe in the frenzy of media coverage of 2004 that "Haiti," as in 1804, was subject to much interpretation and misinterpretation, especially in the Western imagination.

Where, then, is the truth of Haiti, its history, its intellectual traditions, its culture? What were, what are the cultural repercussions of Haiti's revolution, in Haiti and elsewhere? What role has culture played in shaping Haiti's history, and conversely, how has Haiti's history determined, inspired, liberated and restricted

²⁴² Munro and Walcott-Hackshaw.

²⁴³ Munro and Walcott-Hackshaw ix.

Haitian culture and thought? In a land that has constantly relived its past, how can we imagine a Haitian future?²⁴⁴

These timely observations and provocative questions surrounding Haiti's bicentennial and the coinciding political events were, as we have seen, part of the *second* such anniversary, an additional set of circumstances which occasioned such reflection. In the nineteenth century, Haitians began planning the *centennial* celebrations of Haitian independence with the creation of an organization dedicated to this purpose. As American historian Brenda Plummer notes:

Since the early 1890s, Haitians had been preparing for the centennial celebration of their national independence. Steeped in historical lore and imbued with an awareness of the continuity of tradition, many felt a sense of urgency as 1904 approached. Could Haitians make the necessary leap into modernity?²⁴⁵

On the eve of the centennial, Haiti's poets, journalists, historians, and theorists continued to construct their national history, critique internal politics, and contemplate the impact of international events on Haiti's economic and social viability. Their work is a valuable testimony as to how Haitian intellectuals interpreted their own revolution as well as to how they perceived the response of the West to their first century of independence. The tradition of Haitian poetry, itself a "cultural repercussion" of previous events, remained the privileged genre in Haiti even through the 1890s.

Poet, dramatist, and political activist Massillon Coicou was president of the committee for the centennial celebrations, his poetry being an important precursor to this government appointment. Although his poetry is perhaps less well-known than that of Oswald Durand or Haitian poets of twentieth century, no other poet left a greater legacy in Haiti as a public figure than Massillon Coicou. His assassination ordered under the presidency of General Nord Alexis in 1908 changed Haiti's political and literary landscape. For years to come, the circumstances

²⁴⁴ Munro and Walcott-Hackshaw x.

²⁴⁵ Brenda Plummer, Haiti and the Great Powers: 1902-1915 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

which led to this act would be frequently questioned, and attempts to uncover the details surrounding his death and debates about his life works have been the subject of much curiosity and controversy in Haitian letters. To date, no one comprehensive study has been devoted to the poetry which preceded these fateful events.

More exclusively national and staunchly patriotic, for example, than Durand's *Rires et Pleurs*, Coicou's 1892 collection *Poésies nationales* is closely tied to political events of the late 1880s and early 1890s. Coicou's "national" poetry reveals insight into the reasons Romanticism continued in Haiti through the end of the nineteenth century and into the often explosive and dangerous intersections of Haitian literature and politics. Additionally, the dominant characteristics of twentieth-century Haitian texts are already palpable in Coicou's work. In this chapter, I will therefore focus on the poems which comprise Coicou's most celebrated collection, paying particular attention to how he depicts Haiti's difficulties and the overwhelming sense of national failure due to an increasingly triumphant imperialism, internal corruption, and global racism. I will also demonstrate that amidst Coicou's prescient portrayal of Haiti's demise surfaces the conviction that Haitian national identity will be preserved through a commitment to poetry, through recourse to certain ideas of history, and through gestures toward the new and wider notions of spiritual community and racial solidarity.

Massillon Coicou was born in 1867 in Port-au-Prince.²⁴⁶ His father, Pierre-Louis Coicou, was a native of the southern city of Jacmel and had been a baron to Emperor Soulouque who ruled Haiti from 1847 to 1859. As an army general, Soulouque maintained control of Haiti largely through military rule. These details are important to point out, as they highlight that they

²⁴⁶ Most of the biographical information about Massillon Coicou is taken from the following two sources: Raphael Berrou and Pradel Pompilus's anthology *Histoire de la Littérature Haïtienne, Tome 1* as cited in previous chapters and Jacquelin Dolcé's *Massillon Coicou: Textes Choisis* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Choucounne, 2000).

Haitian military was part of Coicou's family heritage. Pierre-Louis died when Massillon was just eight, and he was raised by his mother Amica, a religious woman who worked tirelessly to provide her eleven children with an education. The Coicou family included several teachers, doctors, and journalists. They were part of the rising black elite in Haiti during a time in which class emerges as a category which is not always easily correlated with color.²⁴⁷ Coicou's schooling began at a religious institution, the *Frères de l'Instruction Chrétienne*, and he remained a devout Catholic throughout his life. In various autobiographical accounts, Coicou explained his early interests in letters, specifically recalling the poetry and theater of Alcibiade Bathier, a minor Haitian writer who produced several poetic and theatrical works in the 1860s and 1870s. In Haiti's literary journal *La Ronde*, Coicou would later recount the memory of his first encounter with Bathier:

Quand je connus Bathier, je n'avais que six ans...ce fut en ma première école, chez mon premier maître[...]Le vénéré Dorcelly Etienne, époux d'une sœur du poète, devait à ce titre la joie d'abriter Bathier...Un soir de distribution des prix, je débitai avec mon verbe et ma verve d'enfant intelligent et singeur *Maître corbeau sur un arbre perché*, [...]Bathier, lui, m'embrassa fort et me dit,...Pour cela je te ferai cadeau d'un gros livre...Ce fut en 73. Bathier est mort neuf ans plus tard, et jamais il ne m'a donné mon gros livre, le méchant.

Or, quand parut le gros livre qu'est *Sous les Bambous*, et que je l'appris et que revins du long étonnement...qu'Alcibiade était un *grand poète national*, quand je l'appris, je cherchai à revoir Bathier;[...]Quand je le retrouvai, oh ! L'étrange sentiment que j'éprouvai à lui parler! car il n'était plus mon Alcibiade à moi, mais le Bathier de tout le monde, un poète en pleine gloire.²⁴⁸

In these early impressions, Coicou emphasized his admiration not just for Bathier but for Haiti's national poets. He reminisced with pride the literary talent that could be found in Haiti and the makings of a literary tradition which could be attributed to Haitian poets and

²⁴⁷ For David Nicholls' use of the terms "color" and "race" see how this distinction is explained in this dissertation in the chapter on Oswald Durand.

²⁴⁸ Massillon Coicou, "Souvenirs et Impressions: Bathier," *La Ronde* [Port-au-Prince] le 5 septembre 1898: 78.

playwrights. Even at this young age, much of what constituted a national poet for Coicou also had to do with the place in which local history had in a particular work. This history, as evident below, may indeed be tragic but nonetheless sublime. Coicou went on to explain in this same editorial the impact Bathier's literature had in his own interest in literature and history several years later:

Mais des souvenirs qu'évoque le nom de Bathier, le plus beau date [sic] de plus longtemps encore. C'est *Anacaona!*...J'avais vu des théâtre d'école, montés vaille que vaille; une fois même, à 10 ou 11 ans, j'avais joué, chez les *Frères*, le rôle de la fille d'Oronte dans le *Malade Imaginaire*; mais qu'y eut des théâtres où l'on pouvait voir autre chose que les choses qui font rire, j'étais, jusqu'au soir d'*Anacaona*, à des lieues de le croire!...*Anacaona*, c'est un bloc de l'histoire à peine dégrossi, à peine transformé, mais assez brillant en soi... en revanche, quel mouvement et quelle vie! Non, vous n'imaginerez pas comme c'était beau, comme l'on éprouvait intense l'impression d'être ramené tout à coup à plus de trois siècles en arrière...²⁴⁹

Anacaona was the Taino princess killed by Spanish invaders. As recounted in the first chapter of this dissertation, her story had been explored by Haitian poet Coriolan Ardouin in the poem "Floranna la fiancée" and by Haitian journalist and historian Emile Nau in his work *Historie des caciques d'Haïti*. As did Haitian writers in the 1830s, Coicou recognized *Anacaona* as an important piece of Haitian pre-Columbian history. His admiration for its literary portrayal rested not only with the historical account itself but also with the tragic beauty of its memory. Here, he alluded already to the penchant for melancholic subjects which would characterize his work and to a passion for poetry which connects Haiti of his day to an otherwise distant past.

Coicou's early interest in letters and prize-winning performance in rhetoric led to his appointment as an assistant at the Lycée Pétion where he had earlier completed his education. After two years of working at this lycée, he went on to occupy different government posts, in education, housing, and in the Department of War. Overall, the period of 1891 to 1897 proved to

²⁴⁹ La Ronde 78.

be a defining period both personally and professionally. In 1891 he returned to the Lycée Pétion, this time as a teacher of history and geography for the next several years, and in that same year he married Lisebonne Joseph for whom he had written many love poems published as *Passions* decades later. Lisebonne was the daughter of François Joseph, minister of the Emperor Soulouque, and the couple had eleven children. It was also this same six year period that Coicou began to write and became publicly recognized as an important national statesman. His first collection of published poetry, *Poésies Nationales*, appeared in 1892. According to Haitian professor and researcher Pradel Pompilus, Coicou organized a theatrical presentation of his “poème dramatique” *Oracle* in 1893, published as a manuscript years later in Paris. He also produced two plays in verse, *Le Fils de Toussaint* and *Liberté* 1896. Anthologies additionally make mention of three comedies in prose *Faute d’Actrice*, *L’école mutuelle*, and *L’art pour l’art* performed during this same period, although no traces of them are found today. In 1896, he was appointed the President of the *Association du centenaire de l’indépendance* in preparation for the 1904 celebrations and included this organization in his list of dedications in *Poésies Nationales*. In 1897, Coicou became the head of the *Cabinet Particulier* of President Tirésias Simon Sam, and over the next few years he contributed to various Haitian journals.

Coicou’s *Poésies Nationales* was clearly the most defining accomplishment of these early years. Published in Haiti and in France, it includes a preface by another Haitian poet and former director of Haiti’s lycée nationale, Charles Williams. Williams was also one of several professional and personal contacts to whom Coicou dedicated his collection. William’s seven-page preface begins with a defense of poetry, a reply to anyone in Haiti who would decry poetry’s relevance, usefulness or even existence in late nineteenth-century Haiti. Poetry, Williams contends, is eternal because it is connected to God and is universal because it is a

component of all civilization. Given these qualities, he argues, poetry precedes even a people's history:

Elle est coéternelle à Dieu, donc elle ne peut mourir. Elle a précédé la création. Avant que les peuples aient eu leur histoire, ils ont eu leurs poètes. Et que deviendrait le monde sans la Poésie ? Ne retomberait-il pas d'emblée dans la matière...La Poésie est la plus haute expression de l'art.²⁵⁰

Williams explains in the beginning that *poetry* may encompass all art and takes many forms and that poetry is above the form through which it is expressed. Written verse is the modern expression of this long-standing and universal occurrence. The belief in the eternal nature of poetry meant that it was the genre of choice for many serious writers and its spiritual quality also meant that it was worthy of being appropriated for a national purpose.

Echoing the assertions of Haitian poets in the 1830s, Williams explains that all peoples throughout time have had their poets. For Williams, as for many nineteenth-century Haitian thinkers, Haitian poets are not only engaging in practices known even to "primitive" peoples, but they are also practicing traditions akin to ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Latin writers. He refers to the ancient Judea and the poet's role as prophet. Although Williams does not mention specific texts, one may recall the Hebrew poetry in Old Testament books like David's *Psalms* and the *Book of Isaiah* which foretells a messianic age and humanity's final judgment. Williams also mentions the poets of Athens and the veneration Greeks had for their divinely inspired poets. Ancient Greek poetry is part of the Western literature which Williams outlines. Moreover, in studying Coicou's poetry, the important influence of Greek literary traditions like didactic poetry and elegy are shown to bear their mark on the content and form of many of Coicou's texts.

²⁵⁰ Charles Williams, préface, Poésies Nationales, by Massillon Coicou (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Panorama, 1892) 15-24.

It is from Greece that Williams seamlessly transitions to Rome, as he speaks in more detail about Horace and Vergil. These two poets, in fact, are the ones whom Coicou most often cites in the epigraphs to individual poems in *Poésies Nationales*. Horace (65-8 BC) remains an important choice for Coicou for many reasons, not the least of which was his early political involvement and devotion to his country, as illustrated in many of the odes authored in the thirties.²⁵¹ As will become apparent in this study of Coicou's collection, Horace shared with Coicou the great concern about the demise of their republics, Roman and Haitian respectively. Additionally, Horace is known for his satire, to which we can relate some of Coicou's use of irony and sarcasm in various poems. Horace's epistles may also come to mind when reading poems Coicou addresses to specific Haitian leaders. In Horace's *Epistles ii, I*, addressed to Augustus, Horace stresses the contribution a poet makes to society as a trainer of morality. Gordon Williams quotes this epistle in a chapter called "Poetry and Society" in his study, *The Nature of Roman Poetry*. Of Horace he argues that "even more than other Augustan poets, Horace expresses the sense that poetry has a worthy social function, and it was he, more than any other, who was given the opportunity to demonstrate it practically."²⁵²

The reasons for reminders of Vergil's poetry take on greater significance later in Coicou's collection with quotes from Vergil's *Aeneid*, but in Williams' preface Vergil is mentioned for the honors he received by the emperor Augustus and the literary creativity which places him among other poet-gods. What we know already, however, is that the *Aeneid* is an epic poem about the founding of Rome and the Latin people or Latin *race* (as it is sometimes translated), much like Coicou in *Poésies Nationales* focuses on Haiti's historical and mythical

²⁵¹ This information about Horace and his poetry is taken from two sources: Gregson Davis, introduction, *Odes*, by Horace (New York: The Modern Library, 2002) xi-xvii and Thomas N. Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature: Writing, Identity, and Empire in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

²⁵² Gordon Williams, *The Nature of Roman Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) 16.

beginnings and its implications for “la race noire.” Vergil’s poem also maintains a universal appeal as a text about the destruction of civilizations and their resurrections. As W.R. Johnson states in his introduction to his English translation of the *Aeneid*:

What fuels the poem [...] is neither triumphalism nor defeatism but its pervasive tension between exaltation and lament. This severe dialectic—a counter point of defeat and triumph, abjection and salvation, death and rebirth—is the *Aeneid*’s mainspring. The steady equipoise of this double vision arms the *Aeneid* with its unique power to comfort as well as disturb readers even today.²⁵³

These vacillating sentiments and alternating tones also characterize Coicou’s poetry. Celebration of a glorious revolution and mourning at signs of national failure coexist within the collection as within various poems.

The commonality which Haitian poetry shares with Roman poetry is most evident in the crescendo of Williams’ argument when he lauds poets for their ability to recall and revive through poetry the glory of once prosperous civilizations. The Haitian nation, like other great civilizations, will be preserved through its national epics and founding myths.

Poetry will endure when cities, statesmen, and statues are no more:

Le magnifique César prodiguait au poète des honneurs en échange de l’immortalité; en effet, Horace et Virgile ont été les deux plus grandes gloires du règne d’Auguste. Sa Rome de marbre a disparu avec ses plus beaux monuments; mais ceux des deux grands poètes vivront autant que le monde.²⁵⁴

In general, Coicou’s frequent references to Latin literature take on additional significance if one accepts the viewpoint that Latin literature arose partly in response to two conditions: wanting to rival other cultures (especially Greece) and needing to create through its literature the

²⁵³ W.R. Johnson, introduction, *Virgil/Aeneid*, by Virgil, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2005) xv.

²⁵⁴ Williams, *Poésies Nationales* 19.

beginnings of a national identity.²⁵⁵ The same critic who makes these observations about Latin literature also illustrates the way many nineteenth-century European and American scholars viewed Roman studies: “The Romantic assumption that the story of Rome is the story of loss coincides with the views of Herder and Hegel on the close connection between language and the spirit of a race.”²⁵⁶ Among other Romantic-age thinkers such as Michelet and Vico, Rome is valued for its exemplary history, cultural transformations, and societal institutions, in spite of its association with inconsolable woe and eventual demise.²⁵⁷

The privileging of Rome, as just outlined, takes on increased significance for a Haitian Romantic poet like Coicou who seeks to anchor Haitian poetry in both ancient and modern traditions. The progression which Williams outlines, from Latin and Greece to France and Haiti means that poetry’s enduring legacy from earlier times surpasses mere connections to French literature of the nineteenth century. In addition, the continual relevance of the poet for nineteenth-century Haiti will become apparent in Coicou’s poem “Introduction,” where it is stated that the mission of the poet is both that of spiritual guide and soldier-patriot. As Williams discusses poetry throughout the ages, he increasingly focuses on the association of poet and patriot, as poets are consumed with the suffering and misfortunes of their countries. Williams states: “Le poète aime sa patrie, et la veut libre et indépendante...”²⁵⁸ Related to this then is the poet’s role in *combat* of various sorts or in defense of national interests, from the bards in Gaul to the French Romantics like Hugo and Lamartine, whose importance for nineteenth-century Haitian writers was discussed in the chapter on Oswald Durand. A poet’s devotion to his nation

²⁵⁵ Habinek 8. Habinek frames his study in light of other recent writings on political identity, including Benedict Anderson and the description of how literature functions to create an “imagined community” of readers and writers in the development of modern nationalisms.

²⁵⁶ Habinek 20.

²⁵⁷ Habinek 29.

²⁵⁸ Williams, *Poésies Nationales* 20.

is not only frequently a source of the poet's anguish, but it may also very well lead to persecution and martyrdom, Williams specifies. Ironically, this is exactly how Coicou, the poet for whom Williams authors this very preface, is most often remembered.

As part of poetry's patriotic mission, Williams explains that Haitian poetry, and by analogy Coicou's poems, will often be inspired by Haitian historical figures. In this way, Williams seems to argue that poetry will do what so far, politics has not:

C'est vous, Toussaint Louverture...c'est vous, Dessalines, le Spartacus de la race noire...Si la patrie n'a pas encore traduit sa reconnaissance envers vous en des statues qui immortalisent vos traits et vos exploits, et vous offrent ainsi pour modèles à la postérité, que du moins un des vôtres fasse vivre, pour longtemps encore, votre impérissable souvenir!²⁵⁹

The genius of the poet, Williams claims, lies in his ability to create and sustain sublime figures of Haiti's national history. The black race, like the Haitian nation, will be commemorated most in *poetry*, recognized in literary masterpieces if unrecognized in political practice or in historical account. Coicou's poems, specifically about Haitian revolutionary leaders or this "cult of the hero" as it is often called, will be discussed later in this chapter.²⁶⁰ In this preface, Williams alludes to the place they will occupy in Coicou's work while emphasizing that the relationship between the poet and these heroes is, however, reciprocal:

Souvent le marin italien grave le nom du saint qu'il invoque sur l'avant de sa barque, afin de s'assurer une heureuse navigation; comme lui, puisse l'auteur, grâce aux immortels héros de notre histoire dont les noms décorent le frontispice de son œuvre, obtenir un heureux voyage pour son livre, reliquaire de leur dévouement et de leur gloire!²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Williams, *Poésies Nationales* 24.

²⁶⁰ This (often dismissive) descriptor has appeared in numerous sources on Haitian literature. Most recently, Martin Munro cites it but slightly differently when he states: 'Given the epic scale of the revolution, and the pressing need to create a post-1804 historical consciousness, the cult of the hero was an almost inevitable and in some senses positive phenomenon.' Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, "Petrifying Myths: Lack and Excess in Caribbean and Haitian History," *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks* 26.

²⁶¹ Williams 24.

As Williams explains it, a poet's project will also be a spiritual endeavor, and historical figures are considered nearly synonymous with Haitian deities. Williams ends his preface with an additional Latin quote: "I, pavre liber, sed non sine spe," which translates as "Go little book, but not without hope." While Williams likely composed this himself, he modeled it on Latin poets who would send their book off with a kind of blessing. Indeed what follows the preface is a sonnet by Williams entitled "Le départ" in which wishes the poet of *Poésies Nationales* a happy voyage guided by divine forces. Williams' sign of confidence in Coicou's project and solidarity as a fellow Haitian poet is expressed in this final tercet:

O nef, trésor d'espoir, adieu! vogue et courage !
Et nous, nous qui t'aimons, nous tresserons pour toi
De verts lauriers. Pars ! pars ! Dieu guide ton voyage. (12-14)

4.2 THE POET AND THE MUSE

The first poem in Coicou's collection is entitled "Introduction" and is preceded by two epigraphs of its own. The first one is by the French Provençal poet and regional ethnologist Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914) who also wrote in the late nineteenth century: "Ame de mon pays, /De la Patrie âme pieuse, /Je t'appelle! Incarne-toi dans mes vers." In Mistral's untitled portion of his long narrative poem *Calandau*, the last part of the verse actually reads "Incarne-toi dans mes vers *provençaux*."²⁶² Devoted to the revival of Provençal language and literature, Mistral shared with Coicou a commitment to a threatened cultural identity. According to scholarship on

²⁶² Frédéric Mistral, *Œuvres poétiques complètes* (Aix-en-Provence: Edition Ramoun Berenguie, 1966). Emphasis added.

Mistral, he understood that modern progress meant the demise of traditional Provence.²⁶³ His provençal verse can simultaneously refer to both the language of his poetry as well as the culture about which he wrote, and it is the language issue which perhaps differentiates Mistral and Coicou the most. Coicou did not write in Creole as Mistral did in Provençal, although as alluded to in previous chapters, this can be explained by several factors. It is important to remember that while Creole was the sole language of most Haitians then as it is today, few Haitians were literate either in French or in Haitian Creole. Furthermore, although a few Creole texts were published prior to the twentieth century (including Durand's "Choucounè,"), it was not until the 1940s that there was any serious effort to develop orthography for Haitian Creole.²⁶⁴ Most nineteenth-century linguists considered creoles not as distinct languages but as deformations of French, English, Portuguese, etc. Writing exclusively in Haitian Creole was hardly a viable option for Haitian writers at this time. The mention of Mistral, however, remains relevant, as it demonstrates that poetry remained a contested terrain of cultural identity and not just in colonial or postcolonial locales. This contestation is strongly linked to folklore and popular culture for poets like Mistral and Durand. Coicou's poetry contests versions of Haitian history and draws attention to political corruption, thereby accentuating the rivalries among Haitian elites.

A second epigraph follows Mistral's, one by Horace which in Latin reads: "Prima dicte mihi, summa dicende camoena" and whose English translation is "You who were celebrated in my earliest shall be celebrated in my latest." This opening line from Horace's epistle is addressed to his patron, Maecenas, and begins a poem in which the poet says he will give up lyric poetry for philosophy. Coicou's first—but at this time yet unpublished poems—had indeed

²⁶³ *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 532-533.

²⁶⁴ For information on the history, development and use of Haitian Creole, see Albert Valdman's *Le créole: Structure, statut et origine* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1978).

been poems about love and nature.²⁶⁵ It appears that he too changed the focus of his writing to poetry which was more committed to national causes. More than just a change in purpose, however, is the haunting fact that Mistral of Provence and Latin poets of Rome wrote for nations which were ultimately marginalized or politically destroyed.

The poem “Introduction” begins with the Muse’s invitation to continue to write poetry which reflects on nature and which is harmonious and serene:

C’est l’heure de chanter. La nuit calme et sereine
Glissant furtivement, mystérieuse, égrène
Des étoiles d’argent sous les cieux infinis;
Pas un souffle des bois, nul écho dans les nids,
Rien qui vienne troubler la nature muette.
C’est l’heure de chanter. Ranime-toi, poète ;
En chants harmonieux exhale ta langueur
Et fais vibrer ton luth, et fais parler ton cœur. (1-8)

When it is the poet’s turn to speak, however, he responds that he is unable to compose the type of verse he once loved to write. He begins: “Je le veux, mais mon âme est toujours oppressée.” The presence of the muse of course harkens back to Greek and Latin poetry; Vergil addresses the muse in the first few lines of the *Aeneid*, and Horace in his *Odes* is occasionally possessed by the muse and at other times chooses to distance himself from her. In an on-going exchange between the muse and the poet, the muse in Coicou’s poem persists in inviting the poet to bring to life the nature that surrounds him. The poet eventually gives a more categorical response, indicating his departure from previous notions of poetry. His temperament and focus are no longer compatible with poetry of that sort, and the previously charming descriptions of nature are not contaminated with grating and somber words:

Assez de ces chants. Oui laissons la nature

²⁶⁵ As mentioned previously, Coicou’s *Passions* was not published until 1903 and in Paris. It is subtitled “Primes vers d’amours et variations sur de vieux thèmes” one of many indications he had composed these at an earlier date than the publication indicates.

A ceux que tout captive et que rien ne torture;
Non, ce n'est pas pour moi que la terre a des fleurs,
Que sifflent dans leur nid les oiseaux querelleurs,
Qu'au firmament profond scintillent les étoiles ;
La douleur sur mon âme a mis de sombres voiles,
O Muse ! et si tu n'as que ces chants pour mon cœur,
Laisse-moi, laisse-moi, seul avec la douleur. (67-74)

At this point in this four-page poem, the poet has not revealed the reasons behind his refusal. The Muse in this dialogue tries in vain to encourage the poet and to convince him that poetry rooted in the themes of nature can actually bring consolation. A large section of the Muse's portion of the poem differs not only in theme but in verse, departing from the poet's alexandrine verse to shorter octosyllables. Once again, changing poetic forms and tone within one poem were common for Horace, as he would sometimes move from emotive expression to political catalogue or from light-heartedness to pessimism.²⁶⁶ Additionally, however, this structure is reminiscent of the alternating voices of Durand's "La voix de la Patrie" in which Durand and Coicou as interlocutors debated the direction of Haitian national poetry.²⁶⁷ The following excerpt is taken from Coicou's "Introduction:"

Chante les bois, chante les fleurs;
Chante la nature sereine,
Avec ses rires et ses pleurs,
Danse sa majesté souveraine;
Chante la nature sereine,
Tournant dans leur valse rapide; (45-50)

Here, this voice belongs to Coicou's muse, and in Durand's "La voix de la Patrie," this same lighter verse appeared to represent Durand's voice. The words about dance and song coincide with the idea of a poetry which is musical, pleasant, and joyful, and more concerned with nature and the self. Durand's "La voix de la Patrie," we might recall, was dedicated to

²⁶⁶ This information is taken from Gordon Williams' *The Nature of Roman poetry* 27-36.

²⁶⁷ "La voix de la Patrie" by Oswald Durand in *Rires et Pleurs* was discussed in the previous chapter, section III.

Massillon Coicou in Durand's collection, likely referenced in verse three as *rires* and *pleurs*. In the analysis of Durand's poem, I suggested that the poets' discussion about poetry lent itself to an ambiguous reading, as the poem ended with Durand's voice but in what seemed to be more a continuation of their dialogue than a conclusion. The poet's decision in Coicou's "Introduction" is much more definitive, as the poet's devotion will be unapologetically and singularly devoted to national causes:

Non; car j'étais heureux!...Mais hélas ! maintenant
Plus de bonheur pour moi. C'est la pauvre Patrie,
Elle sur qui je pleure et pour qui mon cœur prie,
C'est la Patrie, objet de mon culte sacré,
Qu'avec toi, désormais, ma sœur, je chanterai. (82-86)

Although the "toi" to whom the poet speaks is still the muse, the "Patrie" will inspire and define the scope of this project. Now that the poet has explained what will constitute poetry for him, he hopes the muse will join him. It is the poet's intent to combine a commitment to poetry with one to his country. A new allegiance is pledged to patriotic sentiments.

Not only do these verses introduce the reader to the difference of Coicou's project, but in conjunction with Durand's "La voix de la Patrie," they may even lead to a different interpretation of the latter. Durand's refrain "Salut ô plaines ô verts gazons!" read in the previous chapter as a "hail" to nature could also be seen as a "farewell" to nature poetry and an affirmation of Coicou's ambitions. Although Coicou was twenty-seven years Durand's junior, both poets were writing in the late 1880's, a period in which Durand's own poetry moved into its most political phase. In this way, the dialogue between Durand and Coicou in Durand's "La voix de la patrie" represents an affirmation of Coicou's poetic focus, commissioning a new direction for Haitian poetry in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

In Coicou's "Introduction," the poet not only expresses his intent to focus on national heroes and national history, but he accepts what was the Muse's charge in Durand's poem to write about the "hideux tableaux" of Haiti's current political and social problems. In the long summary detailing the topic which will comprise the collection, the poet in Coicou's "Introduction" emphasizes that he will indeed focus on violence and suffering. Although some Haitian poetry, national in theme, had certainly been commemorative at times, the poet in Coicou's introductory poem relates that national poetry is not necessarily, and is even perhaps rarely, celebratory. This is especially true when writing in the midst of economic disaster and political chaos. This poetry will be written out of the grief over national difficulties. Note how the idea of *suffering* is centered among these lines of verse:

Ces souffrances,
Ces pleurs, ces souvenirs, ces vœux, ces espérances
Qui toujours et partout reviennent me hanter:
Muse, c'est tout cela que je voudrais chanter. (104-107)

Coicou also addresses the three specific subjects which will largely comprise his collection: history and revolution, the civil war and international aggression, and finally, by extension, the black race. Haiti's revolutionary heroes will be the inspiration behind his poetry:

Ce que je veux chanter, ce sont ces héros tels
Qu'on les nomme à genoux, ce sont ces immortels,
Ce sont ces demi-dieux, en qui mon âme fière
Se complait à bénir ma race tout entière, [sic]
Et dont la gloire monte embrassant l'avenir,
Re foulant le passé debout pour la ternir. (89-94)

Coicou's partial answer to Munro and Walcott's question about how to envision Haiti's future entails reviving the purest notions of Haiti's revolutionary aspirations, an idealized past which did not find expression in Haiti's later political realities. The past which will be discarded is the more immediate, or post-revolutionary past, and not the time of Haiti's revolutionary

heroes. Revolutionary ideals, present strife, and future hopes and fears account for the vacillating tones and topics in Coicou's poetry and the divided sentiments of the poet's subjectivity.

It is after the poet's disclosure in "Introduction" that the Muse announces she will abandon the poet, as she cannot be part of Coicou's mission. The muse bids her final farewell in these verses, many of which begin with words of refusal:

Adieu, poète, adieu! Je m'en vais, je préfère
M'envoler loin de toi, remonter dans la sphère...
Non, j'aime trop les bois, les fleurs, l'azur du ciel ;
La nature a pour moi trop d'attraits, trop de charmes
Pour que je veuille en vain tarir, boire les larmes...
Tu voudrais m'accuser, mais dis, toi-même, enfin,
Dis, n'ai-je pas gémi sur ta Patrie en vain?... [...]
Pas un signe, poète, et ce qui te console
Et ce qui te sourit, n'est qu'un rêve frivole... (108-114, 124-125)

What then is the significance of the muse's repudiation? Is it that traditional poetry is not equipped for this type of mission, that poetry and the Haitian nation remain irreconcilable given Haiti's interminable political crises? Is there irresolvable conflict between poetic essence and political purpose? These questions are the ones which Coicou undoubtedly was also posing, his texts further probing into the calamities overwhelming Haitian society which involved, among other issues, a flailing economy and the influence of the military on internal political affairs. Coicou's poetry often takes this reflective stance, pondering meaning of poetry, the urgency of Haiti's circumstances, and as revealed here, the earlier ambitions of Haitian poets. Ideas for constructing and legitimizing a Haitian identity, as articulated by Haitian intellectuals in the 1830s, had included prescriptions for poetry as an essential component to such success; poets like Durand, even when writing personal poetry later in the nineteenth century, were seen by thinkers like Anténor Firmin as critical to combating theories of racial inequality. Additionally,

much of Haiti's consistently stated mission had been to defend Africans from racial prejudice and practices. Seventy years later, however, and approaching the centennial, the Muse's response reads as a plausible assessment if not a judgment of Haiti's literary and political past. The muse's declaration comes with criticism and condemnation: poetry in Haiti has proved inadequate, and Haiti's mission of sovereignty for a black nation and rehabilitation of a race an utter failure. Haitians faced on-going economic devastation, political instability, and international hostility.

Still aligned with much of the earlier ambitions for Haitian poetry, Coicou's poem "Introduction" nonetheless forms much of the premise and the paradox of his entire project. Defined by a tension between this sense of failure and the will to overcome it, Coicou's poetry is about the futility of the poet's devotion to nation as much as it is about his determination even in face of devastating obstacles. A long break in the text signals the Muse's departure, and the following words, spoken by the poet in solitude, close the poem:

Et me voici seul ... Seul, sans luth, je chanterai
Pour toi, Patrie, objet de mon culte sacré!
Oh! pour la rendre fière, invincible, immortelle,
Dieu pour qui je combats en combattant pour elle,
Pour elle inspire-moi; comme elle, inspire-moi.
Mon luth c'est tout mon cœur ; ma muse, c'est ma foi. (131-136)

Here the poet confirms that the lyre, and by association, lyric poetry, which often connotes harmony and light-heartedness, is not the best mode of expression given Haiti's current crises. Lyrical poetry, too, with its more personal subjects, will give way to political concerns, expressed through longer narrative verse, epic-like stanzas, and a variety of didactic and satirical tones. If we explore one more time the analogy of Coicou's poetry to that of Horace and the Latin tradition, we find that Horace, too, separates from his muse what are called the "Roman Odes." Rayer Batstone explains the political import of this gesture:

Horace, in the dichotomy between Troy and Rome, symbolically alludes to the same major theme we find in Vergil's *Aeneid* (focused on Aeneas's spiritual journey from fallen Troy to a new home in Italy): the need of Augustan Rome to break the curse of civil war in its past century, to become a new nation. Horace puts most of the preaching into the mouth of his character Juno, who is certainly fiercer and more truculent than the usual lyrical "I" of the *Odes*. And so it is no surprise when, in the final stanza, the Horatian speaker disengages himself from her tone and from a wayward Muse who, he claims has defied his characteristic light congeniality.²⁶⁸

In Coicou's "Introduction," it is the opposite: the Muse abandon's the poet, but the poet has the last word. If he will sing with out the lyre, with less harmony, confidence, or personal verve, he implies that his verse will more likely convey discord, pessimism, and collective lament. The complication, however, in this new direction for poetry, is that the 'Patrie' will become the new lyre, for *his* heart and *his* faith. Indeed Coicou's poetry tends to be less personal, for example, than Durand's, but Coicou's collection nonetheless reveals that personal emotion is not so easily separable from Haiti's political situation, and that consequently, the poet's subjectivity will come through even in the most political of poems.

These final verses also commission what will follow in the collection. The notion of *combat* appears repeatedly in the final stanza of "Introduction" and resurfaces throughout *Poésies nationales*, not only in the forms of the word "combat" but also in the homonymic association of luth/lutte. The oppositions are ones which are now inherent to the poetic project itself. No longer a battle between which *type* of poetry should prevail (as in Durand's corpus), Haitian poetry will be fraught with the sentiment of failure and with the call to hopeful resistance. The poet's decision is finalized, his *solitude* in this enterprise emphasized along with his determination. Moreover, the "toi" to whom he speaks is no longer the muse but the country itself; this shift in allegiance targets the country as new object of religious devotion. This

²⁶⁸ Raynor Batstone, *Latin Lyric and Elegiac Poetry* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1955) xxv-xxvi.

“Patrie,” which can only be realized in poetry, becomes a transcendent national ideal which will surpass internal divisions. Moving from the muse to the Patrie, and then to God, however, the following verse has the Patrie as “elle,” and the poet more powerfully addresses *God* directly when he says “Pour elle inspire-moi; comme elle, inspire-moi.” By linking the political with the religious, the poet echoes Williams’ notion that poetry will serve to immortalize what may be an ephemeral national existence. Finally, Coicou anchors national sentiment in his own religious beliefs, proclaiming his personal faith in God and bestowing on this idealized Haiti a greater spiritual significance.

4.3 WARS AND RUMORS OF WARS

4.3.1 Triumphant imperialism and foreign invasions

Poésies Nationales is divided into three books, the first one largely about Haitian history, the second about Haiti’s internal politics and civil war, and third mostly about the poet’s reflections on Haiti’s situation in general. Throughout, however, are the poems about the threat of invasion, the loss of sovereignty, and the need for awakening. The texts themselves mirror the political reality, with the dominant themes generally repetitive in the collection, not perfectly conforming to the general layout of the sections. The poems are highly discursive, each one containing multiple themes, layered tones, and changing sentiment. For this analysis, it will mean treating Coicou’s poems discursively, returning again and again to the same poems for discussion of various themes. Coicou’s poems, so didactic in nature, contain many political and

historical allusions unknown to many current scholars. This means that a lot of attention will be devoted to political and historical contextualization.

The notion of *combat* referred to above continued on a literal level to be part of Haiti's political reality, domestically and especially internationally. As already stated, the threat to Haitian sovereignty by imperialist powers was particularly acute during the late 1880s and early 1890s, when Coicou authored the poems in this collection. Much of the historical information presented at the beginning of the last chapter and as an introduction to Oswald Durand's poetry is also applicable to the period of Massillon Coicou's writing. This general historical overview covered the political and societal changes from Boyer's downfall in 1843 through the end of the century, providing a background for the work of both poets. Within this framework, however, it is worth emphasizing more specific information which centered on the growing imperialist interest in Haiti especially on the part of Germany and the United States. Much of Coicou's poetry reflects actual events near the close of the century.

As Brenda Plummer explains, French and British interest in the Caribbean was waning, due to preoccupations with Asia and Africa.²⁶⁹ Several countries in the developing world, including Haiti, were significant trading partners for Germany around the turn of the century. Describing Germany as a "minor but ambitious Caribbean power" by 1900 with many German commercial houses, Plummer also explains that Germany was seeking a Caribbean base for access to the proposed isthmian canal. Germans had arrived in the Americas during the 1880's and 1890's, and German loyalties in Haiti were reliable for continued German growth development. German merchants competed with other Western powers, especially Britain, in the realm of Caribbean trade. For its part, the United States, which had refused to recognize Haiti

²⁶⁹ Plummer 12.

until 1862, became more interested in Haiti as in other Caribbean locales for strategic reasons by the 1890s, when intervention was more of a possibility. The United States' interest in an inter-oceanic canal and mercantilism made the Caribbean in general a strategic center militarily and economically.²⁷⁰ The U.S. secured Puerto Rico in 1898 and by 1904 had secured the zone for the completion of the Panama Canal. For much of the nineteenth century, the United States had sought to prohibit European influence in the Western Hemisphere through its Monroe Doctrine, and concerns were especially growing related to German interest and investment in the Caribbean.

The changing balances of power near the end of the century meant Haiti's constant vulnerability from various angles. While poems in this second book of *Poésies Nationales* do speak specifically of the German, American and even Spanish aggression, others throughout the collection cite foreign threats in general, new and old. The title of the poem "Encore Eux" deals with the continual invasions or threats thereof which mark the Haitian experience. The poem begins with this stanza:

Ils sont venus chez nous, forts, menaçants, avides,
Voulant, avec du sang, marquer leurs moindres pas,
Remplis d'espoir, tendant vers nous leurs mains cupides,
Et réclament enfin ce que nous n'avons pas. (1-4)

None of the poem's details refer to a specific foreign presence or to other current events which may have inspired the text. In fact, as in other poems, the source of aggression remains ominously unnamed. More important for the Haitian poet appears to be the characteristics of the invader, notably greed and violence, rather than the identity, as the threat is the same regardless of the source. As other poems will illustrate, the foreigner, whether specifically named or more generally referenced, is consistently described as an insulting, invading, and mocking presence

²⁷⁰ Plummer 11.

which not only degrades and blasphemes the memory of the Haitian Revolution but also continues to jeopardize Haiti's present and future sovereignty.

Strikingly apparent in Coicou's poetry is the frustration that others in Haiti especially ignored his observations. In the poem "L'Eveil" which also mentions numerous international threats, the poet is again alone in his warnings and ignored by his countrymen:

Et lorsque dans la foule, une voix passe et crie
Caveant consules ! frères, j'entends des pas !
Veillons sur le drapeau ! veillons sur la Patrie ! »
On la nomme alarmiste et l'on n'écoute pas !... (13-16)

The Latin phrase is from Roman political discourse and means "Let the Consuls beware;" it was decreed in the Roman Senate during the time of the Republic whenever there was thought to be danger. It was a warning to the consuls not to take advantage of their government position, as there is a fine line between autocracy and consultation with the Senate in times of crisis. This is the poet's warning then, likely to Haitian leaders in dealing with Western powers. Complicity on the part of Haitian leaders was a major factor in an eroding independence. Summarizing the actions of numerous later nineteenth-century Haitian leaders, historian David Nicholls says that "despite this determination to defend the independence of Haiti in theory, the practice of politicians, given military control and corruption, was quite otherwise."²⁷¹ These poems bring to the fore the stark dichotomy between the black military and economic elite with the larger Haitian population. Another Latin phrase is the epitaph of the poem "L'Eveil": "Timeo Danaos," the beginning of the complete phrase "timeo Danaos [...] donas ferentes" from Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book 2 where the Trojan priest Laocoon warns his countrymen not to accept the Trojan horse.²⁷² It means "I fear the Greeks and the gifts they bear." Obviously applicable to

²⁷¹ Nicholls 139.

²⁷² Virgil, *Virgil/Aeneid*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2005) 28.

Coicou's time, it is a warning to the elites who exploit the general population and who will stay in power given any means as well as to any well-meaning Haitian politicians: seeking protection or 'gifts' from foreign sources ultimately results in unending involvement and aggression from foreign powers. In this blunt and exclamatory style, the real intentions of the aggressors become apparent. The poem begins with these three stanzas:

Les voilà, tenaillés par leurs désirs tenaces!
Ils parlent de venir nous outrager encore,
De nous faire céder quand même à leurs menaces
Et de nous dépouiller, bientôt, de tout notre or !

Ils rêvent, ces puissants, de faire table rase
De nos droits, d'imposer, - à l'aide du canon, -
Leur seule volonté de garder la Navase,
Et de tenter bien pis si nous leur disons : Non !

Ils s'avisent, enfin, d'avoir : les uns, Le Môle ;
Les autres, la Tortue ; et les autres enfin...
Que sais-je ?...oubliant, tous, que la haine s'immole,
Que l'union renaît quand le danger survient ! (1-12)

Coicou's poetry reveals that for nineteenth-century Haiti, the sources of these threats often seemed relentlessly unending as Haiti moved into the twentieth century. The geographical references mentioned here are important ones during this time, as their small but strategically locales were symbolic of wide and diverse imperialist ambitions. Navasa Island in the Caribbean Sea had originally been claimed by Haiti, but the United States claimed it in 1857 for its guano deposits used to make an agricultural fertilizer. Coicou's frequent use of the word "or" likely stands for the mineral depletion from Haitian territories. Until 1898, active mining of guano and other minerals took place despite Haitian protests. To this day, Navasa Island is still claimed by Haiti and represents one of about a dozen international territorial disputes involving the United States. Largely uninhabited now as then and visited by transient Haitian fishermen, the island is

administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.²⁷³ La Tortue, or Tortuga Island as it is known in English, is located to the north of Haiti. It was claimed like the other surrounding islands by Dessalines as part of his “empire” but had been offered to the United States in exchange for American protection against other powers. The island remained in Haitian hands, but Haitian President Salomon had initiated such discussions with the United States in 1883. During the same time period, Salomon had also approached France about protectorate status.²⁷⁴

The most serious set of negotiations involved the promontory of Mole St. Nicholas. According to Brenda Plummer, Haitian President Hyppolite’s campaign in 1889 had been largely funded by American navalists. She states that

[...] in the burst of enthusiasm for large navies that characterized the period, the U.S. government empowered an admiral to aggressively demand from Haiti the promontory [...] repayment of Hyppolites’ political debt was implicit in the brusque request.²⁷⁵

Anténor Firmin, Haitian secretary of state for finance and foreign affairs, had successfully maneuvered Haiti’s refusal to cede Mole St. Nicholas to American control in 1893. He cited the Haitian constitution, which forbade cession of territory to foreign hands. Talks, however, had begun two years earlier, when the American Admiral Gherardi anchored his flagship in Port-au-Prince in January, 1891 and sent for Frederick Douglass, American ambassador to Haiti, to begin negotiations. According to Brenda Plummer, Douglass considered the bid imperialistic and resented being superseded in the negotiations. At the close of the affair, both Douglass and Firmin resigned from their posts. In the end, no ceding of Haitian territory took place, but the area continued to be a topic of negotiation in international diplomacy. Le

²⁷³ CIA – The World Fact Book, March 2008, <<http://cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bq.html>>.

²⁷⁴ Nicholls 139.

²⁷⁵ Plummer 27.

Môle seemed to be less of a factor when the United States secured a naval base in Guantanamo Bay Cuba in 1903; however, in Coicou's poems these island territories lead to the rightful anticipation of other unending reasons for further encroachment. Understanding these events is essential for situating these poems and for contextualizing Coicou's constant warnings. In light of the circumstances, the threats are not overstated and the warnings cannot be excessive:

Pourquoi?? C'est que, devant une inique furie,
On ne peut de ses droits se montrer trop jaloux ;
On ne peut trop crier quand dans la bergerie
De timides pasteurs laissent glisser les loups ! (21-24)

The constant presence and continual placement of poems with similar themes throughout the collection mirrors the unchanging nature of Haiti's vulnerability and instability in this period as before and as beyond. Although an answer to the question of how to overcome the corruption in Haitian governments is not made definitive, Coicou's poetry at least demonstrates that there were indeed Haitians who protested, ideologically and otherwise, the constant intervention of foreign governments in Haitian affairs. Equally important, Coicou's work elucidates the fact that Haitian literature is not constantly celebratory of its revolution, nor is it blindly and obsessively patriotic.²⁷⁶ This common criticism of Haitian literature has been addressed previously, but it is important to point out once again that even celebratory poetry about national heroes was not unique to Haiti. Returning again to Latin poetry, one can observe that Batstone makes this important observation:

If we go back to the third century, when Roman poetry had its start adapting Greek techniques and genres, we realize that poetry arose as part of a general public movement to celebrate the steady expansion of Roman power [...] But that unanimity of patriotic optimism did not survive the second century [...] Some historians, indeed, like to describe the next century, from the death of Tiberius Gracchus in 129 to the battle between Antony and Octavian at Actium in 31

²⁷⁶ Munro 26-27.

B.C.E., as a period of intermittent civil war. As political unity degenerated, other aspects of culture and individualism, both good and bad, came to the fore.²⁷⁷

In Coicou's poetry, the alarmist rhetoric and imperative messages are thoroughly contextualized in light of events of Coicou's time and in light of the lessons of history. Later in "L'Eveil," he exclaims:

Crains-les tous tant qu'ils sont, ô Mère encore meurtrie!
Crains-les dans leurs conseils, crains-les dans leurs présents ;
C'est pour les avoir trop écoutés, Patrie,
Que tu n'as point vécu tes quatre-vingt-six ans! (45-48)

What this Patrie really refers to is not clearly specified and once again seems to be an abstract identity, a poetic ideal. At the same time, however, there is a concrete reality, complete political sovereignty, which also had not yet been achieved. The "eighty-six years" denotes time between the Haitian Revolution in 1804 and 1890 when Coicou authored the poem. In fact, Coicou's collection was published at the height of the Le Môle affair, when both the immediate and future outcomes seemed uncertain. Additionally, he wrote in the era that precedes what historians typically call Haiti's battles with the "Great Powers," a period from 1902 to 1915. He is already warning of the escalation of imperialist demands. The poet in "L'Eveil" clearly sensed that any goals for real independence had gradually been constituted over time, as the site of this successful slave revolt had become nothing more than the locus of competing imperialist forces and consequently internal corruption. In spite of the revolution, paralyzing fear made it difficult to define a Haitian present and therefore forge a Haitian future. Interestingly, it appears that Coicou anticipated a critique of his texts, an accusation of hatred and bigotry. At the beginning of part three of this long poem, he writes:

Non, non, je ne suis point l'apôtre de la haine;
Je n'ai point clos mon cœur au cœur de l'étranger ;

²⁷⁷ Batstone x-xi.

Mais tel le nautonier, quand la mer se déchaîne,
Je monte à la vigie et préviens le danger. (61-64)

The rhyming words of *étranger* and *danger* reveal the menacing qualities the poet associates with almost any foreign power. His warnings largely have to do with the ceding of Haitian territory, and in this way he does not necessarily target one country differently from the rest. Linking the greatest threats to Haiti across time and space, he says, “Pas plus qu’à l’Amérique et pas plus qu’à la France, /Ne cédon’s à personne un pouce de nos droits!” As another poem “Cauchemar” demonstrates, the “foreign” presence refers to any outside dominance which is insulting to the idea of Haitian national viability. The poem “Cauchemar” begins thus:

L’étranger insulteur: voilà mon cauchemar
Oui, la Force, agitant son farouche étendard
Voulant que la Justice à ses pieds s’humilie,
Pour ne se redresser que souillée, avilie. (1-4)

The word choice and word order of these first two words are not conventional; syntactically, *insulteur* reads as an adjective, but given that this term is normally designated as a noun, the phrase stresses a double and essentialist identity in the synonymous association of insulter and foreigner. Again, the culprit is not any nation per se but is rather any “Force” which denies Haitian sovereignty and suppresses the idea of “Justice” itself. Coicou raises the stakes by warning about the “foreigner” both literally and allegorically. The pretext to foreign aggression is usually rooted in financial gain, and the use of strength is at the expense of freedom.

Il vous faut de l’argent, et vous voici! Qu’importe
Le prétexte, pourvu qu’on vous ouvre la porte...
La force est votre droit, et le droit est notre crime. (11-13)

Coicou's depictions of the inevitable point to an almost intangible and expansive power, one not always specific to any nation per se, but a system of forces which would end Haiti's hope for existence into the next century. If Haitians are complicit in foreign power, then the binary opposition between "Force" as foreign and "Justice" as Haitian is already problematic. Later in the poem the verse "Nous n'avons pas pris place au rang des nations" echoes the theme of national failure from "Introduction." Although Haiti had sought for nearly a century to establish itself as an independent republic, Coicou sensed that this was not to be. He foregrounds Haiti as a conflictual space between global powers which foster internal divisions and render Haitian identity nearly obsolete. The menacing force in this poem can be read on multiple levels: it refers to the real military, economic, and political threat of many nations while making the chief foreign invasion one of *values* related to racial equality and preservation of sovereignty.

4.3.2 Gun-boats and Yankees

The foreigner in Haiti is portrayed not only as oblivious to Haitian culture and national pride but also as ignorant of the larger implications of History. Returning to "Cauchemar," the reader will note the contrasts between the supposed 'crimes' committed by Haitians and the colonial violence of forced displacement and slavery. In this way, Coicou's poetry responds to Western accusations of Haitian brutality, contextualizing what Haitians had argued as a necessary violence to claim for themselves the liberties they had been denied. This viewpoint was already part of Haitian thought before the articulations of Frantz Fanon who in *The Wretched of the Earth* that national liberation is always a violent phenomenon and that it is in

and through violence that the colonized man finds his freedom.²⁷⁸ Additionally, and in anticipation of Coicou's focus on race which will be discussed in a later section, Fanon also conveys that in response to the violence through which white supremacy is affirmed, decolonization unifies a heterogeneous people along national or *racial* lines.²⁷⁹ Many of Coicou's poems contest the racist rhetoric and images of Haitian barbarity which Western texts had exploited since the Haitian Revolution, though he nonetheless urges unity based on race. In "Cauchemar," the poet catalogues some of the violent events in European colonialism and then turns his attention to Haitians and their forefathers, specifying:

C'est pourtant sans forfaits, c'est sans être jaloux,
Sans haïr les petits, que nous grandissons, nous.
Car nous ne sommes pas descendants de vandales ;
Nos pères n'avaient point de ces fureurs brutales
Que Dieu vengeur du Droit, ne sanctionne pas. (33-37)

A few verses later, he continues to refer to the events precipitating the Haitian Revolution, writing:

Sans crainte, sans remords, sans honte, sans bassesse,
Mais le front haut, avec un titre de noblesse,
Nos fiers aïeux n'avaient quelque fois massacré,
Incendié, détruit, qu'au nom du Droit sacré;
Et leur pitié, d'ailleurs, répondait à des crimes: (47-51)

The contradiction, however, between the content of these verses and the qualifying "ne....que..." is readily apparent. This allows the poet to assert a certain pride in the revolutionnaires' actions, a pride in their unexpected power and destructiveness, while still placing that violence well behind in degree to that of colonial slavery. This violence is contextualized, justified, and even within sacred rights of a higher order.

²⁷⁸ Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 35, 86.

²⁷⁹ Fanon 43-44.

A majority of this poem is devoted to claiming historical difference of various degrees. This eventually culminates with the speaker's exasperation at Haiti's current plight. What he sees as foreign hypocrisy prompts him to state with sarcasm "Oubliez l'histoire." The long list of details in the poems creates a binary opposition in which Haiti represents justice and foreign powers represent greed. Coicou concludes this part of the poem with the retort "Voilà notre bilan. Faites-nous voir le vôtre." The poem's final verses are marked by a moralizing tone which again asserts not only Haitian difference but superiority, warning the foreigner that History does not forget, and that History will rightly judge the legacies of all nations. The tone is often provocative and hyperbolic, swinging the pendulum from collective shame to collective pride and touting patriotism over pessimism. In the final diatribe, it is again apparent that the larger view of History will ultimately set right many wrongs and that a divine retribution will eventually come to pass:

Oui, tonnez; oubliez que l'Histoire n'a pas
A redouter sans cesse –ainsi qu'un jeune peuple –
La démence des Batchs, la rage qui dépeuple
Les cités, la terreur dédaignant la raison
Du droit en se faisant cracher quelque rançon ; [...] (81-85)
Jusqu'au jour ou, vengeant les faibles de vos coups,
La colère du ciel aura passé sur vous. (88-89)

Batch was the name of a German naval officer who, in 1872 demanded Haitian payment of 3000 sterling under threat of gun-boat violence. The incident ended not only with Haiti making this payment but also with the outrageous insult of the Haitian flag being soiled in excrement. The German threat is not mentioned until the end of this poem. It is not clear, therefore, if the German threat was the inspiration for much of the poem, or if it is mentioned here as a mere example of the multiple forces at work against Haiti at this time. As explained earlier, the German and American presences in the Caribbean were directly related to the

presence of the other, further complicating the situation and increasingly Haitian vulnerability at this point in history. The “Batchs,” referring collectively to German aggressors, had been mentioned in an earlier poem in Coicou’s collection, one called “A Oswald Durand” Coicou precedes this poem with an epigraph from Durand’s 1871 poem “Ces Allemands.”²⁸⁰ The message of Coicou’s “A Oswald Durand.” is that he thinks of Durand’s earlier verses in light of the Batch affair. Coicou too is outraged at this constant German aggression: “Quand je vois l’Allemand louche qui nous affronte /[...] Je vois brandir tes vers poignants, rouges de flamme...” (5, 10)

Although the United States is not named specifically in “Cauchemar” as in other poems, Coicou rightly recognized American culture, economic practice, and political encroachment as a serious threat to Haitian identity. The U.S. invasion of 1915 was the culmination of American influence and aggression which Coicou had despised and envisioned years before the actual military event. As its pejorative title indicates, the poem “Yankisme” is overtly anti-American and is interesting if only for the fact that it is the one poem in Coicou’s collection to contain untranslated English phrases. These verses tend to respect the metrics of the given verse, but their insertion stands out in the French-language text. “Yankisme” begins with the following stanza:

“Il faut de l’or –ou rien—pour être, --ou ne pas être,
Time is money. Le crime aussi.
Or faisons fi du bien; car l’honneur enchevêtre;
C’est par le mal qu’on réussit. (1-4)

“Time is money” as its own saying apparently carried enough meaning without the necessity of translation. Although this quote of Benjamin Franklin’s from the mid-eighteenth century has been interpreted in various ways, it is negatively associated here with the dawning of the modern industrial age, with the new attitudes that accompanied mass production, and with

²⁸⁰ The complete epigraph is: “Nous jetâmes l’argent, le front haut, l’âme fière, /Ainsi qu’on jette un os aux chiens!”

the spirit of capitalism, all redefining time as a commodity. It is the second half of this verse, “Le crime aussi,” which reveals the consequences resulting from such a philosophy, the subsequently adopted idea that money also equals crime, and that there is benefit if there is monetary gain, even if crime is involved. The ruthlessly exclusionary nature of this implication, in these stanzas as in others, is not only that the end justifies the means but also that aggression is even the preferred manner of achieving monetary goals. Additionally, the coupling of this obvious Shakespearean reference “être ou ne pas être” with the mention of gold also reduces being, sheer existence, to monetary value. These ideas are reiterated a few stanzas later, when the subject elaborates on the cavalier attitude which motivates American greed, as the French word for sums of money (“sommés”) is the same as the conjugation of the verb “to be” with the subject “nous.”

Et toujours de l’argent! Toujours de grosses sommes !
Beaucoup d’or pour l’Américain !
All right ! droit vers le but, quel que soit, où nous sommes
Attirés par l’espoir d’un gain ! ... (9-12)

The principal ideas of the poem are further expanded at the beginning of the next stanza which begins with another saying in English “Cotton is King.” Originating from the American civil war period, this phrase was coined by a southern senator during a debate over slavery. In his congressional speech, Senator James Henry Hammond argued that the economy of the U.S. and that of much of the Western world rested on the production of cotton, and that the black race, being incapable of higher faculties, should appropriately provide the labor source for this and other important crops.²⁸¹ For Coicou, the United States was still lauding its position of economic power and social superiority even decades after American abolition; little had changed for Haiti,

²⁸¹ James H. Hammond, Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina (New York: John F. Trow & Co., 1866) 311-322.

still itself a minor exporter of cotton, to alter the power structures of economic inequality and international exploitation. The poet goes on to remind the reader that “ces noirs” – these blacks –should be remembered for their historical contributions to American success, notably, the fact that Haitians militarily supported the colonies during the American Revolutionary War. Coicou specifically mentions the Battle of Savannah, in which troops from Saint Domingue came on behalf of France to help in the American fight for independence against British forces:

Et—le savez-vous bien? –ces chevaliers, ces braves,
Aux élans, aux cris merveilleux,
Ils venaient de cette île où grandissaient—esclaves
La pléiade de nos aïeux. (28-31)

Interestingly in 2002, the Haitian American Historical approved a Battle of Savannah monument to honor the regiment of free black soldiers known as the unit “Chasseurs-Volontaires.” The monument was unveiled in October, 2007, although not without debate on a couple of fronts. There has been discussion about whether or not these soldiers were really “Haitian” –as this time pre-dates the Haitian Revolution, as well as the fact that these soldiers were fighting on behalf of a country where slavery remained legal. Evading these controversial details, however, Coicou chooses to emphasize and imagine the common heritage, history, and ideals of the United States and Haiti which remained unacknowledged by most Americans. It is believed, even by Haitians today, that some of the same soldiers in that particular unit, such as Henri Christophe, went on to become the leaders of Haiti’s Revolution.

Moving to address Americans directly, the poet discusses the former grandeur of Americans as being like that of Haitians, in that both once shared an identity as ‘avengers of Liberty.’ Here Benjamin Franklin is mentioned again, this time by name, as one of the American forefathers who would be dismayed at how far Americans have departed from their noble beginnings. In this way, the poet highlights the degradation in U.S. ideals over time, the

discrepancy between rhetoric and reality, and the hypocrisy in proclaiming liberty while displaying such hostility to its Caribbean neighbor. For the sake of Coicou's message, it proves to be a more powerful argument to state that Americans have forgotten aspects of their own history, and that they have contradicted not Haitian values but their own:

Quand vous nous menacez, oubliant que nous sommes,
Nous aussi, fils de tels héros! [...]

[...] Vous vous montrez lâches et fous,
Nous en appelons moins à nos aïeux qu'aux vôtres
Des attentats commis par vous... (51-52, 62-64)

Given the fact that these are French-language texts and that there was little reception of Coicou's poetry by American leaders, it is unlikely, of course, that Americans were really the intended audience of this poem. Rather, Coicou employs the strategy of addressing Americans to communicate a message to members of the Haitian elite, a reminder of sorts not to be lured by American glamour, interests, and capital, and to be mindful of the impure motives which may underlie American foreign policy, economic practices, and cultural values. The fact that he addresses many of his poems to Haitian senators and other leaders indicates that Haitians needed to be reminded that they too may befall the same fate as the Americans in departing from the country's original, founding ideals. Haiti is at risk for the same hypocrisy. As a fully modern and typically postcolonial nation, Haiti is already replete not only with international interference and economic dependence but also with class divisions, internal racism, and corruption in leadership.

It is also important to keep in mind the debates that were occurring among Haitian intellectuals concerning the cultural war between Anglo-Saxon industrialism and materialism and the artistic sensibilities of Latin refinement. Some Haitians, like political thinker Edmond Paul, one of Coicou's contemporaries, had argued that Haiti didn't need more poets but more

engineers, scientists, and industrialists.²⁸² Coicou, however, lamented the decline of the arts at the expense of technological development and correlated a mechanical existence with American influence. In an 1898 article in the literary journal *La Ronde* Coicou defends Haiti's intellectual traditions against American emphasis on material development:

Nos littérateurs de théâtre ont tous fait volte-face. La science et la politique, l'indifférence et la mort se les ont partagé [sic]...Mais je n'insiste pas, car j'ai trop peur de heurter dans leurs croyances souveraines ceux qui clament la nécessité de chasser les poètes de notre république et de mécaniser notre vie en américanisant nos moeurs.²⁸³

Coicou was among those Haitians who had argued that commitment to literature and other arts in Haiti was needed to counteract theories of racial inequality and to demonstrate that indeed people of African descent excel in artistic and literary endeavors. Additionally, Coicou remained a defender of the moral and spiritual value of letters and culture, embracing the Romantic vision of the poet as divine emissary and national spokesperson. As these poems outline them, Haitian battles are cultural as much as they are historical and economic.

These poems illustrate how Coicou's poetry contributes to an understanding of international politics as they relate to Haiti during this pivotal period of the late nineteenth century. They reveal that Haitian identity, nearly a century after independence, was still inescapably linked to conflict, in terms of military aggression, certainly, as well as to other oppositions to be discussed later. In Coicou's portrayals and predictions, the recurring menace of foreign involvement, directly related to domestic tensions, is a recurring force in shaping Haitian national sentiment, for better or worse, as Haiti moves into the twentieth century.

²⁸² Nicholls 104.

²⁸³ Coicou 78.

4.3.3 Civil wars

Several of Coicou's poems foreground Haiti's civil strife as also threatening to Haiti's survival, in terms of general discord, occasional political upheavals, and outright civil war. Cociou's poem "A Geffrard" is a prime example of a poem which speaks of Haiti's internal difficulties and correlates domestic policy with external interference. At the same time, the poem merits consideration for the fact that it is one of the few poems in nineteenth-century Haiti to speak specifically of Haitian leaders in the post-revolutionary era. Fabre-Nicholas Geffrard served as Haiti's president from 1859 to 1867 and was responsible for securing the Concordat with the Vatican and for taking steps to improve education. The speaker in this poem recognizes Geffrard's achievements but then unapologetically moves to indictment. In order to maintain power, Geffrard, collaborated with foreign powers for his own political gain. The poem contains references to Geffrard's use of the British Navy to combat political rival Sylvain Salnave. The poet's outrage is evident in the exclamatory nature of this direct address:

Oui, vous avez bien droit aux honneurs de l'histoire
Dans la liste des potentats,
Votre front aux lauriers, votre nom à la gloire ;
Mais je ne vous applaudis pas [...]

Entendre l'Etranger qu'un sourire encourage
Tuer vos frères exaltés!
Quoi! Le canon anglais nous cracher son outrage
Et massacrer nos libertés![...]

Oui, tout cela Géffrard, confirmé par vous-même! [...]

Or, quand vous auriez droit à la plus grande gloire
Dans la liste des potentats,
De ce drame outrageant qui souilla notre histoire,
Non, je ne vous absoudrais pas! (1-4, 13-16, 21,65-68)

One incident in particular involved the British ship, “Bull-dog,” an incident which is no different, the poet stresses, than the events involving the German captain Batch or the Spanish admiral Rubalcava. By bringing foreigners into domestic affairs and thereby comprising Haitian sovereignty, Geffrard had also reopened regional wounds in Haiti between factions in the North, West, and South. His actions for the poet are unforgivable and leave a stain on the nation’s history as well as on Geffrard’s presidential legacy. Although the leaders in Coicou’s day are not ever specifically named in his poetry, one could argue that by extension similar judgments are rendered against them as well. “Cauchemar,” for example, is addressed to a Haitian deputy, suggesting, as do other poems, that the message targets the Haitian elite even if the poet supposes a foreign audience. The venomous attacks on foreign powers serve as a rhetorical strategy to stimulate action and unity on the part of Haitian leaders.

The domestic conflict most central to Coicou’s collection involved the series of events of the late 1880s and early 1890s, which included the civil war of 1888-1889. Coicou’s poem “L’Alarme” is stylistically and thematically very similar to “L’Eveil” but is more focused on Haiti’s civil wars:

Oh la guerre civile!... Avec sa face sombre,
Fécondant ardemment des passions sans nombre,
Elle nous pousse encore à nous entr’egorger ;
Elle vient, dans nos cœurs, briser l’amour qui vibre,
Patrie, et t’inspirer le remords d’être libre,
Aux applaudissements railleurs de l’Etranger ! (19-24)

The poet likely refers to Haiti’s civil wars in general as well as the one of his own time.

These verses mirror others in poems entitled “Haiti,” “La guerre civile,” and “Réflexions,” all in section two of *Poésies Nationales*, in which mocking foreigners gloat at Haiti’s civil war. Moreover, in these poems the speaker recognizes fact that Haiti’s difficulties

are used to substantiate racist claims about Haiti's inability to self-govern. The stakes are high, as the future of an entire race is represented in Haiti's plight. Speaking to his country in the midst of civil war, the speaker laments in "Réflexions:"

Ces spectacles sanglants, ces luttes criminelles,
Et te faire endurer, de l'Etranger moqueur
Ces sarcasmes, ces coups de poignard dans le cœur
Oui, demain, loin d'entendre une race te dire
Que tu causas sa honte, et de te voir maudire:[...]

Pour ne faillir jamais, ô mon doux Pays, meurs. (24-28, 34)

Two points are worth emphasizing at this juncture. The first involves what Coicou's poems do not mention. Although a poet's deep distress over Haiti's internal strife is present in other periods of the nineteenth century, it is interesting to note that Coicou's poems rarely mention the black/mulatto animosities as central to domestic tensions. As related in the previous chapter, Haitian politics had been polarized along party lines in the 1860s and 1870s which coincided largely with color difference. Historian David Nicholls specifies, however, that by the late 1880s, the relationship between color and politics became increasingly complicated.²⁸⁴ With the example of Salomon as with other Haitian leaders, politics became more closely associated with the thoughts and plans of specific political candidates regardless of color, sometimes linked to class alliances, economic interests, or military associations. The rise of the black elite in the last decades of the nineteenth century coincided with this dissent and rivalries among black leaders themselves. It was in 1888 that President Salomon, a black president associated with the National Party, was brought down by a black, northern alliance of the General Nord Alexis and Anténor Firmin. In the aftermath of the revolt which ousted Salomon, fighting amongst various black generals began a turbulent period of what historians

²⁸⁴ Nicholls 111.

have termed a civil war from 1888-1889. The black general Légitime was briefly president until another member of Haiti's emerging black elite, Florvil Hyppolite, assumed power, and the civil war officially ended in 1889.

Most of Coicou's poetry, ultimately published in 1892, was written just prior to Hyppolite's presidency or in its earliest and most turbulent years, including not only the civil war but also a revolt that occurred in 1891 and which Hyppolite brutally repressed. The lack of correlation between politics and color in Coicou's texts reflects the political reality that dissent was occurring more frequently among black leaders, thereby providing one of several reasons for Coicou's repeated emphasis on "la race noire" in his national poetry. It is true that Coicou was to my knowledge the first Haitian poet who could not be identified with the mulatto minority but whose family was, as previously noted, part of Haiti's black and military elite.

The second and more obvious point to be emphasized from those verses in "Réflexions" has to do with the thought of national death, an idea announced in Coicou's introductory poem and which continues to haunt the collection. This national death, we come to see, is linked to collapse from within as much as it is to aggression from without. Its use, however, is literal, symbolic, and rhetorical. There are certainly real reasons for political collapse in Haiti. There are also real reasons why Haiti will not live up to the revolutionary aspirations put forth in its original fight from slavery and prescriptions put forth in its founding documents. Additionally, here, the poet likely doesn't mean he wishes for national death but by means of urgent pleading argues that a willed death would be better than Haiti's current course and general complacency, especially considering Haiti's long-standing and self-appointed mission to represent freedom for those of the African diaspora. Ceasing to exist is better than the failure which Haiti symbolizes for the black race. All of this comprises part of the poet's "reflexions" where the central

question of how to connect to Haiti's past and imagine Haiti's future is posed from the outset: "Mais où donc allons-nous?" The last line of this long stanza confirms the present ambition to "mettre un dernier terme à nos guerres civiles!" There are no easy answers though on how to achieve this reality.

In "Réflexions," the poet mentions Haitian heroes and states "rien n'est sacré pour nous," not even Haiti's founding fathers so to speak. Although Haitian writers are often deemed as being obsessed with patriotism and instilling heroic cults, Coicou's poems demonstrate once again that historical and even cultural reasons substantiate these tendencies, when they do exist. With the centennial approaching, not to mention Coicou's own deep spiritual leanings and poetry—mostly Romantic—in sentiment, Coicou clearly saw amidst national death a lack of all things sacred. At the very least, Haiti must have reverence for its own revolution. Speaking of national death may at least stir commitment to create something sacred. Haitian revolutionary leaders then are the object of choice, and Coicou's poems a vital part of this national quest. Various poems addressed to certain leaders read as epitaphs while others address the Haitian "culte" more collectively. It is again Haiti's centennial that occasions these multiple reflections. In "Vision" for example, the poet summarizes some of his poetic tendencies when he says, "Et je les contemplais, moi dont l'âme vénérée/Les fronts olympiens; je voulais, à mon tour, /Que mon culte atteignit leur grandeur centenaire." (17-19). Union, Liberty, and the date 1804 form a "trinity" of worship and devotion. Amidst the many poems about national death, tombs, and fallen heroes, are ones which suggest reviving their spirits, remembering their feats, and embracing a spiritual notion of national past which will inspire present unity.

The teaching or re-examining of Haitian history for Coicou would also emphasize reclaiming the link between Haiti's Revolution and racial resistance. Coicou's own admitted

undercurrent throughout his collection is the inseparable “Dieu, ma Patrie, et ma Race!”/Trois cultes éternels que j’aime plus que moi” (“Devant une tombe,” 1-2). The long epic-like poem “Vertières” about the decisive 1803 Haitian battle also posits the victory of this “armée indigène” as one of epic proportions which inaugurated a new era for “la race noire.” In Coicou’s poetry, defense of the black race is not a consequence of the Revolution but was the impetus, an ingrained motivation on the part of military leaders which precipitated their actions. This becomes the mission of military leaders like the Haitian general Capois: “Il veut, dans ces héros, couronner des vainqueurs;/ Voir sur les noirs martyrs, la race noire libre!” (“Vertières,” 83-84). The same is true even when leaders like Pétion have traditionally been considered mulatto figures.

4.4 RACE, NATION, AND COICOU’S “GÉNIE AFRICAIN”

The elision of black/mulatto conflict is most apparent in a poem in which “black” is part of the very title: “Le supplice du noir.” It begins as if the poet is standing near the very place where two men, considered rebels in colonial Saint-Domingue, were executed under local colonial rule prior to Haiti’s revolution:

Or, ce n’était pas loin de cette place d’armes
 Ou, sur les nègres vils n’ayant plus sang ni larmes,
 Le colon excellait à se montrer cruel :
 Où l’on fit rompre vifs, la face vers le ciel,
 Chavanne, Ogé, ces deux vaillants dont l’équipée [sic]
 Sublime préluda la sublime épopée :
 Ce n’en fut pas bien loin qu’un crime sombre eut lieu,
 Consommé par des blancs, sur un nègre....sous Dieu! (1-8)

A Haitian audience would have been familiar with this episode, one of the most infamous accounts of colonial brutality in Saint Domingue. Even without a detailed historical context, however, the excessive cruelty and utterly sadistic torture is readily apparent in Coicou's verse. The victims are "nègres" and are described through a series of alliterations, first as "vils," then as "vifs," and finally as "vaillants." The first descriptor pins their designation by colonial rulers, the second their more neutral and factual status as alive during this part of the execution, and then finally their transformation to courageous actors of national history. Moreover, the irony in some descriptions (the colonizer *excelling* in cruelty, the victims being *vile*) mirrors the twisted logic and again the sheer sadism of the perpetrators. Clearly accentuated however, in the sixth verse, through repetition and placement at the front of each hemistich, the word "sublime" is the chief quality of the epic which is to follow.

Curiously, the incident referred to here involved two mulatto leaders, Vincent Ogé and Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, who actively but unsuccessfully petitioned colonial and metropolitan leaders to apply the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* to mulatto property owners in Saint Domingue in the late 1790s. Ogé returned from a trip to France in October 1790 to launch an armed revolt for free men of color, and with Chavannes' help led a mulatto revolt which was ultimately put down by colonial authorities. Ogé and Chavannes were put on trial and condemned to death on the wheel in February, 1791. Coicou's description here of Ogé's and Chavannes' death draws attention to their excruciating suffering inflicted by white leaders in Saint-Domingue, which C.L.R James also recounted in detail in his book *The Black Jacobins*:

They condemned them to be led by the executioner to the main door...tied by a cord round the neck [...]with wax candles in their hands, to confess their crimes...after which they were to be led to the parade-ground, and have their arms, legs, and elbows broken on a scaffold, after which they were to be bound on wheels, their faces turned to the sky, to remain thus, while it pleased God to keep them alive [...] Even in death the racial division was to be maintained. The

written judgment had decreed that they were to be executed on the side of the square opposite to that where whites were executed.²⁸⁵

Ogé and Chavannes had been integral to what Nicholls referred to as the “mulatto legend” in Haitian history. To portray them as black martyrs, however, or to equate them as Coicou does to “nègres” constituted a bold move. As Nicholls and other contemporary historians have noted, the mulatto struggle for social and political rights in Saint Domingue in the 1790s rarely considered the slaves and the complete abolition of slavery. According to some accounts, free mulattos owned perhaps as many as one quarter of the slaves in the colony.”²⁸⁶ The relationship between class and color in colonial Saint Domingue remained a very complicated one, and indeed, in some instances, like property rights and status as owner or slave, class distinctions trumped color difference.

In Coicou’s poem, however, these mulatto leaders suffer similar fates as blacks in Saint-Domingue. The second stanza moves on to recount other violence, notably the pervasive use of hounds to track and maul runaway slaves. Here, the remarks by colonists reveal how little difference whites made between shades of color, as both mulatto and black are *nègre* and therefore inferior to the white population. The class of slave, in the word order in the verses below, automatically implies the racial category of *nègre*. In the historical context, Ogé’s and Chavannes’ race (as mulatto, hence partly black), was used to deny them the class rights they were seeking.

Ils plongent pantelants, sur l’esclave martyr:
Et les colons ravis bien plus haut d’applaudir![...]

La meute cramponnée à ses membres sanglants
C’est un esclave! c’est un nègre ! Et bien, qu’importe

²⁸⁵ James 74.

²⁸⁶ As historian Laurent Dubois explains Ogé had insisted he was not for abolition, while Chavannes seemed more inclined to use the slaves as allies. Dubois 88.

Qu'il meure ainsi! (47-48, 52-54)

In light of these descriptions, the Ogé/Chavannes incident is the first in a series, a prelude to the eventual epic of the Haitian Revolution. In this way, mulattos and blacks, both considered *nègres*, are also both martyrs to the cause of liberty and national independence. From these descriptions, the poem moves to evoke the infamous Rochambeau, governor-general of Saint Domingue and his notorious cruelty:

Or, vous avez bien fait, sublime Rochambeau!
Le nègre n'a point droit à l'amour, et c'est beau
Qu'on l'opprime toujours, qu'il souffre le martyr ; [...]
De la chair et du sang du noir et du mulâtre:
Dieu voit et ne dit mot. Mais, en Dix-huit-cent-quatre,
Quand l'heure solennelle aura sonné pour nous... (67-69, 73-75)

Historian Laurent Dubois refers to the torture methods of French general Rochambeau's when arguing that racist delirium worked to unite factions in Saint Domingue.²⁸⁷ Coicou's poem, like Dubois analysis, posits Rochambeau's cruelty not only as counterproductive but also as instrumental in this unpredicted reversal which would ultimately lead to the decisive victories of the Haitian Revolution. It is only late in this lengthy poem that the word "mulatto" even appears, and when it does, it is side-by-side the word "noir." Their commonality, which consisted largely in their resistance to white supremacy and shared subordinate position, forged a unity which is more plausible in retrospection. More symbolic even than factual, the memory of Chavanne and Ogé, as that of other Haitian figures, can be read as a continual reminder of racist mentality in which any degree of "blackness" was considered inferior. This racism, prior to and after the Haitian Revolution, of course served the capitalist interests of Western governments who manipulated racial categories for their economic benefit. Rewriting and resurrecting some

²⁸⁷ Dubois 293.

of these past episodes would serve to forge present unity among the different color, social, and economic factions in Haitian society of Coicou's day.

Poetic portrayals of Haiti's past, without the pre and post-revolutionary antagonism between mulattos and blacks, are reminiscent of previous political prescriptions and nationalist discourse in Haiti. Elision of color difference had also been the ambition of Haiti's first ruler, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, as he had made explicit in the 1805 Haitian constitution. Problems of political unity in this former colony were addressed in article 14 where blackness alone becomes synonymous with "Haitian." Sybille Fischer explains:

All hierarchies based on people's skin color are abolished, and all Haitians are to be referred to by the generic term, "black." From the taxonomic lunacy that had more than one hundred different terms to refer to different degrees of racial and mixture and color, we have moved to a generic denomination: "black." [...] The very act of calling all Haitians black, regardless of their phenotype, would be for a long time recognized as a radical break from the entrenched practice of distinguishing, at the very least between mulattoes, blacks, and whites.²⁸⁸

Fischer goes on to explain how the previously subordinate term "black" is now used as the universal term for all Haitians. Interestingly, even the few French women and Poles who had fought alongside mulatto and slave leaders during the revolution were also designated as "black" once they became naturalized Haitian citizens. The attempt to eliminate racial distinctions obviously coincided with the desire to abolish class hierarchy as well: there was to be no more slavery, and mulattos could not claim property rights over blacks simply because their French fathers had been land owners. Ultimately, of course, attempting to rid of Haitian society of racial distinctions did not become reality.

The powerful difference as noted in much of Coicou's poetry is that the designation of all mulatto/black inhabitants of Saint Domingue as *black* precedes Haitian independence. In "Le

²⁸⁸ Fischer 232.

supplice du noir,” the future, beyond the Haitian Revolution, also belongs to the “nègre” with no mulatto/black distinctions. In the final part of this very long stanza, their suffering and ultimate victory takes on a present significance and future warning,

Or, demain, qu’appliquant la loi du talion
Le nègre soit debout, se fasse aussi lion,
N’osez point le maudire et comprenez sa haine
L’ignorance est le lot qu’on lui jette en sa chaîne ;
Le mépris insolent, le sarcasme moqueur,
Sont les germes féconds répandus en son cœur
En bien, il gardera la multiple semence
Et, de tant d’éléments, combinant sa démence,
A vos soins généreux donnant leur juste prix,
Ils auront la vengeance, ils auront le mépris. (87-96)

The verses cited previously which invoke 1804 were addressed to Rochambeau in the futur antérieur, showing a past perspective on an event which would occur despite Rochambeau’s iron rule. This part of the poem, however, signals a vague “tomorrow,” with no clear recipient, and written in the simple future and present tenses, both of which are indicative modes, used to state facts and not subjective desires. This warning of future vengeance, if addressed to whites as well as to corrupt Haitian leaders complicit in similar goals, suggests that historical parallels may surface at the end of the nineteenth century: revolutionary violence and victory may *again* be on the horizon for the black people. Earlier in the poem, the poet, in recounting the Ogé and Chavannes execution did recognize that some whites were the exception to the rule, perhaps French intellectuals, when he says: “Il y avait pourtant ces homes austères/Pour qui les noirs courbés n’étaient pas moins des frères:[...]ces cœurs français au juste épanouis.” (9-12) Save these sympathizers, however, the invective admonition stands and comes decades before similar ones issued Aimé Césaire’s *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950) in Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). Recourse to racial solidarity, real, historic, imagined, or prescribed, constituted an attempt to overcome the seeds of dissent

sown in Haiti's colonial past, to refute pervasive racism in Coicou's time, and to combat internal struggles. Although correlating color (black and mulatto) with political affiliation, had, as mentioned previously, become increasingly difficult, these distinctions continued to plague Haitian society. The urgency to narrate national unity can be seen as a response to various crises, including the economic and military interests which divided the black urban elite from the poorer peasants. Again, the warning Coicou issues could equally apply to all Haitians, black and mulatto, who are not in solidarity with the majority of Haiti's population.

For Coicou, reclaiming identity through historical remembrance and deepening racial consciousness become imperatives to national purpose and poetic practice. Just a year after the publication of *Poésies Nationales*, Coicou wrote the following in the preface to one his plays:

...le but est là devant, toujours le même, et nous y allons, nous persuadant, nous convainquant de plus en plus qu'en ces jours où nous sommes de notre vie de peuple il n'est de rien tant besoin que de faire la part plus grande *aux idées et aux sentiments*, et, entre tous, à ceux du PAYS et de la RACE ; car c'est bien de la conception que se seront faite de ces idées et de l'émotion qu'auront éprouvée à ces sentiments l'élite de nos penseurs, en premier lieu, et la majorité nationale, en second ; c'est de cela surtout, avant tout, que l'avenir résultera pour nous,--riant ou sombre.²⁸⁹

Although Coicou concedes that the relationship between race and nation for many Haitian thinkers had indeed been, at least on some level, fairly explicit, he calls for a renewed emphasis at this historical juncture. He, however, accords an unprecedented importance to race in Haitian identity, a commitment to nation and to race which, he argues, must begin as a deep conviction on the part of Haiti's elite. Interestingly, Coicou does not promise that such a commitment will lead to prosperity. Indeed, Coicou's work bears witness to a progressive awareness among Haitian intellectuals that national ambitions are bound to fail at least in part because of racial underpinnings. As will become apparent, the refocusing of commitment to race

²⁸⁹ Massillon Coicou, *L'Oracle: poème dramatique haïtien* (1893; Paris: Atelier haïtiens, 1901) 5-6.

in spite of this failure is one of the great paradoxes of his work. If we return one final time to “Cauchemar”, we see that as in others poems, the reasons imperialist nations target Haiti are not only based on what it has to offer, materially or militarily, but they also relate to what might be, in the mindset of Western imperialism, morally permissible. For Coicou, racism is the underlying tenet, and success of a *black* nation the ultimate offense to imperialist nations:

La force est votre droit, et le droit est notre crime.
Qu’un peuple noir soit libre et travaille et s’anime,
Et lentement prospère, et vive sous les cieux :
Que cela soit ainsi, c’est un crime à vos yeux. (15-18)

The nightmare, as this poem reveals, is not brought on solely by fear of foreign invasion, but by the horror of the justifications, already in place, which allowed and would continue to allow such aggression. In fact, the poet suggests that hatred for a black nation is the real reason for invasion, as money, we may recall from earlier analysis, was a pretext. Once again, we are reminded of Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s contention in *Silencing the Past* that Haiti’s ‘failure’ was imminent, as its success was *unthinkable* given the racist ideologies which governed western paradigms of freedom. Trouillot’s insight about the Haitian Revolution echoes Coicou’s late nineteenth-century observations, that Haiti’s ‘failures’ were willfully intended by nations who not only ostracized the black republic for more than half a century but whose systematic racism meant pervasive intolerance of Haiti’s economic, political, and military viability.²⁹⁰

The title of “Cauchemar” takes on yet an additional meaning later in the poem, signaling a nightmare for the foreign invader who expects his victories to go unchallenged. As in “Le Supplice du Noir,” later verses in “Cauchemar” provocatively suggest a new era in which colonial superiority wanes to the rise of the black race:

²⁹⁰ Trouillot’s text is also mentioned in relation to Susan Buck-Morss’ “Hegel and Haiti” essay in the introduction to the Chapter on Ardouin’s and Nau’s poetry in this dissertation.

Le soleil qui se couche est jaloux de l'éclat
De la lune limpide et calme qui se lève; [...]
Et puis, comme daigner nous tendre encore la main,
Alors que vous criez que l'on n'est pas des hommes
Etant des nègres. Soit, mais nègres que nous sommes,

C'est pourtant sans forfaits, sans être jaloux,
Sans haïr les petits que nous grandissons, nous. (26-27, 31-34)

The verses begin with peaceful nature images and consonance, especially with the repetition of “l” sounds in the first few verses. In contrast, the enjambement between the verses beginning with “Alors” and “Etant” works to accentuate what comes in the second part of verse 30, a sort of punch-line with the surprising claim “mais nègres que nous sommes.” The word “nègre” is doubly emphasized in the syntactic reversal in this verse precisely to call attention to how the very *humanity* of the Haitian population was denied once again because of race. Anne Gulick’s recent study of the 1805 Haitian constitution emphasizes the novelty of this document which “identified both blackness and humanity as the basic signifiers of citizenship.”²⁹¹ In this subversive refiguring, Gulick argues, Haiti would claim political legibility not in spite of but because of its blackness.²⁹² Coicou’s poetry as a whole represents a similar refiguring, with the African diasporic community a central component of this project. Aware of the battles for abolition of slavery in Brazil in the late 1880s for example, he authors a poem of encouragement to Dom Pedro II whose daughter ultimately had the decree signed into law in 1889. Les “nègres du Brésil” would remember his actions despite the protests from other citizens. Coicou’s poems also refocus Haiti’s national past even for renowned revolutionary figures most commonly found in nineteenth-century Haitian poetry such as Toussaint Louverture. For example, poets and politicians in the past as in the present frequently refer to the deportation of Toussaint by

²⁹¹ Anne Gulick, “We Are Not the People: The 1805 Haitian Constitution’s Challenge to Political Legibility in the Age of Revolution,” *American Literature* 78:4 (December 2006): 802.

²⁹² Gulick 808.

Napoleonic forces by including Toussaint's legendary quote: "in uprooting me you have cut off the trunk of the *tree of liberty* for the roots are long and deep." Coicou, however, alters the last part of this quote in the poem "Toussaint-Messie" so that it is not the tree of liberty which is cut but "l'arbre des noirs" which will grow again. In this particular poem, Toussaint's genius lies precisely in the fact that future freedom for an entire race was his primary goal, even in his final moments imprisoned in the Fort du Joux in France. As this poem presents him, he is both a national leader and a messianic figure for this larger community:

Alors, voyant le Joux, --comme Christ le calvaire, --
A cette soldatesque effrénée et sévère [...]
S'il soupire parfois, lui, le héros si ferme
C'est qu'en sa tête un monde, une race regerme:
Et si dans ses deux mains il laisse aller son front,
Oh ! ce qu'il l'y contraint, non, ce n'est pas l'affront,
Ce n'est pas l'agonie à peine commencée,
Mais l'immense avenir qui tourne en sa pensée! (36-37, 44-49)

This expansion of community across time and space is not only symbolized by leaders like Louverture but also in anonymous figures whose names rarely if ever made it into historical accounts. The poem "Martyre" is one of the longest in Coicou's collection, composed of thirty quatrains. The text begins, as do other poems in the collection, with the Haitian Revolution. It then details, however, the initial repercussions of 1804, many of which had disastrous consequences for slaves in other colonies. This poem suggests that slave owners throughout the Americas feared similar revolutions and therefore sought to stamp out what the poet deems the "génie africain." The abundance of detail once again supports declarations like those by Fanon that the encounter between colonized and colonizer began and was perpetuated by violence, and violence that was *real* and not symbolic.²⁹³

Or, à coups de massue, il importait d'abattre

²⁹³ Fanon 36.

L'hydre qui renaissait sur sa base d'airain;
Il fallait étouffer dans l'œuf Dix-huit cent quatre,
Que couvait ardemment le génie africain!

« A la verge, à la flamme, aux fers, aux fusillades, »
« Aux limiers de Cuba, -s'écrient les colons »
« Joignons les pendaisons, ajoutons les noyades: »
« Et nous les vaincrons tous, jusqu'au dernier! Allons! »

Et de nombreux gibets se dressaient sur les places!
Et puis on les pendait, ces nègres obstinés!
Et puis, pour extirper tous les germes vivaces,
Sans raison, sans prétexte, ils étaient condamnés! (21-32)

Birth metaphors are common in Haitian literature, as the events of 1804 are often described as aborted attempts at freedom and national prosperity. This “génie africain” not only personifies a spirit of freedom, sought to be snuffed out, but it also posits the historical, geographical, and ideological origins of the Haitian Revolution as essentially *African* in nature. Approximately two-thirds of the slaves in Saint Domingue were African-born, and as Laurent Dubois in his recent historical study *The Avengers of America* states, “we are increasingly coming to understand that it [the Haitian Revolution] was itself in many ways an African revolution.”²⁹⁴ In these stanzas, this is a rebirth of an African spirit which existed in a distant past and will exist again, with 1804 being one powerful instance of its manifestation. In Coicou's imagining, even the colonists at the time recognized this potential power, for better or worse. Moreover, the violence depicted in this poem was enacted by the white colonists, indiscriminately, against the slaves. This represents a dramatic reversal from Western representations in the nineteenth century in which the Haitian Revolution is equated with the inherent savagery of Africans.

²⁹⁴ Dubois 5.

The drowning of slaves that is mentioned as one of many torturous methods of execution becomes the entire subject in the second part of the poem. This section is separated by an asterisk at the close of the fourteenth stanza. The detailed description which ensues not only magnifies the circumstances surrounding this event but it simultaneously works to evoke the transatlantic slave trade, as Africans are thrown overboard on the wide-open sea and piled on top of one another in the ship's deep hull:

Ayant déjà connu jusqu'au dernier martyre,
Ayant toujours souffert ce qu'ils souffraient encore,
Dans la cale profonde et sombre du navire
Entassés, pêle-mêle, ils espéraient la mort... [69-72]

One of those eventually stands out among the rest. A few stanzas later, we read:

Or, entre eux, se trouvait une négresse austère.
Ses filles, son mari, ---doux vieillard, gais enfants,--
Tout ce qui lui restait de bonheur sur la terre,
Comme elle allaient périr sous les flots étouffants. [sic]

Lorsque, pour le lancer dans la mer vaste et sombre,
Devant lui, menaçant, s'avança le bourreau,
Le noir semble fléchir : voyant se dresser l'ombre
De la mort, il n'osait la regarder front haut. (81-88)

The reason for choosing to add what would be an optional –e in the spelling of *martyre* becomes clear in this section. *Martyre*, which had connoted the death and suffering of numerous slaves in various colonies becomes in this section “*la martyre*,” an African woman aboard the ship who is also an allegory for the black race. It is in her words that resistance is voiced, as she encourages those around her to choose death over captivity:

Alors –ainsi que fit Semprone la romaine—
La noire, encourageant son époux à la mort:
« N'es tu donc pas heureux de n'avoir plus de chaîne?
Dit-elle en souriant ; veux-tu souffrir encore ? » (82-85)

Once again Coicou inserts a reference to ancient Rome. Sempronia refers to women of the prominent Sempronius family in the Roman Republic. Coicou's poetry demonstrates that Haitian writers were not "trapped" in the singularity of their own heroic revolution.²⁹⁵ Rather, poets like Coicou were well aware that their revolution was as historically relevant as any republican revolution and that the revolution itself had been preceded by and followed by other acts of slave resistance. The earlier verses about snuffing 1804 from the womb are ambiguous, in that the word order leaves unclear if it is the African genius which hatches the Revolution or vice versa. What these verses and this poem highlight is that no one type of resistance is superior to the other, and that Haiti is as central to the African community as Africa is integral to some of Coicou's thought. Resistance to slavery which took many forms (marronnage, suicide, etc.) expanded beyond the temporal and geographic scope of the final months of the Haitian Revolution. As Carolyn Fick argues:

Slave resistance to the brutality and human degradation of the system took many forms, not all of them over, and some of them even self-destructive... Indeed, the first instance of resistance, and of suicide as resistance, occurred about these slave ships... For those unable to escape being boarded as captives, suicide was a fatal affirmation of their refusal to accept the conditions of bondage imposed on them.²⁹⁶

The poem comes to a close with a heightened spiritual sentiment. The final verses describe her choice as sublime in its power to affect nature, soften enemies, and transform thinking for the ultimate benefit of humanity. She takes on a super-human strength which transports her in this moment of sacramental sacrifice. "Martyre" in these final verses takes on the full force of its religious connotation as the sea becomes the site of a violent baptismal:

²⁹⁵ J. Michael Dash argues precisely against this perception in "Haiti Chimère: Revolutionary Universalism and its Caribbean Context," *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks* 11.

²⁹⁶ Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990) 47.

Et puis, c'était son tour, à l'altière négresse,
En face du bourreau railleur de ses vertus,
Elle eut comme un délire, un transport d'allégresse,
Car la mort des martyrs ne l'épouvantait plus.

Lui-même, le bourreau, ce qu'il avait de haine,
Le calme de la mère, esclave le tarit;
Et comme un damné geint au fond de sa géhenne
Sa conscience en lui semblait pousser un cri...
Car lorsqu'il eut rempli sa mission cruelle,
Il vit la noire encore le bénir; et les flots
Rugirent d'épouvante en s'engouffrant sur elle ;
Et la mer indignée exhala des sanglots... (102-113)

The ellipsis at the end suggests the ongoing nature of the struggle, the enduring quality, of this symbolism, and the open-endedness of poetic themes. For Coicou, responding to what he sees as the inevitable demise of Haitian sovereignty includes recasting the Haitian Revolution in terms of African survival, providing an alternative paradigm which will work within but also beyond national borders. Reinventing these identities means widening the range of those who could constitute revolutionary heroes, from nameless slaves in “Martyre” to numerous black legions in “Vertières,” to pre-revolutionary leaders in “Le Supplice du Noir.” Moreover, Coicou’s poetry merits being read in a global context, which not only struggles for abolition in Brazil but also the parceling of Africa by European nations. In fact, if we consider the poems about the ever-increasing encroachment of Haitian space by imperialist powers and the constant maneuvers to parcel Haiti’s economy and territory, we see how similar Haiti was in many ways to the African continent at this time. Coicou’s collection was published in 1892, during the height of the European “scramble for Africa” and the precise year in fact that France invaded Dahomey. Treated as an African space by world powers, Haitian writers will increasingly see themselves as African. Coicou was writing at a temporal crossroads so to speak, with a century of retrospection on its revolution, in the midst of increasing imperialism and global European

colonialism, and with movements like *négritude* and Haiti's own *indiginisme* on the horizon. Less than ten years away would be the first Pan-African conference, and only thirty years after Coicou's death C.L.R. James wrote his account of the Haitian Revolution in anticipation of African revolutionary movements. Although rarely considered, Coicou's work certainly "identified and defined a transcontinental resistant political identity predicated upon blackness."²⁹⁷

Perhaps what understandably overshadows this emerging penchant in Coicou's work is his constant devotion to the dream of the Haitian nation, in which blackness is a continual source of both grief and pride. Haiti's struggle to realize this unfulfilled dream of national prosperity is a principal reason for the continuing of Romanticism in the last decades of the nineteenth-century. Another poem begins:

Orgueil sacre! –doux rêve!—ineffable hantise!
Flamme vivante au cœur que le malheur attise !
--Culte mystérieux ! – divine obsession !...

Fonder un peuple noir ; faire une nation ;
Entre les races sœurs établir l'harmonie !
Sauver la noire, enfin, de sa lente agonie !

Oh ! n'est-il pas bien vrai que ce rêve était beau ? ("Exultation," 1-7)

In the beginning of this poem, we have the summary of what constituted much of Haiti's national ambition after the Revolution—to be recognized as a nation, to legitimize its own existence, to halt African suffering, and to counter racism through its example. The break in stanzas before the question "wasn't this a beautiful dream?" again means mourning this failure. The fact that this poem's title is "Exultation," however, connotes exhilaration for such aspirations. "Exultation" is an example of how Coicou's poetry is neither purely celebratory and

²⁹⁷ Gulick 813.

nor purely despairing; there is a racial weight to Haiti's national project that Coicou nonetheless posits as indispensable to Haiti's future. This complexity is inherent to the Haitian condition, past, present, and future. Referring to Haiti's heroes, the poet states that they "inspire l'héroïsme....ainsi que la pitié!" In this frequent recourse to history, it is important to note that Coicou stands out in his inclusion of maroon leaders. He not only does this in parts of "Martyre" but includes names in a long list of less canonical leaders in "Exultation:"

C'est bien de vous aussi que nous nous réclamons;
C'est vous que nous chantons; c'est vous que nous aimons
C'est pour vous que nos cœurs bondissent d'espérance :
Macaya, Zéphirin, Benech, Lamour-Dérance,
Boukman, Jeannot, Fourmi, Labrunit, Guyambois,
Metellus, Halaou, Lavougou, Catabois,
Lafleur, Tellier, Vancol, Sylla !...groupe farouche
Que Dieu même anima du souffle de sa bouche! (131-138)

Boukman is the most famous name in this list, a voodoo priest whose ceremony at Bois-Caiman precipitated the 1791 slave rebellion considered by many to be the official start of the Haitian Revolution. In this list, Macaya, Zéphirin, Benech, and Sylla are identified as maroon leaders by Carolyn Fick's *The Making of Haiti: the Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below*, only published in 1990. They find their way into her historical account precisely because her study focuses on marronage and its importance in the Haitian Revolution. Many of these names, however, appear much less frequently in other books of history and the importance of their revolutionary role is contested by some prominent histories. Some of the names in this poem in fact I have not been able to trace at all, which makes the mention Coicou gives them all the more important at least in the space of his text. After another list of many names he writes:

Tous, nous nous réclamons de ces hommes géants,
Oh ! c'est bien de vous-même en qui la vieille Afrique
Fit passer son génie et son âme stoïque; (129-131)

The poet not only chronicles the often unnamed and unrecognized heroes of Haiti's past but again emphasizes their ancestral homeland. Many maroon leaders were in fact born in Africa. Africa's being "vieille" can of course have multiple meanings. Not only does this refer to the continent's ancient history which preceded colonial intervention, but it also suggests the geographical and temporal distance between the leaders' origins and Haiti's nineteenth century. The lack of knowledge about their personal histories and certainly the paucity of traceable and written records enhance their ancient mystique. At the same time, an old Africa is not a modern one in that it is not composed of independent republics. In "Paroles d'un Croyant," it is the hope to see Africa "reborn" which inspires the poet and will bring Haiti glory: "Vois sous ton fier drapeau ma race qui s'enrôle;/ Vois l'Afrique renaître et reçois l'auréole" (53-54) The dream is for the success of Haiti as a nation and a prosperous Africa, and Haiti is the martyr to this modern cause.

4.5 POETRY AND BEYOND: FROM HAITI TO PARIS AND BACK AGAIN

The poem "Exultation" is a highly representative piece of the many themes which traverse the poems in *Poésies Nationales* as a whole. The suggestion of failure in the first stanza, for example, is more fully played out in other poems, some of which we have alluded to already. Most importantly, Haiti's viability in "Exultation," an admitted poetic obsession, encompassed the larger stakes for the entire African diaspora. This paradox, too, has already been apparent in many of the poems we have studied thus far: the poet declares the futility of his national poetry even as he authors the collection. Amidst these mournful and in many ways

prescient reflections of national failure lies resistance in both through recourse to history and through gestures of racial solidarity. Another evident yet unexplored response to futility and failure which “Exultation” also includes is the continued belief in poetry itself. In this text Haiti’s revolutionaries as Haiti’s very history is equated as powerful *poems* which “perce à travers la brume épaisse du présent!” Not only do Coicou’s texts make the actions of slaves into feats worthy of poetic celebration, but the events are literary expressions, epics, in and of themselves:

Oh, je vous vois passer dans mes rêves parfois,
Beaux, rayonnants, divins ! Oui, pères je vous vois;
Je vous entends aussi nous rappeler, vous-mêmes,
Tous ces faits immortels, ces éloquents poèmes
Dont vous avez rempli le livre d’or des temps; (79-83)

Shortly after these verses, the revolutionary leaders are further elevated, comprising a supreme ‘pléiade,’ a designation which brings together various images of the cosmos with those of literature. This in turn evokes precisely the point that Williams had made in his preface, that the belief in the divine nature of poetry meant that it was the ideal mode of expression for these events and the venue through which they would become part of Haitian history and culture. Even when centered on the Haitian Revolution, poetry is also endowed with timelessness, complementing the ideas in the collection so rooted in history. Many temporal markers throughout the collection express this timeless quality of such ideals, which, while they may enter human history through various circumstances, have always existed outside typical notions of dated events and national independence. Moreover, forgotten or unrecognized historical moments can be invoked as recurring events in the present through the power of the poetic word until ultimately it is the desire for poetry which is revealed. The proliferation of literature, of poetry in particular, was of special importance to Coicou as to some of his fellow Haitians.

Chrisphonte Prosper, a Haitian professor who organized a series of conferences about Coicou's life and works in the 1950s, stated that one of Coicou's primary goals was to justify the aspirations of Haitians by improving conditions to foster an intellectual culture. For Coicou, as for other Haitians of his generation, part of this goal would be achieved through the flourishing of poetry. It is in this way that the ambition of poets like Coicou was not to exclude lower classes but to develop what they believed to be the transformative power of literature; using high poetic form was not only integral to Haiti's claim to legitimacy, but literature became the site where the low could become the high, the slave a revolutionary, all in an effort to express a more complete and fully modern Haitian culture.

In the period after the publication of *Poésies Nationales*, Coicou continued to expand his literary interests. According to Haitian professor and researcher Pradel Pompilus, Coicou staged a theatrical presentation of his 'poème dramatique' *Oracle* in 1893, published as a manuscript years later in Paris, and he produced two plays in verse, *Le Fils de Toussaint* and *Liberté* in 1896. Most notably, he helped to found the short-lived journal *La Jeune Haïti* which preceded the more well-known journal *La Ronde* which began in 1898. It was *La Ronde* which inaugurated a new era of literature in Haiti for the next century.

As a movement, *La Ronde* touted eclecticism in literature and the independence of art from politics. It is sometimes criticized for having denationalized Haitian literature and is known for its political disinterest and its adherence to the tenets of French symbolism. Coicou contributed to the journal, and I believe that the appearance of many of his political poems as well as those of others in *La Ronde* serve to contest the typical understanding that *La Ronde's* focus excluded committed poetry. Rather, the eclecticism of *La Ronde* was just that. Overall, it was much less a reaction against politically inspired poetry than an inclusion and expansion

beyond it, especially in its earliest years. Some of the most intense patriotic verse had dominated Haiti's literary scene in the 1880s, not only by Durand and Coicou but by other Haitian poets like Tertulien Guillbaud. Michael Dash describes the Haitian writer at the turn of the century as one who "could no longer have a secure and confident voice in the face of such political absurdity," and who therefore shifts his poetry to themes which are more private and contemplative.²⁹⁸ This impact of Haiti's social and political reality on Haitian poetic sensibility had of course been observed by Haitians of that generation. In a letter to Coicou, editor Pétion Gérome wrote:

Comment voulez-vous, mon cher Coicou, que des hommes d'une génération aussi sacrifiée n'arrivent pas souvent à vouloir rompre avec tout espoir d'avenir national et à s'enfoncer dans un pessimisme de plus en plus désenchanté ?..Le pays entier leur offre l'aspect d'un vaste champ de course traversé par des ouragans de détresse...Le tableau de la patrie malheureuse s'associe involontairement dans leur esprit à des images de deuil, à des signes emblématiques de funérailles.²⁹⁹

We have already, however, witnessed this reflective stance in Coicou's work, as well as the personal angst that political crises can induce. Coicou was not immune to citing aesthetic and political frustrations as well as the difficulties of literature predicated on the nation. The intensity of his questioning which we see so pronounced in the early years of the twentieth century already surfaces as a complicated dynamic within Coicou's single collection. Wrestling with his poetic mission, with national commitment, with belief in God, all contributed to his own moments of crisis. His spirituality may be more Christian in nature than other writers associated with *La Ronde*, but the general metaphysical nature of some poems certainly demonstrate similarities. In the moments in which Coicou shares the desperation and uncertainty of *La Ronde* writers, however, he balances these lows with an ultimate hope in God's power. Coicou's poem "Le poète à Dieu" which follows the poem "La muse au poète" is one of the most obvious

²⁹⁸ Dash, *Literature* 33.

²⁹⁹ Pétion Gérome, letter, *La Ronde* (1898): 39.

illustrations of this surrender. This poem echoes verses from the introduction in which the highest devotion is one to God.

La Patrie est en proie à son dernier martyr;
Vois, mon Dieu ! sous les coups de ses fils elle expire !...
Pourtant je garde encore la foi ;
Et tandis qu'en mon cœur le désespoir me crie
Que vains sont nos efforts, que morte est la Patrie,
J'espère encor, toujours, en toi ! (1-6)

Also as in the introductory poem, faith in God and faith in country are closely entwined:

Notre espoir est brisé, notre force est finie;
Mais ce que ne peut pas l'amour ou le génie,
Tu le pourras, mon Dieu, toi seul! (40-42)

In other parts of the poem, only the omniscient and eternal God can halt the violence, prevent civil war, and eventually bring blessings to “la race noire et sa fille Haiti.” The poet’s “we” appears to bring in those who share his patriotic as well his religious devotion, a transcendent hope that the God who moves history and inspires heroism will also deliver Haiti from its current misery.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to explore the details of later literary works by Coicou, it is important to reference them as part of understanding his general legacy and the events which transpired between this seminal work and the political involvement which led to his assassination in 1908. When Coicou left Haiti to spend four years in Paris in 1900, he embarked upon a journey which would expand his literary activity and solidify his political ideologies. Coicou went to Paris after having been named the “secrétarie de la légation d’Haïti à Paris,” in charge of Haitian affairs in France. As part of this public role, he represented Haiti at the centennial celebration of Victor Hugo’s birth in 1902, spoke on the occasion of the death of Pierre Lafitte, and lectured in the VIème arrondissement at the invitation of August Dorchain.

This lecture, published in written form, was entitled *Le génie français et l'âme haïtienne*.³⁰⁰ In this essay, Coicou elaborates on the positive points of contact and the free-flow of Enlightenment ideals which began with the French Revolution and spawned a “perpetual contact” which continued to link intellectuals from France and Haiti throughout the next century. He highlights the reciprocal nature of events and ideas, arguing for example that the achievements of Haitian revolutionaries inspired the thoughts and writings of French poets like Lamartine, whose play in verse called “*Toussaint Louverture*” Coicou admiringly calls a beautiful gesture of artistic innovation. The commitment to human freedom, poetic sensibilities, and belief in God may transcend allegiance to nation or race. Beyond the specifics in Coicou’s essay about French and Haitian connections, this work symbolizes a search for spiritual community whether through literary, historical, or religious notions.

Coicou was indeed active in Paris’s literary scene. His play “*Liberté*” about the abolition of slavery in colonial Saint-Domingue in 1793 was performed at the Théâtre Cluny in 1904. He also published in 1903 two collections of poetry: the early love poems *Passions* as well as one entitled *Impressions*, a collection of some his most religious and metaphysical poems. The poems in *Impressions* are indeed more in line with the eclectic, spiritual and non-political vein of *La Ronde*. One of the poems in this collection, “*Crépuscle*” was published in this journal. A true deviation from the poetic themes in *Poésies Nationales*, however, is difficult to document. Most of the poems in *Impressions* are not dated and are strikingly similar to those published in *La Ronde*. Also important to note is the subtitle to *Impressions*, “*poésies de la vingtième à la trentième année*” which would suggest that they were authored from 1887 to 1897, making them concurrent with the texts in *Poésies Nationales*. One hypothesis is that Coicou did not

³⁰⁰ Coicou, *Le génie français et l'âme haïtienne* (Paris : Librairie de la renaissance latine, 1904).

necessarily follow a certain trajectory, moving away from political poetry, but that he chose to publish the poems in *Impressions* at a later, and perhaps less urgent time in Paris. Coicou didn't publish his early poems from *Passions* until 1903 as well, and it is relatively certain that they were authored at a much earlier date.

Coicou left Paris to return to Haiti in 1904. Chief among his accomplishments upon his return was his support of the instruction of Creole in schools in Port-au-Prince, his return to the *Lycée Pétion* as a teacher of philosophy, his founding of the short-lived literary journal *Œuvre*, and his speech at the funeral of Oswald Durand in 1906. Coicou also taught at the *Ecole des Adultes*, a school in Port-au-Prince created for the benefit of illiterate workers. He founded the *Théâtre Haïti* where he directed more than 40 plays, although less than ten were known to exist in manuscript form, and only a handful are accessible in Haiti today. Most notably, Coicou established the *Bibliothèque Amica*, named for his mother, a precursor to the eventual *Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haïti*. Haitian professor Prosper Chrisphonte explains Coicou's commitment to literature and to literacy in this way:

Son idée profonde était de justifier les légitimes aspirations des noirs en prouvant qu'ils possèdent une intelligence qui leur est propre et qu'ils ne sont pas insensibles à toutes les formes de beauté [...] justifier leurs tendances nationales en améliorant leur culture intellectuelle, et c'est à nos poètes...qu'il entendait demander les éléments de ce progrès.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Prosper Chrisphonte Un écrivain par les textes, seconde partie (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie du Séminaire adventiste, 1954) 101.

4.6 POLITICAL CAUSES AND CONSPIRACIES

Politics rather than literature define Coicou's remaining years. The most significant impact of Coicou's four-year stay in Paris in fact was undoubtedly his time spent with statesman, anthropologist, and political theoretician Anténor Firmin. Firmin, who we may remember as the author of the Haitian rebuttal "*L'Egalite des races humaines*,"³⁰² had also been appointed minister to Paris in 1900. Coicou and Firmin were therefore in Paris during the same period, and they became close friends and political allies. It is ultimately Coicou's support of a Firminist insurrection which led to his execution in 1908.

Providing some background on the political climate in Haiti and the corresponding rise of Firminism around the turn of the twentieth century will elucidate the circumstances of this execution and its impact on Coicou's legacy. When General Tiresias Augustin Simon Sam became President of Haiti in 1902, he incorporated Nord Alexis into his government but not Firmin, forging tension between the two former allies. As the newly appointed minister of war and the navy, Alexis' job was to restore order in the midst of any unrest. It appears, however, that he used his position to squelch any political support for Firmin in hopes of improving his own chances at becoming the next Haitian president.³⁰³ The violence unleashed by Nord under this pretext of restoring order meant the beginning of another civil war. After the destruction of Firmin's home and the arrest of many of his supporters, Firmin left his native Cap Haitien for Gonaïves, where he was elected a deputy. In July of 1902, the Firminists declared a provisional government of their own in the Artibonite valley and in the Northwest, their intent being to bring their government to the capital of Port-au-Prince. Firminist supporters were militarily defeated

³⁰² Firmin's response to Gobineau is explained in the previous chapter on Oswald Durand's poetry.

³⁰³ Plummer 98-99.

by the standing government, and Firmin left Haiti for St. Thomas in 1902. Support for Firmin as a presidential hopeful, however, remained alive even after his departure.

Brenda Plummer explains that “Firminism” as it is now known had actually begun in the 1870s with writers such as Edmond Paul and Demesvar Delorme who favored liberal capitalism, reducing the size of the army, and inaugurating other bureaucratic, civilian, and tax reforms. Firmin, like his predecessors, opposed “opportunistic use of foreign nationality” and, as minister of foreign relations during Hyppolite’s administration, Firmin had some fraudulent French naturalizations canceled. He is most known by current scholars for his support of Pan-Americanism and for an Antillean confederation, ideas which, Plummer points out, meant he had more in common with Caribbean scholars of the mid twentieth-century. In his political writings, Firmin had predicted that Haiti would again be occupied by a foreign power if it did not begin to embrace many of the ideas he was advocating.³⁰⁴

In contrast to Firmin, Nord Alexis who had defeated him in a bid for the presidency in 1902, has been described as anti-intellectual and anti-noiriste, being accused by opponents as being a puppet to the mulattos and their agendas.³⁰⁵ He had begun military service in Haiti at the age of 15 and believed in strong militarism in government. As president, Alexis claimed to be pro-American, and, staunchly nationalistic, “he sought not Haitian aggrandizement but Haitian survival,” using military force to demonstrate his control both domestically and internationally, at times brutally repressive in his attempts to squelch any hint of political dissention.³⁰⁶ By 1906, ordinary civil liberties had been suspended, and as elections appeared on the horizon in January 1908, Alexis was attempting to manipulate his own re-election. Not

³⁰⁴ Plummer 28.

³⁰⁵ Nicholls 111.

³⁰⁶ Plummer 109.

wanting a Firminist revolution to spread throughout the Caribbean and interested in keeping a pro-American president in power, the U.S. intercepted an arms' shipment headed for Firmin supporters in northern Haiti in the early months of that year and continued naval blockades to key cities in Firmin area strongholds. The Firminist insurrection ultimately failed, and Massillon Coicou, along with two brothers and other intellectuals, was executed for his involvement in the attempted coup. Many other arrests and executions took place in the following months. In all the ensuing pandemonium, Alexis was forced to flee and went to Jamaica in April where he died two days later. Firmin, for his part, had taken asylum in the French embassy at Gonaïves and again spent many years in exile.

In 1984, Haitian journalist and historian Pierre Jolibois wrote *L'Exécution des Frères Coicou*, a work which not only documents certain uncontested facts about the Coicou assassinations but which also includes testimonials, citations, and articles from a variety of judicial, journalistic, historical, and anecdotal sources.³⁰⁷ Though the contents of this eclectic study are too numerous to explain here, details are relevant to completing Coicou's biographical information. Along with his two brothers, Coicou was apparently planning to help smuggle arm shipments from Saint Marc to the city of Gonaïves, where it was believed Firmin would arrive and begin the insurrection. Aware of the potential plot, Nord Alexis ordered the execution of nearly a dozen others and the arrests of many more. Massillon Coicou was paradoxically denounced by Jules Coicou, a local general, who was Coicou's brother by adoption, was aware of the plan. The orphaned boy had been taken in by Coicou's parents and raised with the other Coicou children.

³⁰⁷ Gérard Jolibois, *L'Exécution des frères Coicou* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Le Natal, 1986).

Among the other details consistent in most accounts is that Massillon Coicou was taken with his brothers to the recently erected statue of Dessalines and beaten before being shot in a Port-au Prince cemetery. Jolibois does not speculate on the meaning of the place of the beating, but the significance may possibly have to do with Coicou's play *L'Empereur Dessalines* whose productions had been forbidden by the government in November, 1907. In Coicou's play, the despotic actions of Dessalines against competing leaders are justified given the compromised interests and treachery of other leaders, notably Christophe and Pétion. Not coincidentally, Nord Alexis was the maternal grandson of Henri Christophe. In Coicou's play, two elites are thus targeted, black and mulatto respectively, and blamed for the assassination of Haiti's father of national independence. Coicou's play may not only have ignited old prejudices, but since Nord Alexis counted on the unity of various groups under his iron rule, no suggestion of impending rebellion or changed leadership could be tolerated.³⁰⁸ According to details in Jolibois' account, Massillon had been condemned to execution due to his theater as also to past speculations about conspiring with Firmin.³⁰⁹

This leads us to the question of whether or not any of Coicou's poems announced his political intent, if there are any hints of conspiracy in his work in the 1890s. While the poems in *Poésies Nationales* were written years before Coicou's affiliation with Firmin, there is no doubt that part of the transformative power of poetry cited previously included facilitating the connection between the present poet with otherwise distant, irretrievable past revolution. I return once again to "Exultation," notable not only for its multiple themes but also for its transitional tone as it moves from epic poetry to personal politics. Although early in the poem the poet readily admits to an obsession with the nation and its history, the most powerful and unexpected

³⁰⁸ Roger Gaillard, *Le Grand Fauve: 1902-1908* (Port-au-Prince: R. Gaillard, 1995) 186.

³⁰⁹ Jolibois 102.

sections of this text come about when the poet's own subjectivity breaks through the dominant descriptions of past heroes and he sees such beauty in military fight:

Alors, je vous contemple! Alors, je vous bénis!
Et j'invoque cette heure où vos enfants, unis
Imposeront votre œuvre au monde!...et je regrette,
Moi, vieux cœur enfiévré d'idéal, moi, poète,
De n'être pas venu, même un siècle plus tôt,
Pour combattre avec vous! ...
Ce dut être si beau! (89-95)

The beauty he invokes was not limited to the actions of these heroes but would have been more about the poet's actual participation in this process. In this stanza alone, the first personal pronouns "moi" or "je" occur six times, and in many instances they are juxtaposed to the direct object pronoun "vous." The contemplation becomes a sort of mirrored reflection as poetry melds with history and words with actions. Specifically, the substantive "œuvre" implies both the poet's work of art and the soldiers' military feats. More generally, the verbs of action with those of thought signify the combination of contemplation, invocation, the imposition of ideas as well as forceful combat. There is also no doubt that Coicou considered his book to be a political project and part of a larger political process. Nowhere is this clearer than in the closing poem titled "Adieu," a poem not yet mentioned up this point. Also a sonnet, it is in the opening quatrain and closing tercet that we find him addressing his own writing directly for the first time. This poem simultaneously serves as a conclusion to the project, a farewell to poetry, surrender to God, and the issuance of a final commission:

Mon livre, lance-toi dans l'arène, et combats.
N'écoute point ceux-la qu'étonne ton audace,
Sans morgue, pour l'honneur du Pays, prends ta place,
O mon livre parmi les plus vaillants soldats.

Que tu montres que rien n'est encore perdu,
Et que toi sois enfin le clairon éperdu
Soufflant dans les cœurs l'âme de la Patrie! (1-4, 13-15)

The audacity he refers to carries the double meaning of a bold gesture as well as a worthy artistic project. So innovative is this book that he cautions against its arrogance (“sans morgue,”) while also rejecting the pessimism and death obsessions which have so far haunted both nation and poetry. Ironically, the poet who has so vehemently written against *foreign* military force ends with images of combat, revealing how inescapably and powerfully Haiti remained defined in terms of conflict. The military imagery, however, is commingled with the notion of inspiration, with the juxtaposition of general words like “soldier” and “combat” with soul and book and with the dual meaning of others like “clairon” and “souffler.” The choice of the word “éperdu” conveys strong but again violent sentiment, making the general tone of the last poem one which is proud and forceful (and yet is there still a touch of pessimism even here, since “le clairon éperdu” could also read “le clairon *est perdu?*”). As much as this poem concludes the collection, it also calls for a future announcement and action, leading to an anticipation of something more to come. Referencing recent criticism about Latin literature once again offers insight into Coicou’s project: literary texts may be viewed not only as representation of society but as an intervention in it as well.³¹⁰ Coicou’s literal, political intervention is explained in the following pages.

It is in this light that an earlier poem in the collection “Défaillance” becomes relevant. At first, the poem doesn’t stand out among others which allude to failure. It begins with the poet addressing the hypocrisy he sees in those whose harmonious words don’t match their treacherous

³¹⁰ Habinek 3. In his introduction, the more complete quote reads: “Without abandoning earlier study of language, form, and literary tradition, scholars have begun to consider as well the means through which literature was produced and circulated.[...] The present study continues this interest in texts and contexts, but with a crucial shift in emphasis. Instead of viewing texts as chiefly illustrative of or reactive to social, political, and economic practices, it regards literature as a medium through which competing sectors of Roman society sought to advance their interests over and against other sources of social and political authority. In other words, literature is here studied not only as representation of society, but as an intervention in it as well.”

actions, and in the second stanza he echoes concerns from other poems about the true usefulness of poetry in Haiti at this time. The only notable difference, I would argue, is that harsh criticism and devastating doubt are not placed in the mouth of the muse or some other figure but articulated by the poet himself in a way which is unexpected even for him. Linking the end of the first stanza to the beginning of the second, the previously impassioned poet now admits: “Que je sens, par moments, ma ferveur qui défaille, /Et que je me surprends qui me demande à moi.” Just six years after the publication of these poems, a contributor to *La Ronde* would observe how a divided self was endemic to the political and social realities of the period:

Il existe une disproportion très marquée entre les espérances instinctives de la jeunesse studieuse et les conditions générales mesquines, implacables de notre existence. De là naît un conflit des tendances de l'être avec la fatalité du milieu, des légitimes attentes de l'âme cultivée avec la grossière réalité. L'issue de ce combat intérieur est presque toujours fatale à l'individu; c'est le plus souvent, un esprit qui corrompt, un talent qui meurt, un artiste qui se détourne du culte de la beauté esthétique avant d'avoir pu faire son ascension des limbes de l'inédit.³¹¹

This relevant reminder applies to the period of Coicou's writing as well, even if in continuing to quote “Défaillance,” the more recognized failure is one intrinsic to the poetic process itself:

Ainsi me voilà donc sous l'étreinte du doute;
Tenté de m'arrêter à moitié de la route,
Gémissant, le front bas, je me demande à moi
Si je peux jusqu'au bout aller sans défaillance,
Si nul instinct honteux ne soutient ma vaillance,
Et si mon livre même est une œuvre de foi. (13-18)

It is the ending of the poem, however, where he doubts not only his poetry, his own project, but his own sincerity and his own trajectory which is most foretelling:

Me voilà lentement obsédé d'un long rêve,
Interrogeant mon cœur, lui demandant sans trêve
S'il ne me berce en vain; si, quelque jour, demain,

³¹¹ *La Ronde* 128.

L'on ne me verra pas, chercheur de gloire vile,
Agiter le drapeau de la guerre civile,
Et puis, sur mes autels, le planter, --- de ma main;

Lui demandant, enfin, si quelque jour, moi-même
Qui parle de Justice, et consacre à ce thème
Ce que peut-être en moi j'ai de meilleurs accents,
Je n'irai pas aussi, fier, devant quelque traître,
Dont un sort rigoureux nous aurait fait un maître,
Fléchir mes deux genoux pour brûler mon encens. (19-30)

Through this poem, Coicou nearly predicts his own political actions. It is impossible not to note the propensity for violence, the possibility of betrayal, and the allusion to martyrdom, as any critical observation of these verses is inevitably overshadowed by the reality we know to have materialized. It is at this point perhaps that we can come to another poem which others scholars have cited previously as indicating Coicou's imminent political intent. It involves the one poem from the collection *Impressions* which stands out from the rest. It is overtly political and has been referenced in regards to Coicou's allegiance to Anténor Firmin. The poem's title is "Lui" and begins with these verses:

Une heure doit sonner, un homme doit venir
L'heure sonne déjà; mais quand donc viendra l'homme ?
Ah ! prenons garde à nous, car les temps vont finir
Et personne ne vient qu'on acclame et qu'on nomme. (1-4)

Jacquelin Dolcé, a professor in Haiti, included this poem in a 2000 booklet of Coicou's poetry called "Textes choisis."³¹² Dolcé mentions in a short commentary that the poem "Lui" which shares its title with a poem by Victor Hugo about Napoleon references the one politician Coicou is known to have openly supported:

Un siècle après son indépendance, Haïti cherche un sauveur. Cette quête de salut semble justifiée par les spectacles de la misère, ou de la gabegie administrative et des méthodes politiques expéditives du gouvernement de Nord Alexis. Un peu partout, on espère voir souffler un vent de libéralisme et de changement. Il va de

³¹² Dolcé 52-53.

soi qu'un homme hautement imbu de cette mission doit incarner cet espoir et cette volonté. Pour qui vivait pleinement ces premières années de notre vingtième siècle, l'allusion à Anténor Firmin pour qui le poète éprouvait la plus vive sympathie est à peine voilée. Tout laisse croire que l'attente de cet homme est à la mesure des grandes frustrations du moment.³¹³

The 1903 publication of *Impressions*, as pointed out earlier, coincided with Coicou's years in Paris and with the time spent with Firmin. Jolibois, in his book on Coicou's execution, also mentions this poem and quotes the same verses. He cites a 1908 Haitian publication with included alongside "Lui" this commentary:

Parmi les haïtiens sommairement exécutés, au cours des événements actuels, se trouvait Massillon Coicou dont nous donnions plus haut le portrait. C'était un poète assez connu à Paris, où il avait fait représenter une pièce de théâtre. Dans un recueil intitulé: « Impressions » rêves des jours de trêve, nous trouvons ces vers, auxquels la mort du pauvre écrivain donne une tragique signification. Il a voulu quitter les lettres pour la politique et il en meurt.³¹⁴

In "Lui," the theme of failure is accompanied by the strong sense of reproach, a criticism of poets for having falsely announced hope. The anticipated arrival of a new era, new leadership, and political revival, may indeed have been heightened near the centennial celebrations, but poets too enthusiastically embraced a future dream at the expense of present realities:

Honte à nous, les voyants, qui, des regards fixés
Vers l'avenir lointain et jouant au prophète,
Avions pensé voir l'homme et l'avons annoncé!
Honte à nous, car le peuple était prêt pour la fête! (9-12)

The future, however, does not completely disappear from the horizon, and the poet continues to place his immediate hope in one particular unnamed person. Standing on the beach and anticipating this arrival, the poet states: "Je crois que c'est un nom qu'a murmuré le flot." This time, a call to action involves a serious sense of responsibility and preparation:

³¹³ Dolcé 53.

³¹⁴ Jolibois 169.

Et s'il faut plus encore pour accomplir la tâche,
L'on ira vers le but, jusqu'où l'on croit le voir;
Car tout cède à l'effort, rien n'appartient au lâche;
L'avenir est à ceux qui savent le vouloir! (41-44)

This call to action may make this poem the last political poem Coicou authors. Henrock Trouillot in his study *Les Origines sociales de la littérature haïtienne* finds *Impressions* as a collection rather uninteresting but declares that “Lui” announces a “Coicou des derniers jours,” adding that this poem shows “le poète de la résurrection nationale dont le combat fut aussi héroïque et glorieux que celui du héros sur le champ de bataille et dont tout l'être est tendu vers la libération de son pays.”³¹⁵

4.7 CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Coicou maintains an enduring legacy in Haitian letters and politics at least in part because of his execution, and it is important to mention that Coicou's assassination had far-reaching implications on several fronts. Although Haitian newspapers, censored by Nord Alexis, were noticeably quiet about those events, Coicou's death provoked outrage abroad. Haitian professor Roger Gaillard in *Le Grand Fauve* and Jolibois again in *L'Exécution* both cite numerous articles from various foreign newspapers of the period. According to Gaillard, mention of Coicou's death was even found in manuscripts of Apollinaire's *Le poète assassiné*: when referencing the worldwide persecution of poets, Apollinaire had noted “...le grand poète nègre d'Haïti avait été coupé en morceaux.”³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Henock Trouillot, *Les Origines sociales de la littérature haïtienne* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie N.A. Theodore, 1962) 74.

³¹⁶ Gaillard 272.

Haitians residing abroad also expressed their sympathy, as numerous other citations lauded Coicou as a man of courage, a national poet, and a martyr to his country and his race. Haitian poet Arsène Chevreau wrote a poem dedicated to Coicou late in 1908 from exile in Guadeloupe, published in the Guadeloupean newspaper “Le Citoyen.” The verses below summarize how Coicou would be perceived by future generations of Haitian writers and the enduring legacy he would leave as a national hero:

De l’Histoire en chantant les dates triomphales
Il est tombé martyr, sous l’horrible ‘rafale’
Et ton arme n’était qu’un luth ô doux poète...
Qu’un luth, ô doux poète...³¹⁷ (1-4)

More immediately and locally, the executions provoked panic, especially in the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Foreign nations were ready to intervene, including Jamaica and Cuba, as well as once again Western imperial powers. British and Danish gun-boat activity occurred alongside plans for departures of numerous political refugees.³¹⁸ Jolibois delves further into the political involvement of other nations by evoking the possibility that Coicou’s assassination became the pretext for multiple foreign interventions.³¹⁹

Haitian journalist Frédéric Marcelin, a supporter of Nord Alexis, asked if “par une stupide fusillade (Nord Alexis) lui assure une immortalité que sa poésie ne lui aurait pas donné...?”³²⁰ Critical of Coicou’s crossing from letters to politics, Marcelin also wrote: “Etrange destinée que celle de Massillon Coicou! Les poètes sont généralement des rêveurs et ils ne sont excellents qu’à cette condition. Le nôtre voulu être un homme d’action, et cela lui

³¹⁷ Jolibois 171.

³¹⁸ Gaillard 273.

³¹⁹ Jolibois 155.

³²⁰ Frédéric Marcelin, *Au gré du souvenir* (Paris: Librairie maritime et coloniale, 1913) 161.

coûta la vie”³²¹ Coicou’s example opens up the debate about the role of poets in politics in Haitian society and undeniably illustrates the dangers of putting poetic aspirations into political practice. For Coicou, the passage from dream to action and from poetry to politics was a natural if not an inevitable trajectory. “Chez nous,” Coicou wrote in a letter to a friend, “l’homme littéraire n’est que la préface de l’homme politique.”³²² This last statement makes the study of his poetry even more paramount. Coicou’s devotion to national literature preceded his own martyrdom in 1908, and in 1915, American forces began a nineteen-year occupation. This foreign invasion, Haiti’s first in over one hundred years, was a manifestation of the national death and culmination of American influence Coicou had feared and expressed in his verses nearly three decades before. All of these brutal realities signal an end to a certain literary and historical era in Haiti as Romanticism ends and national confidence all but disappears. In the most tragic way possible for nineteenth-century Haitian poets, Haitian history had come full circle, but the commitment to poetry would continue, and the national aspirations and concerns to which poets had given voice would resurface. The eclecticism of *La Ronde* which had begun in Coicou’s lifetime would survive in limited fashion through the early years of the occupation, before the notions of racial solidarity and consciousness of African identities, already visible in Coicou’s work, would redefine Haitian literature for the greater part of the twentieth century.

³²¹ Marcelin 160-161.

³²² *La Ronde* [Port-au-Prince] août 1898: 81.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The silencing of Haiti has affected the circulation, reception, and critical consideration of Haiti's earliest texts, though not, it is clear, because Haitians were silent. As this study has demonstrated, several Haitian political theorists, historians, and journalists called for the expository and literary writing which was essential, many Haitians believed, in constituting national identity and countering Western racist discourse. Although Haitian writers of all genres inevitably do their own silencing, a point which Michel-Rolph Trouillot readily points out, this does not diminish the need to take account of Haiti's first century of literature. Haitian poets write in light of pressing national concerns, remaining keenly aware of the problems plaguing Haiti's entry into the world of modern nation-states. In the 1830s, mulatto Haitian poets portray black revolutionary leaders. The journalists who published their poetry contemplate the elitism inherent in writing and the influence French literature should have in the emergence of a modern Haitian poetry. In the mid to late nineteenth century, Haiti's national bard Oswald Durand reveals the pervasive social antagonisms in Haiti as on-going vestiges of colonial power. He navigates many local and universal themes and opens interrogations into how to reconcile ideas of racial equality with those of national difference. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Massillon Coicou's fervent patriotism confronts the knowledge of internal corruption, encroaching imperialism, and Haiti's failures to sustain its own revolutionary ambitions.

In some way, shape, or form, all periods of nineteenth-century Haitian poetry harken back to the Haitian Revolution, that singular and unprecedented monumental event which still captures the imagination and incites interrogation. “Where, then is the truth of Haiti?” is symptomatic of the questions posed by Haitians and non-Haitians alike, in the aftermath of the revolution, on the eve of the centennial, and during bicentennial celebrations.³²³ In the nineteenth century, as in the twentieth and twenty-first, Haiti finds itself in the shadow of its revolution, the one which Trouillot noted, and as I quoted in my introduction, had expressed itself largely through its *deeds*. Perhaps this inability to live up to this event in writing, to express its significance, to articulate its “unthinkability,” is why a writer like de Vastey laments being reduced to the pen in light of Haiti’s past military achievements, or why Massillon Coicou regrets not having fought with the revolutionary soldiers he lauds in his poetry.³²⁴ In spite of the obstacles examined in this study, Ardouin, Nau, Durand, and Coicou, all chose to write, and it is their *poetry* which so aptly captures the aspirations, ambivalence, clairvoyance, and transcendence of nineteenth-century Haitian thought.

It goes without saying that there is no one truth of Haiti any more than there is one truth of any other nation. Moreover, in the course of writing this dissertation, investigating each literary period and uncovering further texts, I came to see that each subject of study could indeed have been expanded into subsequent chapters in its own right, and that many other poems and poets could also have been considered. This study thus represents a compromise between giving a survey of the largely unaccounted for nineteenth-century literature in Haiti and a more focused study, on, for example, the Haitian poet Oswald Durand. It remains, however, as stated in the introduction, that poetry’s role in the building of Haiti’s national identity was crucial to this

³²³ Munro and Walcott-Hackshaw x.

³²⁴ Coicou, *Poésies Nationales*, 67

newly emerging state, and it is nothing short of a paradox that such fundamental texts continue to be overlooked two hundred years after Haitian independence. In spite of an inevitable incompleteness, one central focus of this study has been to address this paradox and rectify what has long been a misunderstanding about the value of Haiti's nineteenth-century poetry.

Finally, in the year of the bicentennial and beyond, as in the nineteenth century, the notion of *failure* also haunts Haitians and non-Haitians alike. This was especially acute during the events of 2004 which culminated in Aristide's exile and has remained unchanged four years later as the United Nations forces are still largely in charge of the country. If there is a purported failure, then it is all the more paramount to examine Haiti's beginnings and its fundamental rapport with Western powers. This includes reading Haitian literature and attempting to understand how Haiti's earliest intellectuals articulated their perceptions. For the purposes of my study, this means noting the ways in which Haitian poets express the ambitions and frailties inherent in early Haitian nationalism and viewing poetry as a noble and deliberate practice from which to convey the complexities of a national project. For all these reasons and more, Haitian literature in the nineteenth century can in no way be relegated to blind imitation of French trends or reduced to a mere prelude to the somehow more authentic literary expressions in the twentieth century. It is its own invaluable project, a series of national projects, in its own right, which deserves more prominent consideration in the study of world literatures.

POEMS BY CORIOLAN ARDOUIN AND IGNACE NAU

A.1 POEMS BY CORIOLAN ARDOUIN

The poems by Ardouin were taken from his 1881 collection *Poésies* published by Ethéart in Port-au-Prince, 1881.

A IGNACE NAU

I.

Mon ami. quand l'orage gronde,
Quand l'éclair éblouit nos yeux
Et qu'une obscurité profonde
Confond la terre avec les cieux,
Sous le nuage qui les voile
Il ne scintille aucune étoile.
Et les oiseaux n'ont point de voix!
La foudre éclate dans les bois!

II.

Ami! quand l'ouragan soulève
Les flots écumeux de la mer,
Et qu'ils s'élancent sur la grève
Ou volent se briser dans l'air,
Tant que n'a cessé la tourmente,
Jamais la gondole riante,
Au bruit des rames n'a glissé
Sur l'Océan bouleversé.

III.

Ah! lorsque la douleur comme un cancer nous ronge,
Quand le dard des soucis, hélas! dans nos cœurs plonge,
Et que notre avenir en un pâle lointain
S'obscurcit à nos yeux où vacille incertain,
Attendons qu'il nous luise un rayon d'espérance,
Et poètes, souffrons, dans l'ombre et le silence!

A UN AMI

La foule est insensible au vieux toit qui s'écroule,
A l'oiseau qui s'envole, au murmure de l'eau,
Et pour elle le monde est toujours assez beau;
Mais nous qui ne brûlons que de la pure flamme,
Mon ami, notre monde est le monde de l'âme;
Tout n'est que vanités, que misères et douleurs;
Le cœur de l'homme juste est un vase de pleurs.

LES BETJOUANNES

I.

LA DANSE

Comme une fille demi nue
Laisse les ondes d'un bassin
La lune que voile une nue
Laisse l'océan indien

Joyeuse la mer sur la grève
Vient soupirer avec amour;
Le pêcheur en sa barque rêve
A ses gains ou pertes du jour.

Au loin les brunes Amirantes
Avec leurs sandales, leurs dattiers,
Brillent sur les eaux murmurantes
Ainsi que l'île des palmiers.

Spectacle ravissant! Nombreuses
Comme les étoiles des cieux,
Les Betjouannes gracieuses
Dansent à fasciner les yeux!

Voyez à l'éclat de la lune,
Etinceler leurs bracelets;
Oh! qu'elles sont belles chacune!
Admirez-les, admirez-les!

Les sons du tambour retentissent
Et vont dans la forêt bien loin
Se perdre; les bois rugissent
Aux alentours: mais c'est en vain.

La Betjouanne se balance,

Recule, vient, recule encor,
Mais cette fois elle s'élance
Et plane au-dessus du Sotor;

Et les mains battent en cadence.
Et mille harmonieuses voix,
Douce musique de la danse,
Se prolongent au fond des bois.

Dancez, jeunes filles d'Afrique!
Tandis que vous chantez en chœur.
Dancez, la danse est poétique.
La danse est l'hydromel du cœur.

II.

CHANT DE MINORA

« C'est le son du tambour, dit-elle.
« Que m'importe à moi le tambour,
« Qu'importe à la lionne une ombre fraîche et belle
« Si le lion n'est alentour!

« Apprends moi, mon fleuve limpide
« Apprends-moi, mon bleu Koûranna
« Sous quels cieux ton onde rapide
« A vu l'amant de Minora.

« Il est parti malgré mes larmes
« Il est parti son arc en main;
« A-t-il trouvé la mort? A-t-il trouvé des charmes
« Ingrat! sur quelque sol lointain?

« Désormais, errante et pensive
« J'irai m'exiler au désert.
« Le malheur m'a touché et pauvre sensitive
« Je ferme mes feuilles à l'air!

« Apprends-moi mon fleuve limpide
« Apprend-moi mon bleu Koûranna
« Sous quels cieux ton onde rapide
« A vu l'amant de Minora. »

Puis suivant du regard le fleuve dans la plaine
Elle contemple encor son cours majestueux.

Lui si calme et si bleu, lui dont l'onde sereine
A vu tant de climats, passé sous tant de cieux.

III.

LE BAIN

Baignons-nous! baignons-nous, dit l'une,
Et toutes ont dit: baignons-nous!
Les feux paisibles de la lune
En se mêlant aux flots, rendent les flots plus doux.

Et c'est Minora la dernière
Qui laisse tomber de ses reins le beau santal,
Comme l'astre des nuits, reine brillante et pure,
Attend que chaque étoile ait montré sa lumière
Pour faire luire au ciel son globe de cristal.

Le Koûranna gémit d'ivresse
En entendant glisser sur ses ondes d'argent,
Ces vierges que dans sa vieillesse
Il ose encore aimer comme aime un jeune amant.

Le nénuphar et les mimoses,
Etendant des deux bords leurs guirlandes de fleurs
Se confondent avec ces roses

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Mais tandis que nageant ainsi qu'une Syrène
La Betjouanne fend les flots,
S'y plonge et laisse à peine
Balancer son corps sur les eaux,

Un bruit lointain s'élève.
Il s'éteint. Est-ce un rêve?
Le bruit s'élève encore et de nouveau se perd!
La Betjouanne timide
Abandonna toute humide
Le fleuve qui s'en va plus limpide et plus clair.

IV.

LES BOCHISMENS.

Fuyez, filles tendres,
Fuyez de toutes parts!
Les Bochismens avides
S'élancent. Leurs regards
Sont des regards d'hyènes,
Ils viennent vagabonds,
Par les chemins de plaine,
Par les chemins de monts!
Tout en eux est farouche.
De misérables peaux
Les couvrent.....

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Ils bondissent de joie
Quand par hasard leurs yeux
Tombent sur quelque proie.

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D'une ivresse infernale
Tout leur être est saisi
Lorsque du sang coule
Colorant leurs cheveux,
Ces barbares en foule
Mêlent des cris affreux
Aux cris d'une victime,
Singeant ses mouvements,
Et conviant aux crimes
Tous leurs petits enfants

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La Betjouanne écoute: Un bruit lointain s'élève
Encore et retentit. Ce bruit était-ce un rêve
Ou le simoun impur qui tournoyait dans l'air,
En vain Minora fuit et dans le bois se perd:

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Et comme sous son aile, un vautour brise et ploie
Le cœur frêle et blanc du ramier,
Les cruels Bochismens en ont fait une proie

Qu'ils destinent au négrier.

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Adieu, les nuits d'ivresse!
Adieu, son du tambour,
Récits de la vieillesse
A la chute du jour,
Promenade rêveuse
Le long du fleuve bleu
Et la tonnelle heureuse
Et le culte du Dieu
Qu'adorait leur jeunesse
Dans les bois d'alentour!
Adieu, les nuits d'ivresse,
Adieu, son du tambour!

V.

LE DÉPART DU NÉGRIER

Le vent soufflait, quelques nuages
Empourprés des feux du soleil,
Miraient leurs bouillantes images
Dans les replis du flot vermeil.
On les embarque pèle mèle;
Le négrier, immense oiseau,
Leur ouvre une serre cruelle,
Et les ravît à leur berceau!

L'une, le front sur le cordage
Répand des larmes tristement;
L'autre de l'alcyon qui nage
Ecoute le gémissement,
L'une sourit dans un doux rêve,
Se réveille et soupire encor,
Toutes en regardant la grève
Demandent son aile au Condor.

Minora, quel exil pour ton cœur et ton âge!
Son œil réfléchissait le mobile ravage:
Elle était sur la proue: on dirait à la voir,
Toute belle, et des pleurs coulant sur son visage,

Cet ange qui nous vient dans nos rêves du soir.

C'en est fait! le navire
Sillonne au loin les mers;
Sa quille entend l'eau bruire
Et ses matelots fiers
Aiment sa voile blanche
Qui dans les airs s'étend
Et son grand mât qui penche
Sous le souffle du vent.
Car à la nef qu'importe
La rive qui l'attend;
Insensible elle porte
Et l'esclave et le blanc!

FLORANNA LA FIANCÉE

I.

Anacaona, la Reine,
Voyant que le ciel est pur,
Q'un souffle berce la plaine,
Que la lune dans l'azur
Se perd, voyant sur la grève
La mer que nul vent soulève
Mourir tranquille et sans voix;
Elle appelle ses compagnes.
Les roses de ses campagnes,
Les colombes de ses bois!
Elles viennent sur la mousse
Formant un cercle de sœurs;
Chacune est naïve et douce,
Et toutes, brillantes fleurs
Que perle une aurore humide
Regardent d'un œil timide
La Reine Anacaona;
Soir voluptueux! les brises
Des senteurs les plus exquis
Parfument Xaragoa!

II.

Innocence et beauté! –Toutes à la peau brune,

Luisante comme l'or à l'éclat de la lune!
Moins fraîche est la rosée, et moins pur est le miel
Moins chaste, la clarté des étoiles du ciel!
Floranna, la plus jeune et la plus ingénue.
Laisse voir sur ses traits son âme toute nue;
Car la vierge rougit d'ivresse et de pudeur,
Car les pulsations de son candide cœur,
Disent que Floranna, d'une douce pensée,
Comme l'onde des mers, cette nuit est bercée.
Des roses, des jasmins embaument ses cheveux,
Et de même qu'on voit sur un lac aux flots bleus,
S'incliner mollement les longs rameaux du saule,
Sa chevelure ainsi flotte sur son épaule!
Oh! chez elle pourquoi cette molle langueur,
Ces craintes, et ce front penché comme une fleur,
Que la brise toucha de son aile amoureuse?
Oh! c'est que Floranna, la fiancée heureuse,
Demain verra briller le jour de son hymen,
De là, ces battements précipités du sein,
Et ce regard voilé qui se lève et qui tombe,
Et cette rêverie où son âme succombe!
Quand elle dormira, mille songes dorés
Lui montreront la fête, et les guerriers parés,
Et ses joyeuses sœurs, abeilles des allées,
Lui composant un lit de ce que les vallées,
Les plaines ou les monts ont de parfums exquis
Pour embaumer l'azur et la brise des nuits,
Oh! qu'un ange debout la contemple et la veille!
Qu'elle rêve en silence, et qu'elle se réveille
A la voix des oiseaux chantant l'aube du jour,
Heureuse ainsi, vivant de rosée et d'amour!

LE PONT ROUGE

I.

C'est là qu'il est tombé dans toute sa puissance
Celui dont le bras fort conquiert l'Indépendance!
Que lui faisaient à lui sa gloire et son grand nom?
Sous son pied d'Empereur il foula cette gloire,
Et du sang fraternel il a taché l'histoire
De notre Révolution!

Pourtant il était beau, quand tirant nu son glaive,

Il s'écria: ton jour, ô liberté, se lève!
Cri de lion qui fit tressaillir les déserts!
Cri sublime! Et soudain les vils troupeaux d'esclaves
Deviennent des guerriers qui brisent les entraves
En s'armant de leurs propres fers!

II.

Le blanc disait: « Toussaint expire!
« L'aigle est tombé dans nos filets!
« Rage impuissante: vain délire!
« Ils redeviendront nos sujets!

« Et nous rirons de leur défaite
« De leur orgueil, de leur espoir!
« La liberté n'était point faite
« Pour l'homme qui porte un front noir.»

III.

Dessalines apparut superbe, grand, immense!
Lui même les pendit à l'ignoble potence,
Q l'élevèrent pour nous leurs criminelles mains!
C'était pitié de voir la terreur dans leurs âmes!
Pâles, on les prenait sous des habits de femmes,
Et leurs têtes tombaient à paver les chemins!

Oh! s'il voulut détruire après son propre ouvrage.
Si contre des écueils sa barque fit naufrage
Et s'il s'ensevelit sous un triste linceul.
C'est qu'il faut que d'un ciel la clarté se ternisse.
Que le flot se mêlant au sable se brunisse,
C'est que la pure gloire appartient à Dieu seul.

MOI-MÊME

Pauvre jeune homme âgé de vingt-un ans à peine,
Je suis déjà trop vieux. Oui, l'existence humaine
Est bien nue à mes yeux.
Pas une île de fleurs dans cette mer immense!
Pas une étoile d'or qui la nuit se balance.
Au dôme de mes cieux!

Désert sans oasis! campagne sans verdure!
Hélas! c'est le simoun, vent à l'haleine impure,
Non la brise du soir!

C'est le cri du lion, non la voix de la femme,
Non des concerts d'oiseaux, qui remplissent mon âme
D'harmonie et d'espoir!

Moi, j'ai le sort de ceux qu'on voit sur cette terre,
Traîner de tristes jours, vrais boulets de galère
Jusques à leur tombeau.
Car tu me réprouvas, mon juge, ô Providence,
Car un papillon noir, le jour de ma naissance,
Posa sur mon berceau.

Le démon tend mes nuits d'un voile de ténèbres!
Si je rêve, en rêvant j'entends des glas funèbres
Ou les soupirs d'un mort!
Un ange ne vient pas me bercer et me dire
Ces paroles du ciel qui me feraient sourire
Comme l'enfant qui dort!

Non, de tout cela rien! Vivre ou mourir, qu'importe
Vivre jusques au jour où la tombe l'emporte,
Jusqu'à ce que le cœur
Plonge sans remonter et se noie et s'abîme,
Alors c'est le repos éternel et sublime,
Alors, c'est le bonheur.

A.2 POEMS BY IGNACE NAU

Nau's poems were taken from a variety of sources, including Haitian journals of the 1830s.

DESSALINES

Dessaline!... A ce nom, amis, découvrons-nous!
Je me sens le cœur battre à fléchir les genoux
Et jaillir à ce nom un sang chaud dans mes veines.
Demain, quand le soleil reluira sur nos plaines,
Quand son disque demain ira de ses rayons
Réveiller l'harmonie et l'encens de nos monts,
Qu'au bruit de la fanfare et de l'artillerie
Le peuple saluera le jour de la Patrie,
Suspendez vos plaisirs, recueillez votre cœur,
Songez à nos héros, songez à l'Empereur!

Quand cet aigle africain parut sur nos campagnes
On dit avoir senti tressaillir les montagnes,
Vu ployer leurs sommets comme un noble coursier
Qui fléchit et reçoit son royal écuyer,
Et tout à coup le sol osciller sous les maîtres,
Les repoussant partout comme ennemis et traîtres.
A voir l'aigle promis que longtemps il rêva,
D'un seul cri, d'un seul bond l'esclave se leva,
Et, surprenant l'impie au milieu de ses fêtes,
Rompit son joug de fer contre ses mille têtes.

Et ce peuple nouveau qui d'esclaves naquit,
Fier des libertés que sa force conquit,
Dédaigne de s'asseoir autour des mêmes tables
Pleines encore de vins et de mets délectables,
Cette orgie insultait à ses mille douleurs;
Le vin était son sang et le pain ses sueurs.
- "Purifions le sol des péchés de l'impie",
Dit le peuple, et la torche alluma l'incendie,
Et Jean-Jacques, semblable à quelque esprit de Dieu,
Dicta l'indépendance à la lueur du feu!...

Ecoutez...le canon! La montagne en tressaille

Comme autrefois de joie au son de la bataille!
-Oh! demain le soleil se lèvera plus pur
Et plus majestueux dans sa courbe d'azur!
L'oiseau nous chantera des chants d'amour encore,
La voix de nos forêts redeviendra sonore,
Et nos fleuves taris jailliront en torrents,
Et nos lacs rouleront des flots plus transparents,
Et toi, peuple héroïque, et toi, mon beau génie,
Demain vous saluerez une ère d'harmonie!...

PENSEES DU SOIR

En mer sur le grand Casimir: Mai 1830.

Calme, calme toujours, retiens ton souffle, ô vent,
Vent qui nous vient de l'occident
Dors, dors sur la vague légère,
Tu m'emportes trop vite à la terre étrangère.

Recueillez à présent vos souvenirs chéris
O mon âme, et songeons, songeons à mon pays.
Triste comme le ciel sous lequel je voyage
Moi je voudrais rêver, car le rêve soulage,
Oui, rêvons à ces jours dans les champs écoulés.
A ces secrets d'amour à mon cœur révélés
Par tout ce qui respire en leurs forêts profondes,
Aux splendeurs de nos nuits en voluptés fécondes;
Ah! vous ne savez pas ce que c'est que la nuit!
La nuit dans la campagne où l'on n'entend de bruit
Que l'effort des moulins, que les chants de la danse
Et l'accent du tambour, perdus dans la distance,
La mouche bourdonnant autour de pâles fleurs
Dont l'étoile a rempli les corollas de pleurs,
Où l'on a pour parfum les senteurs de la canne
Et du pin dont le pauvre éclaire sa cabane,
L'encens du vanillier et de l'humble oranger
Que vous porte à toute heure un vent pur et léger;
Où l'on voit bien plus haut que la haute montagne
Le firmament d'azur sous lequel la campagne,
Repliant à demi sa ceinture de fleurs
Dont l'haleine du soir a fané les couleurs,
S'endort comme une reine en sa tente dorée,
Pour s'éveiller demain plus belle et plus parée.

- Un soir, voilà quatre ans, par l'ombre du sentier

Je m'en allais, le cœur à l'amour tout entier,
Écoutant ruisseler les cascades lointaines
Et l'atelier chanter ses chansons indigènes.
Annoncer à Marie et la date et le jour
Fixés pour rapprocher et bénir notre amour.
Fille, ô toi qu'entre mille à jamais j'ai choisie
- Pour ajouter, disais-je une vie à ma vie,
Pour créer d'un seul mot un ciel à mon bonheur,
Bientôt nous marcherons à l'autel du Seigneur...
Elle baissa son front tour-à-tour rouge et pâle.
D'amour et de pudeur son âme virginale
Peignit dans ses yeux noirs un éclair de gaieté;
Puis soupirant de honte et d'incrédulité
S'égara vaguement de pensée en pensée.
Bientôt, m'écriais-je, oui, demain ma fiancée!
Oh! laisse aller ton cœur aux rêves des plaisirs,
Laisse errer tes pensées au gré de tes désirs!
Déjà ta jeune sœur a tressé la couronne
Que ma main posera sur ton front qui rayonne,
Voici l'anneau qu'un prêtre à ton doigt va bénir
Portant nos noms que nul ne pourra désunir,
Quoi! rien autour de toi ne t'annonce cette heure?
Le vent ne te dit rien? L'oiseau sur ta demeure,
Marie, a-t-il jamais mieux chanté qu'à présent?
Viens, accours vers l'onde où tes pas bien souvent
Te mènent chaque soir pour mirer ta coiffure;
Son azur te dira combien ta chevelure
Brille d'un jais plus beau sous ces fleurs du matin
Dont je ne sais quel souffle a raminé le teint.
-Comme un lac endormi qui tressaille et se lève
Sous le vent du matin pour chanter sur la grève,
A ta voix, cher amour, mon cœur se lève en moi
Pour murmurer des chants d'espérance et de foi.
Ils n'ont pas, les jasmins dans leurs blanches corolles,
Plus de parfum que toi dans tes douces paroles;
Le vent chantant le soir si plaintif dans le bois,
N'a pas de son plus pur que le son de ta voix.

D'où me vient cette joie en laissant mon vieux père,
Son humble toit de chaume et ma sœur et mon frère?
Oh! d'où vient que j'appelle ainsi de tous mes vœux
Ce lendemain, cette heure et de pleurs et d'ateliers?

Qu'ils me pardonnent donc cet amour dont je t'aime
Ma vie est impossible aujourd'hui, sans toi-même,
Comme le ciel sans Dieu!...Bientôt c'est le bonheur!

O merci! ma prière ira mieux au Seigneur!...
Elle était à genoux, et le son angélique
De sa voix me venait ainsi qu'une musique
Et son front virginal, relevé vers les cieux
M'apparaissait brillant sous ses flots de cheveux.
Que je voudrais ouïr sa voix dont je raffole
Me parler à présent son langage créole!
Qu'importe si la mer, de plus fort en plus fort
Vient briser en grondant contre le haut sa bord;
Qu'importe si, la nuit, nul astre ne s'allume
Du dôme de ce ciel toujours couvert de brume;
Si l'alcyon souvent prédit l'orage aux flots
Et jette la pâleur au front des matelots!...
Mon Dieu! si je l'avais à mes côtés assise,
Livrant sa chevelure au souffle de la brise.
Sa bouche à mes baisers et ses yeux à mes yeux...
Non, je n'envierais? plus d'autre bonheur aux cieux!
Notre enfant sur mon cœur, mon front sur son épaule,
Ah! je m'endormirais au son de sa parole!...
S'il est doux de s'asseoir à son humble foyer
En un cercle d'amis prompts à vous égayer,
Combien il est plus doux d'être aux pieds de sa femme
De bercer son enfant, cette âme de son âme
Sur ses genoux, le soir, et de voir dans ses yeux
Percer tout le bonheur qu'il éprouve, joyeux
De se trouver toujours entre ceux qui l'adorent,
De voir sous vos baisers des roses qui colorant,
Ses deux lèvres d'enfant, et d'entendre parfois
Son rire se mêler au bruit de votre voix...
Quel bonheur infini, que le bonheur d'un père!
Sa femme et ses enfants, c'est le ciel et la terre

Calme, calme toujours, retiens ton souffle, ô vent,
Vent qui nous vient de l'occident,
Dors, dors sur la vague légère,
Tu m'emportes trop vite à la terre étrangère...

BASSES-PYRENEES

Comment donc ai-je fait pour vous abandonner?
Quel besoin, quel esprit a donc pu m'entraîner
Loin de vous, mes foyers, loin de vous, mes campagnes?
Quel attrait si puissant peut-elle avoir, la mer,
La mer sans frein, la mer qui se dresse dans l'air

Plus haut que les hautes montagnes?

C'est que mon jeune front devint pâle et bien lourd,
Je sentis mes genoux faiblir de jour en jour,
J'éprouvai je ne sais quel malaise dans l'âme,
Et je n'eus plus d'audace à courir mon cheval.
Tout me fit mal au cœur, fête, musique et bal
Et jusqu'à l'amour de la femme!

Quelle épreuve, Mon Dieu! Non, vous ne savez pas
Ce qu'il coûte de pleurs, ce qu'il faut de combats
Pour s'arracher enfin au sol de la patrie!
Mon pied à l'escalier du navire hésita
Et je me tins le cœur afin qu'il n'éclatât
En quittant sa terre chérie!

Dans mes veilles, la nuit, j'entendais bien souvent
Des voix d'oiseaux monter à l'unisson du vent
Leurs accords prolongés, chant de triste présage;
Et souvent, quand le ciel d'un éclair s'allumait,
Je voyais sur les flots dont la crête écumait
Passer leur troupe dans l'orage.

Ils m'ont épouvanté! Dans ces moments de deuil
Où chaque heure nouvelle en un commun cercueil
Allait nous abîmer loin de notre patrie,
Hélas! combien de fois mon cœur n'a-t-il pleuré,
Vous, mes oiseaux, mes champs, mon firmament doré.
Et surtout toi-même, ô Marie!

De vos gazouillements vous berciez mes ennuis,
De vos brises toujours vous embaumiez mes nuits,
Vous reposiez mes yeux de vos blanches lumières,
Et toi, toi que je sens, ombre que j'aperçois
Et veux étreindre en vain, tes chants ont bien des fois
Dans le sommeil clos mes paupières!

Et me voilà jeté, moi, triste passager,
Sans amour, sans amis, sur un sol étranger,
Attendant du retour l'heure lente et tardive.
Ce ciel est trop désert, ce soleil sans rayon,
Ces champs, de mon pays, là-bas sous l'horizon,
N'ont point la nature si vive.

Qu'il est resplendissant et d'azur et de feu
Le ciel de ma patrie, et si vaste et si bleu!

Puis, quand notre soleil voyage dans l'espace
Et, de ses rayons d'or remplit l'immensité,
Quel œil d'aigle oserait fixer la majesté
De son orbe qui roule et passe!

S'ILS SAVENT LES OISEAUX

S'ils savent, les oiseaux, ce que c'est que la vie,
S'ils ont le sentiment de la joie infinie,
S'ils sont les messagers ou les bardes du ciel
Qui viennent nous chanter le poème éternel,
Si l'arbre, si la fleur, si l'eau de la prairie,
Si l'haleine des vents leur gardent des douceurs
Et des enivrements inconnus à nos cœurs...
Alors, mais non sans vous, je voudrais être oiseau
Pour suspendre mon nid au rebord du coteau...
Rêvons, rêvons au bruit de ces chants du moulin,
Dont la brise des nuits nous porte le refrain,
Écoutons soupirer l'écluse des savanes
Et palpiter au vent l'oranger et les cannes
C'est un bonheur aussi de rêver au bonheur!

Feuilleton

POÉSIES

AU GÉNIE DE LA PATRIE

Qu'ils sont délicieux tes jours de liberté!
Comme il est pur ton ciel, firmament enchanté
Où le plus beau soleil du haut de sa coupole
Couronne nos cités d'une ardente auréole
Et promet l'abondance et la paix à nos champs!
Merci! femme aux yeux noirs, toi, l'objet de mes chants,
Merci, pour ces bienfaits! – cher et mâle Génie
Dont le sein allaita ces fils de la Patrie
Héros aux bras de fer dont jamais les grands cœurs
N'ont tressailli de crainte aux canons destructeurs,

C'est à toi maintenant que s'attache ma Muse,
Elle que la douleur aujourd'hui désabuse!
Ma pensée erre en vain de désir en désir,
Mon cœur n'a plus de cœur où trouver un soupir;
J'ai des rêves brûlants, des songes où mon âme

Doute presque du ciel à cause de la femme.
Ah! j'ai souffert assez; j'ai le cœur labouré
Et j'ai le front meurtri comme ton sein sacré
Lorsque tes fils, luttant contre la tyrannie.
Tombaient en te nommant dans leur triste agonie.

Oh! oui; j'ai bien souffert de la femme que Dieu
Créa pour nous aimer toujours en ce bas lieu!
La femme! hélas! – vois-tu l'oiseau dans ses caprices
Qui chante et va chercher de nouvelles délices
En ses migrations de climats en climats
Oubliant les gazons qu'hier encor ses pas
Ont foulés, l'atmosphère où ses ailes soyeuse
Ont dans ses jeux tracé des spirales joyeuses?
C'est ainsi qu'elle fuit en vous laissant le cœur
Vide d'affections, incrédule au bonheur.

Et c'est le doute alors qui vient poser son prisme
Entre le monde et vous; et puis le Fatalisme
Vous berce entre le ciel et l'aveugle Destin,
Il ébranle le cœur et quand la foi s'éteint...
Oh! quelle perspective! où donc est l'espérance?
Cependant, à travers tant d'écueils, de souffrance,
Malheur, cent fois malheur à qui doute de Dieu!
Mes rêves, mes pensées, sont des charbons de feu,
Mon front bout sous leur flamme... oh! hâte-toi Génie;
Oh! viens sauver mon cœur de l'athéisme impie!

Non! j'en jure par toi, d'angoisse et de douleurs
Tu n'accables jamais, *** adoreurs!
Non! non! – et si contr'eux il surgit dans la vie
Quelques hommes méchants, aimant la calomnie,
Envieux de la gloire et du bonheur d'autrui,
Fatigués de croupir dans un monde sans bruit,
Et dont la haine enfin, par la critique infâme,
En ternissant leurs jours les blesse et les diffame,
Quand leurs yeux sont fermés dans la nuit du tombeau,
Alors toi seul, Génie, allumant ton flambeau,

Et voilant ton front triste, et l'âme désolée,
Tu viens t'agenouiller seul à leur mausolée!
Sur tes lèvres leurs noms n'ont plus rien de mortel
Et leur cher souvenir, ainsi qu'un arc-en-ciel,
Brille au fond de ton cœur, et tu transmets leur gloire
Et, leurs humbles vertus au creuset de l'histoire.
Puis, un jour la Patrie, oubliant leurs malheurs,

Eternise leurs noms, environne d'honneurs
Le seul asile enfin où leur triste poussière
A trouvé la justice et la paix sur la terre.

Réveille-toi, Génie, et ranime les cœurs
De tes jeunes enfants croupis dans les langueurs
D'un coupable repos où la honte et le vice,
Où la mollesse, hélas! font naître l'injustice
Et germer dans leur sein la vile lâcheté,
La triste ingratitude au regard déhonté!
Etouffe dans leurs cœurs l'orgueil et l'égoïsme,
Ramène leurs pensers au saint patriotisme,
Pour qu'aux jours de danger surgis à l'horizon
La nation s'ébranle et marche à l'unisson!

Et toi, le cœur rempli d'extases et de joie,
Tu guideras leurs pas dans cette immense vole
Où l'humanité marche et poursuit son destin
Jusqu'à cet horizon dont Dieu seul est la fin.
Et puis tu verseras dans le sein de nos femmes
La constance et l'amour, céleste encens des âmes,
Surtout le souvenir trop sacré des bienfaits...
O songes! ô désirs d'union et de paix!
N'est-il pas tems d'éclore? et jusqu'à quand, Génie,
Réaliseras-tu ces rêves d'harmonie?

Voici. – Moi, j'eus hier de douces visions
Où mon cœur un instant bercé d'illusions,
Pressentit les beaux jours promis à ma Patrie.
-- Entouré dans le ciel d'une foule chérie
De héros, compagnons de ses premiers combats,
Intrépides martyrs, attachés à ses pas.
De son mol édredon d'azur et de nuage
Pétion, arrêtant ses regards sur la plage
Où son peuple vainqueur erre libre aujourd'hui
Et projette bien loin son éclat et son bruit,

Dit: -- "bénis soient mes fils et toi, leur terre sainte
"Que mes pas ont foulée, où j'ai bu mon absinthe,
"Où j'ai laissé ma gloire et mon nom immortel
"Et bâti seul une aire à mon peuple éternel.
"Ma couvée est éclosée aujourd'hui pour ma gloire!
"Oh! mon Dieu, soutenez dans l'air son aile noire
"Trop faible maintenant pour franchir d'un essor
"Et d'un vol assuré l'espace que le sort
"A mis entr'elle, hélas! et ces peuples du monde

“Resplendissants d’éclat et de gloire profonde.

“Prends ton casque, ô Génie, où flotte un noir cimier
“Plus noble que la flèche au front de mon Palmier,
“Va t’asseoir sur les pics de nos vertes montagnes,
“Et, de tes regards d’aigle embrassant nos campagnes
‘Et l’immense archipel, du haut de tes gradins
“Veillent sur nos enfant et leurs jeunes destins;
“Que ton front couronné des foudres de l’orage,
“Superbe et menaçant, éloigne du rivage
“Où dorment nos cités la guerre et le fléau,
“Et laisse croître en paix le peuple en son berceau.”

Je le vis ceindre alors ton front d’une auréole
Et ses mains rattacher en plis sur ton épaule
L’étendard rouge et bleu qu’il suivait aux combats:
Je vis s’agenouiller à tes pieds ses soldats,
Et, tes puissantes mains sur leurs fronts ***,
Comme aux champs on voit l’aube épandre ses rosées
Sur ces jeunes martyrs des révolutions
Tes lèvres murmurer des bénédictions;
Puis, d’un vol tu revins vers la terre bénie
Que ton cœur lui promit de veiller, ô Génie!

*** : Text not readable

A L’AN 1838

Te voilà donc passé comme ceux que tes jours
Ont enfin dans la tombe entraînés pour toujours;
An maudit, le voilà, semblable à tes victimes.
Disparu pour jamais au fond de ces abîmes
D’où plus rien ne remonte au monde des humains.
Espoir, plaisir, bonheur s’effacent sous tes mains.
Toutes nos voluptés tombent l’une après l’une.
Tu n’as rien respecté, pas même l’infortune!

Passe, passe, pour moi je ne puis te bénir!
Je voudrais oublier jusqu’à ton souvenir;
Car tes pas sur mon front ont laissé leurs empreintes
Et mon cœur brûle encor de tes chaudes étreintes.
Chaque heure de tes jours, chacun de tes moments
Ont pour moi soulevé bien plus d’événements
Qu’un navire de flots sous sa lourde carène,
Ou qu’un char de poussière et de bruit dans l’arène.

Ah! si j'en crois le ciel, ce nouvel an éclore
Ne porte comme toi que l'orage en ses flots.
Je regarde, et le jour n'est qu'un soupir de l'aube;
A peine si la nuit dans les plis de sa robe
Montre un astre perdu dans un espace obscur
Où mon œil plonge et cherche en vain un pan d'azur.
Et dans les airs il souffle une haleine de glace.
Est-il donc un malheur plus grand qui nous menace?

Cependant bénissons et l'aurore et la nuit
Du jour de l'an si beau de fanfare et de bruit!
Oh! quel jour pour nos cœurs et quel jour pour l'histoire!
Quel souvenir brûlant de bonheur et de gloire!
Vous tous que l'espérance et que l'amour sacré
Rassemblent cette année eu leur cercle doré
Unissez vos accords aux soupirs de la terre
Pour rendre au ciel sa part de joie et de prière!

APPENDIX B

POEMS BY OSWALD DURAND

All of Durand's poems are taken from his 1896 collection, *Rires et Pleurs*.

DÉDICACE d'il y a vingt-cinq ans

A M. Demesvar-Delorme, à Paris.

Votre élève d'hier, aujourd'hui vous convie
A faire un bon accueil à ses Rires et Pleurs;
A les prendre en pitié, quoique dans votre vie,
Les rires aient souvent fui devant les douleurs.

J'ai chanté nos oiseaux, nos fertiles campagnes,
Et les grappes de fruits courbant nos bananiers,
Et le campêche en fleurs parfumant nos montagnes,
Et les grands éventails de nos verts lataniers.

J'ai chanté notre plage où la vague se brise
Sur les pieds tortueux du raisinier des mers;
Nos sveltes cocotiers, qui prêtent à la brise
Des sons purs qu'elle mêle au bruit des flots amers.

Puis, la joie et l'amour, aux radieux visages,
Avant devant mes yeux fait luire leur beauté,
Je faillis oublier – nous sommes si peu sages! –
Qu'il fallait s'éveiller dans la réalité.

A quel autre qu'à vous dédirais-je ce livre,

Oiseau de notre sphère, à votre souffle éclos?
Ces pages qu'au lecteur insouciant je livre,
Comme le ruisseau aux mers livre ses flots?

A quel autre qu'à vous qui fûtes notre maître,
Et, plus tard, notre guide et notre conseiller,
A quel autre qu'à vous qui les avez fait naître,
Dédierais-je ces vers que d'autres vont railler?

Sur la plage où du flot on suit les folles danses,
Quand vous alliez rêver un volume à la main,
Du chantre de Milly les douces "Confidences"
Vous inspiraient des chants redits le lendemain.

Et, tandis qu'à vingt ans, en lisant Lamartine,
Dans votre cœur, pour lui, naissait l'amour sacré,
Malgré nos dix printemps, dans notre âme enfantine,
Votre nom grandissait de prestige entouré.

Enfant, nous écoutions, l'âme sereine et gaie,
En sons harmonieux votre cœur s'épancher;
Ces vers que, maintenant, notre lèvres bégaie.
Pour vous dire merci, vont bien loin vous chercher.

Journaliste, tribun, puis chantre de nos gloires:
Ignace Nau, Milscent, Boisrond, Coriolan.
Votre nom est resté dans toutes les mémoires,
Tous les cœurs, vers le vôtre, ont pris un noble élan.

Les flots vous poussent loin de la rive chérie,
Mais de nos cœurs, ami, rien ne peut vous bannir.
Je vous offre ce livre, écho de la patrie,
Dont l'exil rend encor plus cher le souvenir.

Ne vous étonnez pas si, jusqu'en cette France
Où votre nef s'endort loin des vents querelleurs,
Compatriote aimé, grandi par la souffrance,
J'ose vous égayer de mes Rires et Pleurs.

Oswald Durand, 1869.

SONNET-PRÉFACE

Ainsi qu'à l'occident, lorsque le soleil pâle
S'amincit par degrés et plonge dans les flots,
Des flocons empourprés, brillant au ciel d'opale,

Y forment un instant de ravissants tableaux;

Mais, plus tard, quand la Nuit aux pieds d'argent étale
Sa robe sur la nef des joyeux matelots,
Ces beaux nuages d'or, pris par l'ombre fatale,
S'éclipsent, envolés aussi vite qu'éclos;

Ainsi les humbles vers de cet humble volume
Où l'inspiration, pour un moment, allume
Un reflet fugitif aux ardentes couleurs,

S'éclipseront demain, L'oubli, cette nuit sombre,
Sur les vers du poète étendra sa grande ombre,
Et nul ne parlera de ses Rires et Pleurs.

LA JALOUSIE

Dans le bleu paradis, ce frais séjour du rêve,
Ève, la belle enfant, curieuse comme Ève,
Se cache aux yeux du Maître, et, trop tard, se repent
D'avoir prêté l'oreille aux propos du serpent.
Pourtant elle sourit, malgré son cœur qui souffre;
C'est qu'il est d'un péché comme de certain gouffre:
On s'y penche avec peur, on y glisse en tremblant,
Tant on craint le remords, au pied sûr quoique lent,
Mais on descend pourtant la spirale du crime,
Et l'on trouve des fleurs au fond du noir abîme.

Ainsi la blonde enfant, cette fleur de l'Éden,
En touchant au doux fruit du céleste jardin,
Sentait que c'était mal; mais, malgré ses alarmes,
Elle avait du péché savouré les doux charmes.

La voici donc heureuse et tremblante à la fois
Auprès de son complice; et, maintenant, le bois
Semble avoir pour eux deux des mystères étranges;
Ils se sentent contents quoiqu'ils ne soient plus anges;
La fleur a des parfums autrefois inconnus;
Malgré la large feuille, ils se trouvent trop nus;
La voix de l'un résonne en douceur infinie;
La femme a les yeux lourds, comme si l'insomnie
Avait posé ses doigts sur ses longs cils soyeux;
Les oiseaux, à présent, ont des chants plus joyeux;
Ève rougit de voir les blanches tourterelles,

Sous la verte feuillée entrelacer leurs ailes;
Le zéphir qui frémit la fait frémir aussi;
C'est alors que de Dieu la voix dit: « Hors d'ici ! »

Ils s'en allèrent donc, l'un, la tête baissée,
Tenant sur le gazon sa paupière fixée,
Comme pour y chercher son bonheur envolé,
Songeant avec douleur au beau ciel étoilé;
L'autre, la femme forte, avec sa voix sonore,
Lui disant: « Nous avons une espérance encore,
« Car, auprès du travail, âcre fruit des douleurs,
« Du sombre enfantement, de la mort et des pleurs,
« Il nous reste l'amour, cette vive étincelle,
« Que nous avons ravie à la flamme éternelle! »

Mais Dieu voulait punir et non pas consoler.
Or, tandis que la femme, avec son doux parler,
Allégeait pour Adam le fardeau de la vie,
Celui-ci caressait une biche asservie
Qui suivait tous ses pas, qui lisait dans ses yeux,
Et s'égayait soudain quand il était joyeux.
Alors Ève sentit que le froid d'une lame
Lui passait dans le cœur et lui traversait l'âme:
« Tu l'aimes plus que moi! » -- dit-elle à son époux,
En lui montrant du doigt la biche aux yeux si doux.

C'est que le Maître, aussi, pensait à l'étincelle
Qu'ils venaient de ravir à la flamme éternelle.
Alors, pour être sûr de la punition,
A côté de l'amour, céleste passion,
Dieu venait de placer, d'un mouvement rapide,
« La sombre Jalousie au teint pâle et livide! »

LA VOIX DE LA PATRIE

A Massillon Coicou.

I.

Quand le palmier, sous le vent qui l'effleure.
Agite ses verts rameaux,
Allons ensemble, ô poète! c'est l'heure
De rêver sous les ormeaux!

A notre esprit, qui plane solitaire
 Dans l'idéal et l'azur,
Qu'importe, ami, cet affreux terre à terre
 --Ce monde où tout est obscur?

Allons rêver! voici l'heure immortelle,
 Le doux soir mystérieux!
Allons chanter avec la cascabelle
 Au babil mélodieux!

Nous préférons à tout ce que le monde
 Appelle félicité,
Les bois touffus où la paix est profonde,
 Où l'oiseau s'est abrité.

II.

--Salut, ô plaines!
O verts gazons!
Fraîches haleines!
Bleus horizons!
Et vous, prairies
Toujours fleuries,
Causons! causons!

Vous, hirondelle,
Ne fuyez pas
A tire d'aile
De nos climats!
Jamais la neige
Ne nous assiège,
Ni les frimas!

III.

Vous, tièdes vents, apportez à la terre
 Les chants que nous murmurons!
Soufflez, zéphyr, haleine salubre!
 Caressez nos jeunes fronts!
Insectes d'or qui voltigez sur l'herbe,
 Nid par la brise agité,
Manguiers fleuris, et toi, palmier superbe,
 Emblème de liberté.

Formez un chœur à nos chants en délire!
 O peuple! écoute à genoux.

Nous t'enseignons aux accents de la lyre!
--Toi, Nature, inspire-nous !

Nous préférons à tout ce que le monde
Appelle félicité,
Les bois touffus où la paix est profonde,
Où l'oiseau s'est abrité...

IV.

Pour la patrie
Et ses douleurs,
Quelle élégie
Dira nos pleurs?
Peux-tu décrire,
O faible lyre,
Tous nos malheurs?

Terre fertile,
Beaux paradis,
Verdoyante île,
Toi qui, jadis,
Subis l'outrage
De l'esclavage,
--Dis-nous, oh! dis!

V.

Qui nous inspirera?... – Sera-ce Dessalines
Dont le hardi courage a chassé l'étranger?
Qui nous légua ton sol et tes vertes collines
Où fleurit en tout temps l'élégant oranger?
Faut-il dire plutôt à l'ogre Bonaparte:
« Qu'as-tu fait de Toussaint, l'immortel précurseur? »
Et, fier républicain de notre jeune Sparte,
Devrons-nous lui lancer notre flèche du Parthe,
Jusqu'au delà du Temps et de la Mort, sa sœur?...

LA VOIX :

-- « Non! mais faites vibrer vos cordes argentines
Sur les hideux tableaux qu'offre notre pays,
Et, racontant à tous nos guerres intestines,
Parlez de ces tyrans des valets obéis !
Ou bien si Juvénal, près de lui vous attire,
Jetez au loin le luth aux sons mélodieux,
Et fouettez jusqu'au sang, du fouet de la satire,

Tous ces vautours, dont l'un, quand l'autre se retire,
Coupe à son tour sa part du sol de nos aïeux!
« Allons! A celui-ci, demandez quel génie
En deux jours a bâti son château somptueux;
A celui-là pourquoi, chaque nuit, l'insomnie
Lui montre une victime au front majestueux.
A cet autre qui vit comme un millionnaire,
Comment économise un si mince employé;
A cet écrivassier qui ne devrait que braire,
Dites tout bas: « Caïn, qu'as-tu fait de ton frère,
Pauvre martyr, hélas! par tes soins fusillé? »

« Interrogez-les tous, dans votre rage sainte!
Demandez au tribun qui singe Mirabeau,
Ce qu'il gagne en votant toujours en cette enceinte,
Pour ses amis d'hier, l'exil et le tombeau!
Et, puisqu'il faut qu'on rie au milieu de ses larmes,
Demandez au Parquet, qui bouffonne et qui mord,
Comment ses attendus et ses vus pleins de charmes,
Devant qui Calino déposerait les armes,
Peuvent toujours conclure à la peine de mort!...

VI.

« Mais quand vos fronts, dont l'un à l'autre touche,
Regardent ensemble au ciel,
Dois-je venir offrir à votre bouche
Un vase si plein de fiel?
Dois-je, ô penseurs épris de poésie,
Changer soudain votre essor,
Et vous montrer votre aile ainsi saisie
Par la main rude du sort?

« Vous qui disiez, prêts à chanter vesprée,
La reine de ce séjour!
Et la campagne, encore diaprée
Des derniers rayons du jour:

« Nous préférons à tout ce que ce monde
« Appelle félicité
« Les bois touffus où la paix est profonde,
« Où l'oiseau s'est abrité! »

Cette voix sombre,
Nous l'écoutions,
Pensifs, dans l'ombre

Où nous étions.
Puis l'Égérie
Cria: « Patrie! »
--Et nous chantions:

--Salut, ô plaines!
O verts gazons!
Tièdes haleines!
Bleus horizons!
Et vous, prairies
Toujours fleuries,
Causons! causons!

A LA VILLE DE SAINT-MARC

« Saint-Marc est une touchante
petite ville de poète, couchée silencieuse et
triste au pied de ses hautes montagnes et qui
rêve en écoutant le murmure des vagues de
sa baie profonde. »
(Delorme)

I.

O ville de poète où la brise est si douce!
Où les fleurs, plus qu'ailleurs, ont un parfum si pur!
Où chantent les saras; où l'on dort sur la mousse,
Afin de contempler un éternel azur!
O baie! il me souvient du ton clair de tes ondes,
Des légers corallins, seuls biens des matelots,
Des vers que je disais sur tes vagues profondes,
Lorsqu'avec Bertita je voguais sur tes flots!
Faut-il que ce beau temps qui me rendait poète
Ne soit plus, ô cité! qu'un lointain souvenir,
Et qu'aujourd'hui, ma lyre à ce point soit muette,
Qu'avant de commencer mes vers doivent finir!

Il me souvient, Saint-Marc, des longues promenades
Que nous faisons à deux, lorsque tombait le jour;
Lorsque les rossignols, brochant leurs sérénades,
Se cachaient aux lueurs de l'astre de l'amour.
Nous laissions loin de nous la radieuse route,
Pour aller, ô beau ciel! sur le pont nous asseoir,
Et regarder la lune illuminant ta voûte
Et mirant son front pâle au limpide miroir.
Il me semblait alors que tes vives étoiles

Avaient pour notre amour des rayons plus brillants,
Et que l'onde, où voguaient quelques lointaines voiles,
Prenait rien que pour nous tes reflets scintillants.

Il me souvient, Saint-Marc, de tes fraîches campagnes
Où nous allions parfois en joyeux *barbacos*;
Elle accourait avec ses rieuses compagnes,
Et leurs douces chansons animaient les échos.
Elle et moi, nous allions dans tes vertes prairies,
Redisant ces aveux qu'on s'est dits mille fois,
Et le vent retenait nos chastes rêveries
Pour aller les conter aux palombes des bois.
Mais de ce temps d'amour, ô ville de poète!
Il ne nous reste plus qu'un lointain souvenir;
Et ma lyre, à présent, est à ce point muette,
Qu'avant de commencer mes vers doivent finir!

Laissons donc ces jours disparaître,
Laissons le bonheur s'envoler!
Qui sait? notre muse, peut-être,
Un jour, voudra nous consoler.
Un jour, ô ville toujours chère!
Tes ruines où court le lierre
Diront mes amours de naguère
A mon cœur vieux avant trente ans.
Le poète aime les lieux sombres,
J'irai m'asseoir sur tes décombres,
Et je croirai revoir les ombres
De ces belles fleurs du vieux temps!

III.

Souvent, dans ma chambre isolée,
Je pense à ces jours tissés d'or;
Ma muse, alors, moins désolée,
De Saint-Marc se souvient encor.
Voici, voici l'onde limpide,
L'esquif à la course rapide
Où dormait d'un sommeil candide
Bertita, l'ange bien-aimé.
Quel est ce souffle? C'est la brise
Caressant la surface grise
Du flot qui doucement se brise
Sur le rivage parfumé.
Ma muse redit la romance
Que chantaient les braves marins.

L'un revue encore à son Hermance,
L'autre espère des jours sereins.
Elle revoit la blanche étoile
Que pas un nuage ne voile,
Et qui dirige l'humble voile
Sur l'océan sombre et houleux.
A ces souvenirs pleins d'ivresse,
Je vois s'envoler ma tristesse
Et ma brune muse caresse
Mon front naguère sourcilleux.

IV.

Ensuite, elle saisit la lyre
Qui dormait depuis si longtemps,
Pour parler dans un long délire
De ces beaux rêves de vingt ans.
Elle revoit la verte plaine
Où du zéphir la fraîche haleine
Venait jusqu'à nous, toute pleine
D'amour et d'enivrant parfum.
Elle chante le doux mystère
De ce rendez-vous solitaire
Où les amants, sur cette terre,
De leurs deux cœurs ne forment qu'un.

V.

S'enivrant par degrés, elle redit ta gloire,
Tes héros rayonnants, ô célèbre cité!
Ceux qui, par leur courage, ont rempli notre histoire
De pages où l'on voit briller la liberté.
Elle évoque ces jours de chaleureuse ivresse
Où l'étranger hautain nous vit rompre nos fers,
Ces jours où, dans les cœurs, une vive allégresse
Nous soulageait des maux que nous avions soufferts.
Ce n'est plus, ce n'est plus la joyeuse colline,
Les rendez-vous charmants sous le ciel toujours bleu...
Ce n'est plus Érato!... –Calliope burine
De grands noms sur l'airain, en des lettres de feu!
Adieu donc, prés fleuris où parfois le poète
S'est assis pour rêver à quelque gai lutin!
Adieu, monts verdoyants que sa muse inquiète
A gravés si souvent pendant le frais matin!
Adieu, baie azurée, où les voiles rapides
Glissaient, sans aucun bruit, au souffle des zéphirs!

Adieu, beau pont de pierre et tes eaux si limpides!
 Adieu! mon luth, pour vous, n'a plus que des soupirs.
 Je chante maintenant la gloire de nos pères,
 Le joug de l'étranger par leurs fers abattu
 Muse, toi qui sais tout, de ces moments prospères.
 Et de tous nos grands noms, réponds: Te souviens-tu?
 S'il t'en souvient, dis-moi cette belle épopée
 Que nos hommes de bronze, au bras fort et puissant,
 On *** autrefois de leur arme trempée
 Dans l'amer désespoir, dans des pleurs et du sang!
 Sans doute qu'ils dormaient, quand ils virent en rêve
 Se pencher sur leur lit un front plein de fierté,
 Une femme, montrant son bras armé d'un glaive,
 Et leur disant tout bas: « Je suis la Liberté! »
 Et, sans doute qu'épris de la grande déesse,
 Ils voulurent la suivre, hélas! jusqu'au trépas,
 --Elle qui leur montrait pour boudoir, pour caresse,
 Le beau champ de bataille et les rudes combats!

VI.

Mais, sais-tu bien, ô pauvre muse,
 Qui ne vibres que pour l'amour,
 Toi dont la douce voix s'amuse
 A célébrer l'éclat du jour,
 Toi qui montes sur la colline
 A l'heure où le soleil décline,
 Pour contempler ton Idaline,
 Ou Bertha, l'ange au front joyeux,
 --Sais-tu bien chanter la victoire?
 De nos héros dire la gloire?
 Pourras-tu mettre à notre histoire
 Une page à brûler les yeux?...
 --Non! Laisse donc ces fronts stoïques
 Que l'esclavage avait courbés!
 Laisse ces villes héroïques
 Où tant de braves sont tombés!
 Et reviens, muse, à la vesprée,
 A l'heure où l'onde est diaprée,
 Et la plaine tout empourprée
 Des feux d'un beau soleil couchant!
 Alors, élève ta voix pure,
 En présence de la nature!
 Commence par un doux murmure,
 Finis par un sublime chant!
 Dis-nous la fraîcheur des pelouses,

Quand les vierges y vont en rond
 S'asseoir, foulant les fleurs jalouses,
 Et, devant nous, baissant le front,
 Dis-nous le charme de l'enfance,
 Ces chérubins qu'un rien offense,
 A qui les mères font défense
 De braver le soleil d'été.
 Sur la lyre, lorsque tu poses
 Tes doigts si frêles et si roses,
 Chante, bonne muse, trois choses:
 --Jeunesse, innocence, beauté!
 Prends ton luth pour parler encore
 Des pleurs qui fécondent les cœurs;
 Les fronts que le douleur décore
 Ne gardent pas de plis moqueurs.
 Les pleurs, où l'œil sombre se noie,
 N'empêchent pas que l'esprit voie;
 Ils inspirent mieux que la joie:
 --Nul n'est poète sans un pleur.
 Tous les grands hommes de génie
 One eu cette larme bénie,
 Et Musset dit que l'harmonie
 Est la fille de la douleur.

VII.

Mais les vieux souvenirs ressemblent à ces îles
 Qu'on ne peut aborder sans danger pour ses jours,
 Et dont l'aspect, pourtant, semble offrir des asiles
 Où l'homme, loin du bruit, se plairait pour toujours.
 On s'embarque et, joyeux, on voit s'enfuir la rive;
 On s'enivre en pensant à la verte oasis;
 On rit, on est content; mais, hélas! on arrive,
 Et la joie a fait place aux douloureux soucis.
 Pas un ruisseau plaintif pour vous offrir son onde!
 Cet ombrage si frais vient des mancenilliers;
 Dans la plaine, là-bas, la sueur vous inonde
 Et les graviers du sol vous déchirent les pieds!
 Tel, dans la grande baie, aux vagues cadencées,
 Sur un esquif léger ballotté par les vents,
 Je laissais aujourd'hui mes lointaines pensées
 Voyager au pays des rêves décevants.
 Ne vois-je pas déjà ces beaux lieux où ma lyre
 Avait trouvé l'amour qui la faisait vibrer?
 Je vais encor chanter mon amoureux délire...
 --Éole, ne dis pas à ma nef de sombrer!...

J'arrive à l'heure pure où les brises nocturnes
 Se parfument aux fleurs qui s'entr'ouvrent le soir...
 Mais ma muse, à marcher, use en vain ses cothurnes,
 Et, le regard humide, elle revient s'asseoir.
 « Quoi! » --dit-elle,-- « où sont donc ces joyeuses
 « Ces instants où mes vers étaient mélodieux, [ivresses,
 « Où l'inspiration, me couvrant de caresses,
 « Me disait de parler le langage des dieux?
 « Voici le pont de pierre, --où donc la blanche lune
 « Qui se mirait dans l'onde, un soir, pour me charmer?
 « Où donc la jeune fille et ses doux serments? --L'une
 « Se cache dans les cieux, l'autre a cessé! d'aimer.
 « Ces beaux temps ne sont plus, ô mon pauvre poète!
 « Il ne m'en reste plus qu'un lointain souvenir...
 « Et ta lyre, en mes mains, est à ce point muette
 « Qu'avant de commencer tes vers ont dû finir ».

LE CHANTEUR DES RUES

«Puisque c'est ton métier, misérable poète. »

(A. De Musset.)

Puisque c'est ton sort, chanteur misérable,
 D'amuser la foule avec tes chansons;
 Puisque pour ton cœur rien n'est préférable
 Aux joyeux oiseaux de nos verts buissons;
 Puisque les heureux, ceux que la fortune
 Couvre de ses dons, convie à ses jeux,
 Écoutent parfois ta voix importune,
 --Soupir de la brise ou vent orageux;--
 Puisque du balcon où ta chanson quête
 Leurs bravos flatteurs, il tombe parfois
 Quelques maigres sous, --tends-leur ta casquette!
 Chante, doux ami de l'oiseau des bois!

DUCAS HIPPOLYTE

Pourquoi, lorsque je veux écrire sur sa tombe,
 Sous ma plume, des vers sont-ils si vite éclos?
 Pourquoi, devant l'abîme où sa jeune âme tombe,
 La poésie en deuil a-t-elle des sanglots?

Oh! réponds, chaste muse, ô ma consolatrice!
 C'est que son cœur savait chanter l'hymne sans fin;
 C'est que Ducas pouvait, ô douce inspiratrice,

Faire vibrer son luth sous ton souffle divin!

C'est que pour nous parler dans la langue immortelle,
Pour prendre son essor vers le ciel radieux,
Haïti regardait le cygne ouvrir son aile
Et verser à longs flots ses chants mélodieux!

C'est que la fleur s'ouvrait à l'aube matinale,
Parfumant nos vallons de sa suave odeur;
C'est que, dans un baiser, la muse virginale
Pressait ce jeune cœur sur son sein plein d'ardeur!
C'est que, pour répéter les accents de sa lyre,
L'altière Renommée apprêtait ses cent voix;
C'est qu'enfin tout aimait son magique délire,
Quand, soudain, sur ce front, la mort posa ses doigts!

Coriolan, Milscent, Ignace Nau, Gardères,
O vous dont la patrie a conservé les chants!
Vos âmes ont souri dans les divines sphères,
En voyant cette fleur venir croître en vos champs!

Vos bras se sont ouverts pour reformer la chaîne
Agrandie aujourd'hui par ce nouvel anneau!
Vous avez regardé sur la terre lointaine
S'ouvrir et se fermer ce funèbre tombeau!

A la couronne d'or que la sainte patrie
Réserve pour le front de ses nobles élus,
En voyant se glacer cette tête chérie,
Elle vient d'ajouter une perle de plus.

Et c'est pourquoi mon luth où pleure la pensée,
A la grande élégie où se trouvent vos noms,
Vient apporter aujourd'hui sa plainte brisée
Comme un rayon de plus pour ses chastes rayons.

Oh! la Mort, pour sa faim toujours inassouvie,
Pour ses gouffres muets, béants, jamais comblés,
Choisit le plus beau front et la plus belle vie!
Et, tel un moissonneur, parmi les champs de blés,

Distingue d'un coup d'œil la gerbe la plus belle,
Les épis les plus pleins, les épis sans défauts,
Telle la froide mort, moissonneuse cruelle,
Abat les plus beaux fronts du tranchant de sa faux!

Que te fait la douleur, ô Mort insatiable?
Oh! que te font les pleurs qui coulent à longs flots?
Ton cœur sec, inflexible, est un désert de sable
Qui veut être arrosé de pleurs et de sanglots.

Bientôt, en bruit sinistre, à froides pelletées,
La terre va tomber sur ton léger cercueil;
Et bientôt quelques fleurs, par tes amis jetées,
Parfumeront ton corps en son séjour de deuil.

Ton âme blanche et pure, ouvrant déjà ses ailes,
A pris son vol là-haut, loin des biens superflus.
Mais tu laisses trop tôt nos demeures fidèles!
Tu as revoir trop tôt le pays des élus.

Amis, famille en deuil, laissez couler vos larmes.
Il est bon de pleurer et je pleure avec vous.
Devant ceux qui sont morts la douleur a ses charmes,
Pleurer est un bonheur dont les dieux sont jaloux.

.....
De ton divin repos, j'ai troublé le silence,
Ducas! –Pardonne-moi! Dans la tombe, endormi,
Alors que vers les cieus ta belle âme s'élance,
Poète, souviens-toi des regrets d'un ami.

27 novembre 1868.

LES DEUX BOUTS DE L'ÉCHELLE

Nous étions deux sur le chemin: lui, gros, fier, blond
Et riche; moi, fluet, noir, pauvre, humble et très long.
« Il me disait: Je suis planteur, propriétaire
De ce château, là-bas, de toute cette terre
Qui s'étend jusqu'à la montagne; je réponds
Au nom de monsieur John, j'ai bâti ces deux ponts
Qui traversent le fleuve; un seul geste, un seul signe
De moi fait accourir – pour eux, honneur insigne --
Quatre cents paysans qui m'appellent sauveur
Et vous ? »

Je répondis: « Moi, je suis le rêveur;
Je m'en vais doucement, côtoyant la double arche

De vos ponts, l'œil baissé, car j'ai peur, quand je marche,
D'écraser un insecte ou bien quelque humble fleur.
Je butine, en passant, ou le rire ou le pleur,
--Car la vie, ici-bas, a toujours ces deux choses,
Et l'on trouve des pleurs même au cœur de vos roses, --
Et de ce que je vois je compose mon miel.
Quand mon front s'assombrit, je le relève au ciel,
Il redevient serein. On me jette une pierre,
Quelquefois, en disant: « C'est le vieux fou, c'est Pierre! »
Mais une voix réplique: « Allons! je le défends!
« Ne lui fais pas de mal! il aime les enfants!
John reprit: -- « L'an passé, la récolte fut bonne;
Je chargeai trois bateaux, mais grands, Dieu me par-
[donne,
Rien qu'avec mes cafés; mes bois se sont vendus
Cher; -- dix mille francs pour un seul me sont dus:
--Acajou moucheté, mais une bille énorme! --
New York s'en est ému. Mon commettant m'informe
Que neuf cent mille francs, en mon nom sont placés;
Que j'en peux rester là, si je les trouve assez.
Il plaisante! jamais l'argent ne rassasie.
--Qu'en dis-tu? »

(Monsieur John, --j'en ai l'âme saisie
De bonheur, -- me faisait cette insigne faveur
De me tutoyer!...)

Moi, toujours sombre et rêveur,
Je lui dis: « L'an passé fut pour moi date amère,
Je perdis mes enfants et j'enterrai leur mère:
Une bien sainte femme et deux anges du ciel!
Les enfants, cher monsieur, c'est là l'essentiel.
Ils étaient beaux, les miens! L'un de huit ans, la fille
De dix printemps. C'était là toute ma famille.
Maintenant, je m'en vais, sans joie et sans souci,
Jusqu'à ce que là-haut la mort m'appelle aussi.
Les temps sont durs, mais je puis faire, avec ma tâche
Double et triple, -- au travail je n'ai pas le cœur lâche, --
Assez de pain pour vivre un peu; -- je suis gardien
De l'hôpital; j'écris -- pas trop mal, pas trop bien, --
Des lettres pour ceux-là qui n'ont pas eu de classes;
J'ai mes courses; enfin, quand mes jambes sont lasses,
Je garde la maison; je rimaille; j'ai fait
Des vers sur vos grands bois: -- mon cœur est satisfait! »

Monsieur John écouta, patiemment, sans doute,
Puis me dit de son ton protecteur:

«Pierre, écoute!
Viens-t'en au château; là, j'aurai soin de tes jours;
De la viande parfois, des bananes toujours.
Tu n'auras rien à faire ou, du moins, pas grand' chose:
Tu me diras tes vers quand je serai morose.
--Les riches ont parfois quelque cuisant souci. »

Et je lui répondis: « J'aime mon sort; merci! »

AUX CUBAINS

A Eliseo Grullon.

A vous qui combattez depuis nombre d'années
Pour conquérir la liberté,
Embrassant corps à corps les hordes déchaînées
Sur votre sol ensanglanté;
A vous, peuple proscrit, dont les vertus stoïques
Ont résumé tous les devoirs,
Et qui nous rappelez les combats héroïques
De Toussaint, le géant des noirs;
A vous, frères Cubains qui, contre un joug infâme,
Parfois vaincus, souvent vainqueurs,
Luttez sans nul soutien que votre force d'âme,
Cet auxiliaire des grands cœurs;
A vous, le barde noir vient répéter: « Courage,
« Peuple! Si votre ciel si pur
« S'assombrit quelque temps, -- Dieu chassera l'orage;
« Son souffle vous rendra l'azur!
« Avez-vous vu la mer, pendant une tempête,
« Brisant les fragiles esquifs
« Contre les lourds vaisseaux, qu'elle étreint et rejette
« Aux dents tranchantes des récifs,
« Cependant que la trombe, entrant dans la démence
« Du vaste océan triomphant,
« Du cri des naufragés fait une plainte immense
« Qui s'éteint comme un cri d'enfant?
« Et puis, l'avez-vous vu, la tempête finie,
« L'océan aux flots azurés,
« Avec ces frêles nef's ridant l'onde aplanie,
« Blanches sous les cieus empourprés?...
« C'est là le lendemain! Peuple cubain, courage!
« Frères! si votre ciel si pur
« S'assombrit quelque temps, Dieu chassera l'orage;

« Son souffle vous rendra l'azur!

« Avez-vous vu parfois une forêt inculte
« Où jamais nul pied n'a posé;
« Où les ronces ont l'air de lancer une insulte
« Au champ de sueurs arrosé;
« Où croit en sa laideur l'arbre à l'ombre fatale,
« Le suc mortel gonflant ses nœuds;
« Où le marais fétide, en son luxe s'étale,
« Rempli d'arbustes vénéneux;
« Puis vient le laboureur. En avant, la cognée!
« La moisson jaunira l'été.
« Derrière la charrue, au travail résignée,
« Marche à grands pas la liberté.
« Frères, votre heure arrive. En avant donc! Courage!
« Cubains, si votre ciel si pur
« S'assombrit quelque temps, Dieu chassera l'orage;
« Son souffle vous rendra l'azur!

« Sous le joug des colons, maîtres impitoyables,
« Nos ancêtres courbaient le front;
« On inventait pour eux des peines effroyables,
« Doublant la douleur de l'affront.
« On les jetait aux chiens; pour comble d'infamie,
« On prostituait leurs enfants;
« Et la prostration, de sa main ennemie,
« Les ployait sous les triomphants.
« Puis, tout à coup, un cri retentit des collines,
-- « Ce cri qui renverse les rois!—
« Et Toussaint Louverture et le grand Dessalines
« Rendent à l'homme noir ses droits!
« C'est bientôt votre tour, ô mes frères! Courage!
« Cubains, si votre ciel si pur
« S'assombrit quelque temps, Dieu chassera l'orage
« Son souffle vous rendra l'azur !

CES ALLEMANDS

Quand le tigre cruel eut déchiré sa proie,
Le fort et superbe lion;
Quand, le mufle rougi par les restes qu'il broie,
Oubliant la loi du talion,

Dans son antre fétide, ainsi qu'une couleuvre,
Il eut rampé les yeux baissés;
Alors, ivre de joie et contemplant son œuvre,
Il dit: « Non! ce n'est point assez!
Je comptais, rançonnant la nation guerrière,
Le pays des héros chéri,
Avoir non seulement milliards et flotte fière,
Mais encore Pondichéry.
Car c'est un beau joyau pour ma couronne inique,
Lourde de rapt et de larcin,
Que le moindre morceau de cette Inde magique,
Recélant de l'or dans son sein! »

.....
Alors, les yeux tournés vers notre île fertile,
Vite, ils dépêchent leur agent...
Et, comme quelquefois un prétexte est utile,
Ils nous réclament de l'argent.

On hésite. – La nuit, heure qu'aiment les crimes,
Ils s'emparent de nos vaisseaux,
Ils attendent le jour, certains que leurs victimes
Paîtraient comme simples vassaux.

Puis – jour sans précédent! ces célèbres Cartouches,
Qui se surnomment des Césars,
Pointèrent leurs canons, dont on voyait les bouches
Prêtes à briser nos remparts!

Mais, ainsi que la France, à la bande guerrière,
--Allemands, doublés de Prussiens—
Nous jetâmes l'argent, le front haut, l'âme fière,
Ainsi qu'on jette un os aux chiens!

14 juin 1872

LA MORT DE NOS COCOTIERS

A.T.M. Guilbaud.

Grands palmiers panachés, hôtes des chauds rivages,
Géants des plaines et des monts,

Arbres des voyageurs, fils de nos bois sauvages,
O cocotiers que nous aimons!

Vos fronts n'accueillent plus la brise aux doux mur-
Un mal inconnu vous atteint; [mures;
Un vent empoisonné touche vos chevelures,
Et les flétrit, et les déteint!
En vous voyant ainsi mourir, sans que personne
Cherche à deviner votre mal;
En voyant vos fleurs d'or, au glas de mort qui sonne,
Perdre ainsi leur souffle aromal,

Et tomber à vos pieds, avant que le fruit naisse;
En vous voyant vieillir ainsi,
Vous à qui je croyais l'éternelle jeunesse,
Il me vient un cuisant souci.
Dites-nous, phalange fidèle:
Pourquoi tombez-vous les premiers?
Votre mort annoncerait-elle
La fin de nos autres palmiers?
Et si nul de vous ne résiste,
Mourra-t-il aussi le palmiste,
L'emblème de la liberté,
--Cet arbre dont le temps et l'âge
Embellissent le vert feuillage,
Et qu'ils couronnent de fierté?

Deuras-tu périr, pur symbole
Que nos pères nous ont légué?
Te verrons-nous, comme un vieux saule,
Courber ton grand front fatigué,
--Toi qui dardes aux cieux ta flèche
Que le soleil caresse et lèche,
Sans la faner un seul instant,
--Toi qui ne crains que le tonnerre,
Et qui, comme l'aigle en son aire,
Te moques du terrible autan?...

Ces pensées m'assaillent sans trêve...
Faut-il trembler pour l'avenir?
Voir la liberté comme un rêve?
Craindre un réveil qui va venir?
--Faut-il, ô Toussaint Louverture!
Devant cette belle nature,
Fière de tes premiers jalons,
Sentir, en moins de quinze lustres,

Sur nos fronts le pied de ces rustres,
Plus lourd que le pied des colons?

Non, tu ne mourras pas, ô liberté! –Quand même,
Sous le souffle d'un vent mortel,
Nous verrions se flétrir ce palmier, ton emblème,
Nos cœurs resteraient ton autel!

Non, tu ne mourras pas! Si des mains assassines
Osent couper ton noble tronc,
Toussaint te nomme l'arbre aux vivaces racines:
Tes verts rameaux repousseront!

O mes frères, les noirs! rappelons-nous nos pères,
Héros-martyrs des premiers jours,
Qui prirent corps à corps les gros colons prospères
Et les chassèrent pour toujours!

Rappelons-nous Capois –l'homme du fort Vertières.—
Où sont Leclerc et Rochambeau,
Ces terribles guerriers, dont les troupes altières
Trouvèrent chez nous un tombeau?

Et, fils de ces hommes sublimes,
Ne pouvant pas, faibles aiglons,
Franchir comme eux les hautes cimes,
Ne restons pas dans nos vallons!
Il est encor d'autres batailles
Qui sont mieux faites pour nos tailles.
Ces vieux héros vont nous guider.
Ils nous ont donné notre histoire,
Nous liberté, --leur victoire, --
--Sachons lutter pour les garder!
Nous n'avons plus, nous, faibles êtres,
A courir par monts et par vaux,
Combattant pied à pied les maîtres,
Sans armes pour ces grands travaux;
A verser pour l'indépendance
Larmes et sang en abondance;
A faire la « Crête-à-Pierrot » !
--Ils ont écrit ces épopées!
N'ayant que leurs fers pour épées!
--Notre orgueil ne va pas si haut.

Nous avons, --c'est notre partage, --
Pour rester dignes des patrons,

A conserver cet héritage
Qu'à nos enfants nous léguerons;
A redresser un front austère;
A fouler libres cette terre
Où tant de pur sang fut versé,
Empêchant que la tyrannie
Flétrisse notre île bénie
Et ternisse notre passé!

Donc, ô mes cocotiers! Laissez vos palmes vertes
Jaunir et s'effeuiller au souffle du destin!
O nids charmants! laissez vos portes entr'ouvertes:
Vos hôtes vont chercher un abri plus certain!

Beaux palmistes, alors que le vent délétère,
Fanant vos flèches d'or, jettera de vos fronts
Le bonnet phrygien, --à genoux sur la terre,
Fils de la liberté, nous le relèverons!

Et lorsque nous aurons de notre île chérie
A tout jamais chassé les hommes de la nuit;
Quand notre nef aura laissé la barbarie,
Loin, derrière, pareille au sillage qui fuit;

Quand nous aurons planté sur nos mornes fertiles
L'art saint du progrès et que ses verts rameaux
Ombrageront un sol où les choses utiles
Remplaceront nos deuils, nos guerres et nos maux;

Quand nous aurons ouvert pour la franche accolade
Nos bras longtemps fermés aux étrangers, aux blancs;
Quand nous ne serons plus comme un enfant malade
Qui trébuche en chemin sur ses genoux tremblants;

Quand les vieux préjugés, la haine de l'esclave
Pour le maître, fuiront devant l'égalité;
Quand nous aurons éteint cette brûlante lave
Sous l'humide baiser de la fraternité;...
C'est alors, seulement, ô mes palmiers superbes,
Que nous nous sentirons libres sous le ciel bleu,
Et que nous secouerons, à pleines mains, les gerbes
Du flambeau --vérité qu'allume l'œil de Dieu!

LES FORTS

I.

Comme ennuyé de son impeccable beauté,
De la perfection de son stipe, un palmiste,
Droit, dans la solitude immense, jaune et triste,
Secouait ses cheveux vert sombre en la clarté
Du jour. Sa flèche d'or trouait les hauteurs vides.
Émergeant de la spathe uniflore, un bouquet
Doré, sentant le musc, conviait au banquet
Les essaims vrombissants des abeilles avides.
Et le pollen nacré fuyait comme un adieu.
Les gouttes de cristal, sur son front déposées,
Descendaient lentement, --pleurs de l'aube ou rosées,--
Les cercles espacés marquant l'âge du dieu.
Et la brise chantait un hymne du psalmiste
Dans ses longs cheveux verts de Vénus-Astarté;
Et, comme ennuyé de sa magique beauté,
Droit, dans la solitude, on voyait le palmiste.

II.

L'aiglon peut souffler, brisant en peu d'instant
Les grands chênes noueux, aux multiples ramures,
C'est mettre un *sforzando* sur les tendres murmures
Du palmiste vaillant qui se rit des autans.
Si la foudre, crevant les nuages pleins d'ombre,
A l'appel de sa flèche, accourt et le combat,
Alors le beau palmier, l'arbre que rien n'abat,
--Sans son aiguille d'or et son panache sombre,--
Comme ennuyé de son impeccable beauté,
Sera toujours debout dans sa sérénité!

III.

La nature est avare en hommes héroïques,
Et le siècle n'est plus des antiques géants...
Où sont les vieux martyrs, les lapidés stoïques,
Les colosses debout au bord des océans?

.....
.....

Il fut grand, lui, le noir! Quand, surpris par le traître,
Dans l'humide cachot il fut enseveli,
Sur ses traits amaigris, on ne vit rien paraître;

Ses yeux restèrent secs, son tronc n'eut pas un pli.

.....

Comme ce haut palmier qui devint le symbole
De notre liberté; --fier quoique foudroyé,--
Répondant comme Christ par quelque parabole,
N'ayant jamais cédé, n'ayant jamais ployé,

--Toussaint, qui semblait né d'une femme de Sparte,
Malgré la faim, le froid et la captivité,
--Sphinx que n'a pu jamais déchiffrer Bonaparte, --

Restait toujours debout dans sa sérénité.

CHANT NATIONAL

«Derrière la charrue, au travail résignée
Marche à grands pas la liberté !»
(O.D.)

I.

Quand nos aïeux brisèrent leurs entraves,
Ce n'était pas pour se croiser les bras.
Pour travailler en maîtres, les esclaves
Ont embrassé, corps à corps, le trépas,
Leur sang, à flots, engraisa nos collines.
A notre tour, jaunes et noirs, allons!
Creusons le sol légué par Dessalines:
Notre fortune est là, dans nos vallons.

L'indépendance est éphémère
Sans le droit à l'égalité!
Pour fouler, heureux, cette terre,
Il nous faut la devise austère:
« Dieu! le travail! la liberté! »

II.

Quoi de plus beau que ces fils de l'Afrique
Qui, trois cents ans, dans tous les maux plongés.
Tournent leurs fers, leur carcan et leur trique
Contre la force et les vieux préjugés!
En bas, voyez! C'est la noble bannière
Cernant les noirs qui vont mourir là-haut...
--Non! Leur torrent, avec Lamartinière,

Descend fougueux de la Crête-à-Pierrot!

Tout cela serait éphémère
Sans le droit à l'égalité.
Pour fouler, heureux, notre terre,
Il nous faut la devise austère:
« Dieu! le travail! la liberté! »

III.

De Rochambeau les cohortes altières,
Quelques instants, suspendirent leur feu,
Pour saluer le héros de Vertières,
--Capoix-la-Mort, grand comme un demi-dieu?
Vers le progrès, crions comme ce brave:
« Noirs en avant! en avant! » Et bêchons
Le sol trempé des sueurs de l'esclave!
Nous avons là ce qu'ailleurs nous cherchons!

Sans quoi, tout devient éphémère;
Pas d'ordre et pas d'égalité!
Pour fouler, heureux, notre terre,
Il nous faut la devise austère:
« Dieu! le travail! la liberté! »

IV.

Sang des martyrs dont la pourpre écumante
A secoué nos chaînes et nos jougs!
Chavanne, Ogé, sur la roue infamante,
Toi, vieux Toussaint, dans ton cachot de Joux;
O précurseurs, dont les dernières fibres
Ont dû frémir, --vous les porte-flambeaux, --
En nous voyant maintenant fiers et libres,
Conseillez-nous, du fond de vos tombeaux!

-- « Votre bonheur est éphémère;
« Ayez droit à l'égalité!
« Pour fouler, heureux, votre terre,
« Il vous faut la devise austère:
« Dieu! le travail! la liberté! »

V.

A l'œuvre donc, descendants de l'Afrique,
Jaunes et noirs, fils du même berceau!

L'antique Europe et la jeune Amérique
Nous voient, de loin, tenter le rude assaut.
Bêchons le sol qu'en l'an mil huit cent quatre
Nous ont conquis nos aïeux au bras fort.
C'est notre tour, à présent, de combattre
Avec ce cri: « Le progrès ou la mort! »

A l'œuvre, ou tout est éphémère!
Ayons droit à l'égalité!
Nous foulerons, plus fiers, la terre,
Avec cette devise austère:
« Dieu! le travail! la liberté! »

A DELORME

Ne saviez-vous donc pas qu'ici-bas le génie
Est créé pour servir de proie aux ignorants?
Qu'ils n'ont pour le talent que honte, ignominie,
Et du respect pour ceux qui marchent dans leurs rangs?
Que pour vivre en ce monde où la bêtise seule
Est à l'aise, il vous faut leur emboîter le pas?
Marchez donc, mais ployés, courbés comme une aïeule!
Pauvres aigles des monts, votre aile est gauche et veule
Sur cette terre... Ami, ne le saviez-vous pas?

Ne saviez-vous donc pas que, pour vous, la souffrance
Dure toute la vie; et que le seul moment
Où l'horloge pour vous sonne la délivrance,
Où finisse à jamais votre cruel tourment,
C'est lorsque le destin, lassé de vous poursuivre,
Vous conduit à ce port qu'on nomme le trépas?
Pourquoi donc avec eux marcher, enseigner, vivre,
Leur montrer le chemin et leur dire de suivre...
Pauvre cœur incompris, qu'on n'écouterà pas?...

Ne saviez-vous donc pas, vous dont l'aube vermeille
S'illumina soudain d'un éclatant rayon,
Que l'envieux en qui la bonne foi sommeille,
Poète, hait ta plume, et, peintre, ton crayon?
Que son œil, offusqué par la vive lumière,
Déteste l'aigle altier, qu'il regarde d'en bas,
Quand l'oiseau du soleil y baigne sa paupière...
S'il vous force à courber votre front sur la pierre,
S'il est né pour cela, --ne le saviez-vous pas?

--Tu le sais, mais qu'aussi l'on rencontre en ce monde,
Pour mille cœurs d'acier, quand même une âme sœur,
Qui comprend l'idéal; qui, sur la foule immonde,
Jette un regard fier, plein de magique douceur:
Que j'ai cette âme-là; que pour toute l'envie
Qui te mord les talons; pour ces milliers d'ingrats,
Je voudrais t'aimer seul, te consacrer ma vie,
Et, seul reconnaissant pour toute ma patrie,
Te louer, te bénir!... --Dis, ne le sais-tu pas?

LE SANS-CESSE

A Julie.

Dans la verte vallée,
Une fleur étoilée
Fleurit.
Comme toi, rose et blanche,
Vers nous elle se penche
Et rit.

Elle a pour nom *sans-cesse*.
L'élégante princesse
En rit,
Mais, pour une amourette,
Va voir si la fleurette
Fleurit.

La fleur de la constance,
Dans le jardin d'Hortense,
Fleurit.
Mais la belle frivole
Qui, sur mille amants vole,
En rit.

Comme la fleur jolie,
Notre amour pur, Julie,
Fleurit;
Mais ce siècle de prose
Voit la fleur blanche et rose
Et rit.

A notre amour, qu'importe
L'homme qu'un vent emporte
 En rit;
Mais jusques au ciel même,
Fleur ou femme qu'on aime
 Fleurit!

LA PASSIFLORE

A Laure P.

Bouton de rose attend longtemps
 Les doux baisers de Flore.
Fais ainsi: tu n'es qu'au printemps,
Il n'est pas temps d'éclore!
Regarde ce sombre bouton,
Si laid. Eh bien! cet avorton
Sera la reine du canton,
 Car c'est la passiflore!

Ton œil noir, au ciel attaché,
 Chaque matin l'implore;
Tu veux, --et c'est un grand péché, --
 Qu'on t'aime comme Aglaure.
Mais elle a déjà dix-sept ans,
Et toi, douze automnes! Attends,
Pour t'ouvrir, un peu plus de temps,
 Comme la passiflore!

La beauté n'a pas les pieds lourds,
 O ma petite Laure!
Elle vient; sa main de velours.
 Doucement, te colore.
La déesse va te baiser
Au front, et sur toi se poser.
Et le soleil va t'embraser
 Comme la passiflore.

Mais, de tristesse et de douleur,
 Je vois tes yeux se clore.
Et ton visage, où coule un pleur,
 Déjà se décolore.
Pourquoi te hâter? Si ton cœur
S'ouvre trop tôt, l'Amour moqueur

Va le cueillir d'un air vainqueur,
Comme une passiflore.

Et puis, bien vite triomphant,
Ce beau dieu le déflore,
--Ce dieu que ton âme d'enfant
Chaque matin implore,
Aussitôt qu'il cueille une fleur,
Il lui prend sa fraîche couleur.
Aussi, bien loin de ce voleur,
S'ouvre la passiflore
Attends donc, cœur aux doux soupirs,
Longtemps avant d'éclore.
Fuis l'oiseleur, fuis les zéphyr,
Fuis les baisers de Flore!
Tu t'ouvriras, un frais matin,
Parmi la verveine et le thym,
Et loin de tout regard mutin,
Comme une passiflore

A UNE ETRANGERE

Pour un regard de tes yeux,
Si bleus qu'ils feraient envie
A l'azur de nos grands cieux,
Je voudrais donner ma vie...
Mais n'est-ce pas qu'il est tard
Pour t'offrir, Rose,
Si peu de chose
Pour un regard ?...

Pour un cheveu de ton front,
Cheveu fin comme la soie
Et blond comme l'épi blond,
J'offrirais ma part de joie
Dans le ciel... Mais ce doux vœu,
Franchement, Rose,
C'est peu de chose
Pour un cheveu !

Pour un baiser tout léger
De ta bouche si gentille
Où l'amour vient voltiger,

Je laisserais ma famille...
Mais, suis-je fou pour oser
T'offrir, ô Rose,
Si peu de chose
Pour un baiser !

Pour ton amour chaste et pu,
J'offre bien plus que ma vie,
Famille, et place en l'azur :
--Je laisserais la patrie,
Hélas, où j'ai vu le jour !
N'est-ce pas Rose,
Beaucoup de chose
Pour ton amour ?...

A QUI CROIRE

Près du mangier fleur qui chante sous la brise,
Le ruisseau gazouilleur murmurait sa chanson ;
La feuille du palmier, sous le vent qui la frise,
Mêlait de doux accords à ceux du vert buisson.
Tout chantait près de la : mais Manoune, la noire,
Restait triste et pensive au bord du frais ruisseau,
Disait tout bas, de peu d'effaroucher l'oiseau ;
« Si Pierre m'a trompée, à qui donc faut-il croire ?... »

--Enfant, crois à l'éclat du jour !
A la fleur, des l'aurore éclore !
Crois à ton beau ciel ! crois à toute chose !
Mais fuis l'inconstant qui parle d'amour !

--« C'était sous le manguier dont l'épaisse feuille
Berçait mon doux sommeil et mes rêves d'enfant ;
Par mon ange gardien, tout à coup réveille,
Je vis Pierre penche vers moi, l'œil triomphant !

--Ah ! comme j'enviais sa chevelure noire,
Ombrageant son front brun, plus pale que le mien !
Il sut gagner mon cœur dans un seul entretien !...
Maintenant s'il me fuit, à qui donc faut-il croire ?...

__ Enfant, crois à l'éclat du jour !
A la fleur, des l'aurore éclore !
Crois à ton beau ciel ! crois à toute chose !
Mais fuis l'inconstant qui parle d'amour !

* * *

--« Manoune, » -- me dit-il ; --et ses douces paroles
Me faisaient frissonner sur mes genoux tremblants !—
--Il laissait, ce jour-là, le patois des créoles,
Pour me parler, hélas ! le langage des blancs ! —
« Manoune, tu sais bien que j'ai rêvé la gloire
« Pour la mettre à tes pieds ! et qu'une heure, avec toi,
« Seul à seul, loin des yeux, vaut tout le ciel pour moi ! »
--« Maintenant s'il à qui donc faut-il croire ? »

--Enfant, crois à l'éclat du jour !
A la fleur des l'aurore éclore !
Crois à ton beau ciel, crois à toute chose !
Mais, fuis l'inconstant qui parle d'amour !

--Pour l'écouter, l'oiseau se taisait dans les branches,
Moi, j'étais suspendu à ses levers en feu !
Il tenait mes deux mains dans ses mains presque
Et prenait à témoins le regard du ciel bleu !... [blanches,
Depuis, --frais ruisselet dont l'onde invite à boire, --
Tu nous vis bien des fois causes sous le manguier !
Si bien qu'un jour...-mon Dieu ! j'avais beau te prier !...
Et l'ingrat m'abandonne !...à qui donc faut-il croire ?

--Enfant, crois à l'éclat du jour !
A la fleur des l'aurore éclore !
Crois à ton beau ciel ! crois à toute chose !
Mais fuis l'inconstant qui parle d'amour !

SUR LE MORNE LOINTAIN

Sur le morne lointain, semé de blanches cases
Le tambour qui rugit le chant mystérieux
Du magique vaudoux aux divines extases,
Où l'on immole un bouc, où l'on brise des vases,
Enivre les papas, qui battent, furieux,
Le tambour qui rugit le chant mystérieux
Sur le morne lointain, semé de blanches cases.

En sourds, sibyllins, du gosier des sambas,
L'improvisation pleurant les dieux antiques,
Réveille les vieux morts qui gémissent là-bas,
Et guide les danseurs dans leurs lascifs ébats.
Les adeptes fervents écoutent, frénétiques,

L'improvisation pleurant les dieux antiques,
En sons sourds, sibyllins, du gosier des sambas.

* * *

Dans le fond où *Legba* gouverne les yeux mornes,
Au pied su saint autel qu'entourent les houncis
Dont les lugubres chants d'entendent dans les mornes,
On conduit le bouc noir, le bouc à quatre cornes,
Qui penche sont front ceint de rubans cramoisis,
Au pied saint autel qu'entourent les houncis,
Dans le fond où *Legba* gouverne les yeux mornes.

Une sainte terreur emplit le lieu divin.
On ne voit que l'éclair de la mortelle lame.
Pour plaire au dieu vaudoux, le grand prêtre devin
Donne à boire aux élus le rhum mêle de vin,
Brise le vase rouge et fait envoler l'âme...
On ne voit que l'éclair de la mortelle lame...
--Une sainte terreur emplit le lieu divin.

* * *

Sur le morne lointain, semé de blanches cases
Toujours le tambour dit le chant mystérieux
Mais l'antique vaudoux, aux magiques extases
Plus n'égorge le bouc, plus ne brise les vases.
Les papas ne sont plus, qui battent, furieux,
Le tambour qui rugit le chant mystérieux
Sur le morne lointain, semé de blanches cases.

ÉPITRE

A une femme charmante qui confessait sa haine pour l'auteur.

Je sais qu'il n'est à votre cœur
Qu'un seul sentiment que j'inspire:
--La haine! --Eh bien! tel est l'empire
De votre air hautain et moqueur,
Que, vrai, j'adore votre haine!
Et, s'il vous plaisait, ô ma reine,
De commander, -- j'eusse obéi,
Trop humble pour être rebelle,

Trop fier d'être par vous haï,
Quand, surtout, vous êtes si belle!

Quels avantages vous avez
Sur votre esclave, chère dame!
Vous êtes belle à damner l'âme;
Riche, aimable; puis, vous savez
Au moins ce que votre âme éprouve!
Mais moi, poète, je ne trouve
Rien pour peindre ce que je sens.
Loin de vous haïr, il me semble
Que je vous aime... --O dieux puissants!
En le disant, comme je tremble!

D'autres fois, --étrange animal
Que le poète! --je veux croire
Que je vous hais, et que ma gloire
Serait de vous vouloir du mal.
--C'est insensé, car je suis pauvre,
Et ne peux tirer sur Hanovre.
« Le moindre petit ducaton »...
--Le riche avec le prolétaire!
--C'est oublier le vieux diction:
--Pot de fer contre pot de terre!

Enfin, voici mon triste cas:
--Poète, en vous, j'aime la femme,
Car vous êtes belle, Madame!
--Comme homme, je ne vous hais pas;
--Pauvre, je décline la lutte
--Contre vous, prévoyant ma chute.
Que me reste-t-il? --Implorer
A deux genoux votre indulgence;
Pitié! l'on veut vous adorer!
Grâce! l'on est dans l'indigence!

CHANTEZ, OISEAUX

A Linnée Miot.

Mes oiseaux de palmistes
Chantent là-bas dans les tamariniers.
Chantez! nous sommes tristes.
Égayez donc les pauvres prisonniers.

Les pieds aux fers, à travers le grillage,
Un pan du ciel apparaît à nos yeux.
Il vient à nous, votre gai babillage:
La liberté permet d'être joyeux.
La brise est pure et toute parfumée;
Nous voudrions la humer comme vous.
Mais il fait chaud et la porte est fermée:
La liberté n'est pas faite pour nous.

Enfants experts, la joyeuse science
Nous a soufflé ses plus douces chansons.
Maintenant forts de notre conscience,
Chantons encor dans nos dures prisons.
Et si la mort, succédant à nos chaînes,
A nos regards apparaît en ce lieu,
Nous volerons bien plus haut que vos chênes,
Charmants oiseaux, nous irons jusqu'à Dieu!

O mon pays! ô ma belle patrie!
Pourquoi faut-il que des hommes méchants
Trouvent leur joie à voir l'âme meurtrie,
Et leur délice à voir mourir nos chants?
Sursum corda! Saluons les altesses,
Les porte-clés, qui tirent les verrous!
Sur nos grabats, pleins de noires tristesses,
Les bras en croix, nous attendons les clous!

Mes oiseaux de palmistes,
Chantez là-bas, dans les tamariniers!
Chantez! nous sommes tristes;
Égayez donc les pauvres prisonniers!

Cachots du Port-au-Prince, 11 juillet 1889.

APPENDIX C

POEMS BY MASSILLON COICOU

All Coicou's poem's come from his original 1892 collection, *Poésies Nationales*, published in Paris.

INTRODUCTION

*Ame de mon pays,
De la Patrie âme pieuse,
Je t'appelle ! Incarne-toi dans mes vers.*

Mistral

Prima dicte nihi, summa dicende camoena

Hor.

La Muse

C'est l'heure de chanter. La nuit calme et sereine
Glissant furtivement, mystérieuse égrène
Des étoiles d'argent sous les cieux infinis :
Pas un souffle des bois, nul écho dans les nids,
Rien qui vienne troubler la nature muette.
C'est l'heure de chanter. Ranime-toi poète ;
En chants harmonieux exhale ta langueur
Et fais vibrer ton luth, et fais parler ton cœur.

Le poète

Je le veux, mais mon âme est toujours oppressée :

Mais je ne sais d'où vient une sombre pensée
Qui rétrécit le cercle où je tente mes pas.
Oui, mon cœur veut chanter, mais il ne l'ose pas.
C'est qu'en ce monde, ô muse ! Ô toi-même qu'on nie,
Contre soi le poète arme tant d'ironie ;
On l'abreuve de fiel, d'outrage, si souvent :
C'est qui n'est rien pour lui qui ne soit décevant :
Il demande l'amour on lui verse la haine :
Voyant le sentier rude et la borne lointaine,
Il regarde une étoile et voit l'astre qui fuit ;
Invoque l'Espérance, et sent qui le poursuit,
L'Envie insatiable, et pourtant féconde...

La Muse

Et qu'importe ? chantons. Quand de sa bave immonde
La vipère rampante aura sevré les fleurs ;
Lorsque du frêle agneau les bêlements, les pleurs,
Sauront fléchir le tigre en quête de sa proie ;
Et lorsqu'ouvrant son aile et sa serre qui broie,
Ouvrant son bec crochu, l'on verra le vautour
Fuir devant la colombe, à peine éclos au jour,
Contre la Foi, l'Amour, la Vertu, le Génie,
En vain se dressa l'ignoble Calomnie !...

Oui, poète, chantons. Vois déjà le printemps
Nous sourit. Que c'est doux, lorsque l'on a vingt ans,
D'épanouir son être aux charmes de la vie,
De faire aller son âme où l'amour la convie,

Et de comprendre aussi, dans cet essor divin
Tenté vers l'idéal, que ce n'est pas en vain
Qu'en dépit du malheur le rivant a ses transes,
L'homme garde en son cœur toutes les espérances !

C'est l'heure de chanter ; prends ta lyre ; ta voix
Doit consoler souvent, peut guérir quelquefois ;
Car le poète est saint : la nature en son âme
Versa tout ce qu'elle a de parfum et de flamme,
Ce que tous ses soleils, ses ondes et ses fleurs
Ont de chants, de clarté et d'exquises senteurs.

Chante les bois, chante les fleurs ;
Chante la nature sereine,
Avec ses rires et ses pleurs,
Dans sa majesté souveraine ;

Chante la notre sereine,
Tournant dans leur valse rapide ;
Chante les flots capricieux
Cadençant leur rythme timide ;
Chante la vague qui déferle,
Dont la grave cadence endort,
Tandis que la mer, sur son bord,

Brille d'écumes, grains de perle
S'enchâssant dans les sables d'or ;
Chante aussi la brise jalouse
Entr'ouvrant la robe des fleurs
Et frôlant la verte pelouse
Que la nuit humecte de pleurs ;
Chante enfin l'oiseau qui gambade,
Amoureux du jour qu'il bénit
En exhalant de son aubade
Les longs trilles vers l'infini
Chante...

Le poète

Assez de ces chants...Oui laissons la nature
A ceux que tout captive et que rien ne torture ;
Non, ce n'est pas pour moi que la terre a des fleurs,
Que sifflent dans leur nid les oiseaux querelleurs,
Qu'au firmament profond scintillent les étoiles ;
La douleur sur mon âme a mes de sombres voiles,
O muse ! et si tu n'as que ces chants pour mon cœur,
Laisse-moi, laisse-moi, seul, avec ma douleur.

La Muse

Lorsque ton âme était d'allégresse absorbée,
Naguère, allais-tu pas, dès l'aube, à la tombée
De la nuit, l'inspirer du refrain des ruisseaux,
Ou du mystérieux gazouillis des oiseaux ?
Ta lyre, entre tes mains, s'est-elle enfin brisée,
Un jour que tu chantais l'aurore, ou la rosée,
Ou la beauté du ciel d'astres d'or rayonnant ?

Non ; car j'étais heureux !...Mais hélas maintenant
Plus de bonheur pour moi. C'est la pauvre patrie,
Elle sur qui je pleure et pour qui mon cœur prie,
C'est la Patrie, objet de mon culte sacré,
Qu'avec toi, désormais, ma sœur, je chanterai.

C'est la mère montrant son front et sa poitrine
 Sanglants au peuple aveugle et sourd, qui la piétine ;
 Ce que je veux chanter, ce sont ces héros tels
 Qu'on les nomme à genoux, ce sont ces immortels,
 Ce sont ces demi-dieux, en qui mon âme fière
 Se complait à bénir ma race tout entière,
 Et dont la gloire monte embrassant l'avenir,
 Refoulant le passé debout pour la ternir.
 Et puis ô douce Muse à ces âmes serviles
 Qui glissent leur venir dans nos guerres civiles ;
 A la force brutale osant même, parfois,
 Humilier nos fronts, nous imposer ses lois,
 Mon cœur chargé de fiel veut jeter l'anathème ;
 Puis encore, à ce peuple en deuil n'ayant plus même
 L'espoir d'atteindre un jour ce bonheur qui le fuit,
 Je veux le lui montrer qui rayonne pour lui.
 S'il consent à s'unir, à s'aimer.
 Ces souffrances,
 Ces pleurs, ces souvenirs, ces vœux, ces espérances,
 Qui toujours et partout reviennent me hanter :
 Muse, c'est tout cela que je voudrais chanter.

La Muse

Adieu, poète, adieu ! Je m'en vais, je préfère
 M'envoler loin de toi, remonter dans la sphère
 D'où je daignai pourtant descendre à ton appel.
 Non, j'aime trop les bois, les fleurs, l'azur du ciel ;
 La nature a pour moi trop d'attraits, trop de charmes,
 Pour que je veuille en vain tarir ; boire les larmes...
 Tu voudrais m'accuser, mais dis, toi-même, enfin,
 Dis, n'ai-je pas gémi sur ta patrie, en vain ?...
 N'est-il pas d'autres voix qui conjurent tes frères
 L'exercent leur clémence ?... Abjurent-ils leurs guerres ?
 A la mère en lambeaux versent-ils moins d'affronts ?
 Le moindre repentir se lit-il sur leurs fronts ?
 Sonde ta conscience, et dis ce qui révèle
 Leur remords, et t'annonce aussi l'ère nouvelle,
 Et te fait entrevoir l'avenir rédempteur
 Dont tu veux être, toi, le clairon précurseur ?

Pas un signe, poète, et ce que te console,
 Et ce qui te sourit, n'est qu'un rêve frivole...
 Adieu ! garde pourtant ton amour et ta foi,
 Et lorsqu'une autre sœur descendra jusqu'au toi,
 Que du moins ton pays ne te fasse plus honte !...

Adieu ! garde pourtant ton amour et ta foi.

EXULTATION

Orgueil sacré ! –doux rêve ! – ineffable hantise !
Flamme vivante au cœur que le malheur attise !
--Culte mystérieux ! – divine obsession !...

Fonder un peuple noir ; faire une nation ;
Entre les races sœurs établir l'harmonie !
Sauver la noire, enfin, de sa lente agonie !

Oh ! n'est-il pas bien vrai que ce rêve était beau ?
N'est-ce pas qu'il fallait qu'un rayon vint d'en haut,
Qu'inondant tout, de sa clarté mystérieuse,
Une étincelle d'or s'échappât radieuse
Et fécondât en eux des semences de foi,
Pour qu'en dépit de tout ils eussent d'autre loi,
Que de tendre à ce but l'effort de leur génie ?
N'est-ce pas qu'il fallait cette force infinie
De ceux qui, face à face, osent parler à Dieu ?
Sentir, comme l'éclair ou la langue de feu.
Un souffle de l'Esprit descendre dans leurs âmes,
Pour conserver, malgré ces tortures infâmes,
Malgré ces arts maudits, ces ressorts ténébreux,
Que le colon forgeait, imaginait contre eux ;
Pour conserver, malgré cette latente angoisse,
Malgré tout ce qu'en soi le cœur sent qui le froisse
Quand le silence est long, quand l'espoir semble vain ;
Pour conserver, malgré le désespoir enfin,
Ce rêve de géant dans leurs âmes esclaves ?
Aussi, lorsque, pareils à des torrents de laves
S'élançant d'un cratère immense vers les cieux,
Jaillissaient de leurs cœurs ces cris audacieux
Qui frappaient de stupeur le clan hideux des maîtres :
« Mort à nos oppresseurs ! Liberté ! Sus aux traîtres ! »
Lorsqu'on les vit ainsi rompre avec le mépris,
S'ils tremblaient, ce n'est pas que la peur les eût pris
Et leur eut fait sentir son étroite tenace ;
Ce n'est pas que, frappés de leur sublime audace,
Effrayés des pensers soulevés à leur voix,
Scrutant l'horizon vaste assombri quelquefois,
Ils fussent dans cette ombre ou le doute s'accule ;

Ce n'est pas que, sortis de leur long crépuscule,
Ils fussent, tout à coup, éblouis de l'éclat
De l'astre qui montait ; non ce n'est pas cela. (40)

S'ils tremblaient ces héros, en leurs saintes furies,
C'est comme un volcan qui tremble en crachant ses scories,
Comme la mer s'agite en vomissant ses flots,
Comme hurle le fauve en poussant ses sanglots ;
Oui, quand, brisant leurs fers, quand, saisissant le glaive,
Ils allaient, animant le chaos de leur rêve,
Ils allaient, inondés des rayons lumineux
De cet astre divin qui se levait en eux,
S'ils tremblaient, ces héros, c'est comme le tonnerre
Qui, jaloux de broyer le chêne centenaire,
En franchissant pourtant l'espace illimité,
Tremble de voir si bas gronder sa majesté ;
S'ils tremblaient, c'est ainsi qu'à cette heure suprême
De franchir le damné... doit trembler Dieu lui-même !

O mes divins aïeux, comment dire mes vœux !
Comment tenter jamais ce que pour vous je veux !
C'est trop peu que mon cœur constamment vous exulte ;
Que, bravant ces dédains dont peut souffrir mon culte
Je rêve encore des jours éternels, infinis,
Ou vous soyez aimés, ou vous soyez bénis !...
Non, ce n'est pas assez !...Devant vous je m'incline,
Louverture, Capois, Pétion, Dessalines,
Et l'âme débordant d'enthousiasmes fous,
Dans mon plus humble orgueil faisant des dieux de vous,
Remplissant de vos noms les cris de mon cœur, j'ose
Convier l'univers à votre apothéose !
Il viendra, l'univers, et, demain, à genoux,
Vous exultant aussi, vous aimant comme nous,
Trouvant notre transport plus juste qu'aucun autre,
Il montera son cœur à l'unisson du nôtre !

Oh ! vite, épanouis en toute ta splendeur !
Eclos, vaste idéal d'éternelle grandeur !
Hâte-toi de venir, jour dont mon cœur implore
La sereine clarté, la ravivant aurore ;
Jour sacré, jour prochain, dont l'astre éblouissant
Perce à travers la brume épaisse du présent !...

A travers cette brume, oh ! je le vois sourire,
Ce groupe harmonieux qui cause mon délire !...

Oui, je vous vois passer dans mes rêves parfois,
Beaux, rayonnants, divins ! Ou, pères, je vous vois ;
Je vous entends aussi nous rappeler, vous-mêmes,
Tous ces faits immortels, ces éloquents, poèmes
Dont vous avez remplis le livre d'or des temps :
Et vous voyant ainsi, radieux et contents,
Fiers, dans l'immensité de toute votre gloire,
Je m'agenouille, moi, fils de la race noire.

Alors, je vous contemple ! alors, je vous bénis !
Et j'invoque cette heure où vos enfants, unis,
Imposeront votre œuvre au monde !...et je regrette,
Moi, vieux cœur enfiévré d'idéal, mon, poète,
De n'être pas venu, même un siècle plus tôt,
Pour combattre avec vous !...Ce dut être si beau !

Ces obscurs va-nus-pieds, ces farouches esclaves,
Etonnant ces vainqueurs, épouvantant ces braves,
Que le monde acclamait sous l'atelier conquérant !
Aux yeux des plus railleurs, ce dut être si grand
De voir, dans sa splendeur d'âme enthousiasmée,
Dessalines poussant contre la Grande Armée
Toutes ces légions d'hommes deux fois bronzés,
Revendiquant leurs droits par deux siècles lésés,
Prouvant, par ces exploits que couronna Vertières,
Que les nègres aussi sont des âmes altières
Qu'inspire l'héroïsme... ainsi que la pitié !
Aussi, pas un de vous, pas un n'est oublié ;
Lorsque vibrent nos cœurs pour vibrer Louverture,
Le premier des noirs, l'homme à l'immense stature !
Dessaline ce bras terrible qui forma
Le bronze que Dieu de son souffle anima !
Lorsque nous contemplons la pléiade sublime
Dont la gloire ennoblit, dont la clarté ranime,
Lorsqu'enfin, nos fronts bas, jusqu'à terre inclinés,
Offrant l'apothéose à ces illuminés,

N'ayant rien dans le cœur, d'assez grand pour leur dire,
Nous nous extasions d'un profond délire,
Invoquant Pétion, l'aigle au regard serein ;
Capois, le justicier que Dieu moula d'airain ;
Christophe, terrassant l'opresseur, de son ombre ;
Magny, Monpoint, Pierrot, seuls, écrasant le nombre ;
Oui, tous ces fous divins, tous ces fiers, tous ces grands
Qui de l'iniquité surent briser les rangs

Et du monde incliné réformer l'équilibre,
Oui, tous ces demi-dieux rêveurs de peuple libre :
Guerrier, Yayou, Gérin, Vernet, Clerveau, Géffard,
Herne, Abroise, Férou, Cangé, Bélaire, Gabrard,
Morisset, Marcadieu, Maurepas, Toussaint-Brave,
Francisque !...Tous ces noms que la liberté grave
En longs traits de lumière !...Oui, lorsque dans nos chants
Tous, nous nous réclamons de ces hommes géants,
Oh ! c'est bien de vous-même en qui la vieille Afrique
Fit passer son génie et son âme stoïque !
C'est bien de vous aussi que nous nous réclamons ;
C'est vous que nous chantons, c'est vous que nous aimons
C'est pour vous que nos cœurs bondissent d'espérance :
Macaya, Zephrin, Benech, L'amour-Démence,
Boukman, Jeannot, Fourmi, Labrunit, Guyambois,
Metellus, Halaou, Lavougou, Catabois,
Lafleur, Tellier, Vancol, Sylla !...groupe farouche
Que Dieu même anima du souffle de sa bouche !

Car tous, avec vos noms, cent fois bénis ces noms
Magiques et sacres, qu'aux salves des canons
Nous voudrions redire en guise de poème ;
Oui tous vous méritez l'éclatant diadème
Des demi-Dieux debout dans l'immortalité,
Humbles vengeurs du droit et de la liberté !

MARTYRE

Contre eux tous le colon tonnait, bien dur, bien aigre
Car leur crime était grand, leur crime était d'avoir
Avec leur foi tenace, un courage de nègre,
De fixer l'avenir, de même le vouloir !

Deux siècles les ont vus, ces noirs et ces mulâtres,
Courber leur front servile ; et puis, après ce laps
De temps, voilà que tous ils étaient idolâtres
Du Droit, voilà que tous ils devenaient relaps !

Et voilà que, devant l'idole de la Force,
Ils ne consentaient plus à se mettre à genoux,
Qu'avec la tyrannie eux tous faisait divorce,
Tant de la Liberté leurs cœurs étaient jaloux !

Voilà qu'enfin, rêvant un nouvel équilibre,

Le bilan de leurs droits se chiffant a zéro,
Ils ne voulaient plus voir l'un courbé l'autre libre :
Le noir toujours martyr, le blanc toujours bourreau !

Or, il fallait broyer ces viles créatures
Qui réclamaient des droits pour prix de leurs devoirs
Et qui, malgré la mort, en dépit des tortures
Gardaient pieusement tant de nobles espoirs.

Or, à coups de massue, il importait d'abattre
L'hydre qui renaissait sur sa base d'airain ;
Il fallait étouffer dans l'œuf Dix-huit cent quatre
Que couvait ardemment le génie africain !

« A la verge, à la flamme, aux fers, aux fusillades,
Aux limiers de Cuba, --s'écriraient les colons, »
« Joignons les pendants, ajoutons les noyades : »
« Et nous les vaincrons tous, jusqu'au dernier ! Allons ! »

Et de nombreux gibets se dressaient sur les places !
Et puis on les pendait, ces nègres obstinés !
Et puis, pour extirper tous les germes vivaces,
Sans raison, sans prétexte, ils étaient condamnés !

Quand d'un lâche soupçon, d'un caprice quelconque,
Un seul osait, un jour, se prétendre innocent,
Comme de vieux rameaux d'un vieil arbre qu'on tronque.
Pour ce seul criminel on en détruisait cent !

Et tel qu'on sait mourir, lorsqu'on pense, en son âme,
Que sa mort doit sauver, racheter l'avenir :
Ils tombaient sous le fouet, périssaient dans sa flamme,
Assez forts pour se taire, assez grands pour bénir.

Parfois, après avoir longtemps courbé l'échine
Pour faire, au gré du maître un labeur sans pareil
On leur cinglait le corps de longs coups de rouchine
Et les laissait gésir regardant le soleil !

Parfois on les voyait mener, tête baissée,
N'importe, ou, nuit et jour, et n'importe comment
La plupart étalant, non, encore effacée,
L'empreinte, vive encore d'un récent châtiment.

Car un jour qu'il souffrait, un jour qu'il eut, peut-être,
La force de pousser un cri lugubre, amer,

Ce noir fut accusé d'en vouloir un son maître :
Pour punir sa révolte on le frappa d'un R !

Cet enfant, pour avoir glissé sa main timide,
Un jour que vainement sa force avait bravé
La faim qui l'agitait, qui le poussait, avide
N'était plus qu'un voleur : on le frappa d'un V.

Et cet autre, un vieillard, une femme qu'on fauche,
Pour avoir fui le fouet, dont elle a trop souffert,
N'est plus qu'une marronne : et son épaule gauche
Étalait au soleil l'M qu'avait mis le fer !

Ainsi marqués, pareils à des bêtes de somme, --
Ces noirs étaient livres par le maître-colon,
Et le colon-bourreau, vieux monstre las d'être homme,
Remplissait son office aussi cruel que long.

*

Un jour on en noyait proche d'une centaine.
Ceux-ci la corde au bras, ceux-la la chaîne aux pieds :
Enfants, femmes, vieillards, qu'en sa rage hautaine
Le maître, plus ou moins, avait estropiés.

Ayant déjà connu jusqu'au dernier martyr,
Ayant toujours souffert ce qu'ils souffraient encore
Dans la cale profond et sombre du navire
Entasse pêle-mêle ils espéraient la mort.

Ils étaient là : les uns, cœurs où grondaient des laves
De haine, conservant leur calme solennel :
Les autres fredonnant leurs plaintes d'esclaves,
Faisant dans leurs soupirs monter leurs vœux au ciel.

Jadis, tant que le fouet torturait leurs entrailles,
Du cœur brisé d'angoisse un cri pouvait jaillir ;
Pressentant maintenant l'heure des représailles,
Toute leur foi rayonne à l'heure de mourir.

Or, entre eux, se trouvait une négresse austère,
Ses filles, son mari, -- doux vieillard, gais enfants, --
Tout ce qui lui restait de bonheur sur la terre,
Comme elle allait périr sous les flots étouffants.

Lorsque, pour le lancer dans la mer vaste et sombre,

Devant lui, menaçant, s'avança le bourreau,
Le noir semble fléchir : voyant se dresser l'ombre
De la mort, il n'osait la regarder front haut.

Alors —ainsi que fit Semprone la romane—
La noire, encourageant son époux a la mort :
« N'es-tu donc pas heureux de n'avoir plus de chaîne ?
Dit-elle en souriant ; veux-tu souffrir encore ? »

Et le vieillard debout s'indigna de sa faute ;
Le repentir passa qui raviva son cœur ;
Il s'offrit au bourreau, l'œil serein, l'âme haute,
Et, lancé dans la mer, petit martyr, --vainqueur.

Puis le tour des enfants. Encor jeune et belles,
Mais sans nulle espérance, oh ! C'était leur souci
De s'en aller enfin ; mais lorsque devant elles
La mort surgit soudain, elles pleuraient aussi.

Et la noire, vainquant la pitié maternelle,
Leur inspirant ainsi l'horreur des assassins :
« Plus heures que moi, mourrez, leur criait-elle ;
Vous n'aurez point porté d'esclaves dans vos seins ! »

Radieuses, alors, s'arrachant à l'étreint
De leur lente agonie, et relevant le front,
Ces vierges au bourreau s'abandonnant sans plainte,
Burent la mort au sein de l'abîme profond.

Et puis, c'était son tour, à l'altière négresse.
En face du bourreau railleur de ses vertus,
Elle eu comme un délire, un transport d'allégresse,
Car la mort des martyrs ne l'épouvantait plus.

Lui-même le bourreau, ce qu'il avait de haine,
Le calme de la mère, esclave le tarit ;
Et comme un damne geint au fond de sa géhenne,
Sa conscience en lui semblait pousser un cri.

Car lorsqu'il eut rempli sa mission cruelle,
Il vit la noire encore le bénir ; et les flots
Rugirent d'épouvante en s'engouffrant sur elle ;
Et la mère indignée exhala des sanglots....

PAROLES D'UN CROYANT

-I-

Encore à toi, toujours à toi, sainte Patrie,
O le premier objet de mon culte sacré !...
Et tandis que plus d'un jette la raillerie,
En te voyant souffrir, moi, je te bénirai.

Encore à toi, toujours à toi, -- que l'on renie !
Oh ! ton plus chaste amour dans mon âme est ancré :
Aussi, dans tes douleurs, dans ta lente agonie,
Sans me lasser jamais, je te consolerais.

Encore à toi, toujours à toi !...Mère, quand s'ouvre
Ton cœur toujours aimant et toujours ulcère,
Soulevant le manteau de deuil qui te recouvre,
A tes deux pieds sanglants, je m'agenouillerai.

Encore à toi, toujours à toi !...Mère, que d'autres
Laissent s'éteindre en eux le flambeau de la foi :
Allant sans défaillir parmi tous ces apôtres
Qui te font l'avenir, j'aurai ma place, moi.

Je lutterai pour toi parce que tu veux vivre,
Abjurer le passé, sans retard, sans regrets,
Étanter dans la source ou tout peuple s'enivre
Ta soif de liberté, de travail, de progrès ;

Parce que tu subis trop d'angoisse et de honte,
Pour n'être pas aimé, compris, idolâtre,
O mon humble Pays !...Aussi, tandis que monte
Le flot des contempteurs, moi, je chanterai.

Moi, je te chanterai, malgré les cris sceptiques,
Tes malheurs grandissant, je sens ma foi grandir ;
Et je tente d'ouvrir, par mes notes épiques,
Ton âme vaste entière à l'immense avenir !

Souffre, ô mon Pays ! mais grandis, mais espère !

Qu'un sort toujours cruel ne soit pas ton vainqueur,
Prends la coupe, et bois-en jusqu'à la lie amère ;
Mais haut dans l'infini laisse planer ton cœur.

Souffrir pour s'élever ; garder ses espérances ;
Prendre un plus large essor au plus fort de ses trances :
Oh ! Dieu bénit celui qui sait grandir ainsi !
Un peuple ne meurt pas, quand il a pour souci
Le culte de l'honneur, quand il a pour boussole
La foi qui raffermi, qui ravive et console ;
Lorsque, dans l'avenir, il fixe, qui reluit,
Le Progrès, tel un phare au milieu de la nuit,

Pour moi, je sens bondir d'aise mon âme entière
Quand je songe te voir, rayonnant de lumière,
Oh, mon humble Pays, t'en aller de l'avant !
Ne te lasse jamais de ton espoir fervent ;
Marche, et si tu faiblis, que cela te rappelle
Que plus le but est loï, plus la conquête est belle.
Marche ; ouvre l'horizon ; ne cesse de grandir ;
Sous ton ciel lumineux qu'on vienne t'applaudir.
Marche donc ; sous tes pieds vois la force brutale
Qui jadis t'outrageait, riait de te voir pale,
Alors qu'elle t'osait menacer du canon.
Marche ; vois tous les noirs s'incliner à ton nom ;
Vois sous ton fier drapeau ma race qu s' enrôle ;
Vois l'Afrique renaître et reçois l'auréole
De gloire dont le monde a genoux ceint ton front,
Couvrant de ses baiser tout vestige d'affront !

Et tout cela serait une pensée, un rêve !
En ces temps ou la foi dans le progrès soulève
Comme un levier sacré, tu n'aurais pas aussi, aussi,
Toi, notre culte, toi notre plus cher souci,
O mon humble Pays ! ...scrutant ta foi tenace,
Dieu, parmi les élus, n'eut pas crée ta place !...
Oh ! berce-moi, doux rêve ! O mon rêve, prends corps !
Déroulez à mes yeux, ô ferriques décors,
Eternel idéal ou ma pensée aspire,
Puis, au souffle puissant de la foi qui m'inspire,
Soyez réalité !

Non, je ne rêve point ;
Je sens que tu grandis, je vois l'astre qui point

Pour t'inonder bientôt de ses vives lumières !
Je te vois, Haïti, fière entre les plus fières,
Répandre sous tes pas l'harmonie et la paix,
Monter âpre sentir sans défaillir jamais,
Aller toujours, hanter jusqu'aux plus hautes cimes,
Et de tous les malheureux combler tous les abîmes...
Frère, qui que tu sois, si tu n'as pas un cœur
Que jamais n'épouvantes aucun rire moqueur
Et que la foi nourrit, féconde de sa sève,
Ne viens pas dans ma nuit effaroucher mon rêve.

(Partie I)

TOUSSAINT-MESSIE

Et Brunet – un Français, mais un traître – Brunet
Voyant que des colons l'étoile déclinait,
Au dessein de Leclerc ouvrit toute son âme ;
C'était peu d'être lâche, il fallait être infâme.
Or, Brunet le devint. Et comme fit Judas
Baisant Christ pour trahir, Brunet n'hésita pas
A parler d'amitié pour trahir Louverture.
Et lui, ce grand, planant dans sa large envergure,
Et lui, voyant, là-bas, passer la Liberté
Souriant à sa race : et lui, l'esprit hanté,
Le cœur embrase comme une ardente fournaise,
Il partit confiant dans une âme française.

Oh ! Dieu trouvait si beau, si grand, si noble, enfin,
Le rêver du héros : il trouvait si divin
Le projet que conçut le noir en sa démence,
Que pour mettre dessus le sceau de sa puissance,
Créer dans Louverture un nouveau rédempteur,
Il voulut que le blanc, ironique, insulteur,
Lui fit jusqu'à la lie accepter le martyr.

Et Toussaint l'accepta.

Calme, au milieu du rire,

Au milieu de la joie infinie, au milieu
Des sarcasmes du blanc vainqueur, sous l'œil de Dieu
Fécondent son génie, il laissa cette terre,
Volcan dont jusqu'au alors il était le cratère :
Il laissa son asile aimé, son Ennery,
Où pour lui le bonheur avait déjà fleuri :

Où les nids amoureux, les sources murmurantes,
L'enivraient : il laissa ces collines riantes
Où du lambi des noirs vibrait l'accent vainqueur :
Il laissa tous ces lieux qui dilataient son cœur,
Ces monts aux flancs pierreux, aux verdoyantes cimes,
Où son esprit rêvait tant de choses sublimes :
Et l'île aux verts palmiers, splendide sous les cieux.
Lentement, lentement, se perdit à ses yeux.

Alors, voyant le Joux, --comme Christ le calvaire, --
A cette soldatesque effrénée et sévère
Qui le raille, aux colons, juifs qui veulent sa mort,
A ce que travaille à lui rendre le sort
Plus cruel, à la force, à la haine, à l'envie,
A ces bourreaux armés que chute convie
A le nommer infâme, à lui jeter des cris,
Toussaint, dans sa grandeur, oppose son mépris
S'il soupire parfois, lui, le héros si ferme,
C'est qu'en sa tête un monde, une race regerme ;
Et si dans ses deux mains il laisse aller son front,
Oh ! Ce qui l'y contraint, non, ce n'est pas l'affront,
Ce n'est pas l'agonie à peine commencée,
Mais l'immense avenir qui tourne en sa pensée !...

Aussi, lorsque la nef ouvre sous le ciel pur
Ses voiles, lève l'ancre et fend les flots d'azur
Sur cet autre Nébo, comme un autre Moïse,
Toussaint plonge ses yeux vers la terre promise
Ou son peuple entera sous un autre qu lui
Et, --Tel qu'avant l'orage un dernier soleil luit, --
Lançant sur ses bourreaux ses yeux pleins de lumière
Ces yeux où rayonnait son âme toute entière ;
« Vous avez abattu, dit-il, en m'abattant,
« Le tronc de l'arbre noir ; il renaître pourtant :
« Ses racines sont la vivaces et profonds ! »
Et tu jetas ces mots à ces vainqueurs de mondes
O Toussaint ! Et ta voix dans le ciel retentit!

Saint Domingue, dès lors, redevient Haïti ;
De ces soleils éteints, de ces volcans sans laves,
Dès lors, on vit surgir des pléiades de braves ;
Dès lors, enfin, du nègre incompris, insulte,
Le sang pur féconda la chaste Liberté :
Et ceux que le colon poursuivait de sa haine,
Par un suprême effort faisant tomber leur chaîne,

On entendit vibrer sous nos cieux infinis
Ce cris : Dix-huit cent quatre !

Oh ! Tous je vous bénis !

Cent fois je vous bénis, vous dont la gloire immense
Eblouit mon esprit ! Ce que votre démente
Lumineuses, divine, osa tenter pour nous :
Ce n'est pas d'avoir vu se briser sous vos coups,
S'écrouler, quand dessus passa votre colère,
Le vieux temple d'airain tant de fois séculaire ;
Ce n'est pas seulement d'avoir vu, tant de fois,
Des martyrs réveillés aux sons de votre voix
Briser soudain le sceau de leur sépulcre étrange ;
Ce n'est pas seulement, dans vos splendeurs d'archange,
D'avoir en l'inondant d'effluves d'idéal,
Perce l'ombre où gisait le dieu colonial ;
Ce n'est pas seul ; émanant, lassés de sang, de larmes,
D'avoir lutté, vaincu, presque sans pain, sans armes,
Et dans ces nains obscurs, raillés, chassés, audits,
Moule tous ces géants tant de fois applaudis ;
Mais c'est d'avoir aussi compris le chant du cygne ;
D'avoir, quand l'aigle altier, pris dans un art insigne,
Eut rempli l'infini d'un murmure nouveau,
En des exploits si grands traduit ce cri si beau ;
C'est d'avoir imprimé, malgré bien des souffrances,
Malgré des jours d'angoisse et de désespérances,
A la voix du martyr comme un écho divin ;
Oh! oui, c'est d'avoir fait, pleins de son souffle enfin,
Et réalisant tous sa grande prophétie,
De Toussaint-Louverture, un voyant, un messie !

LE SUPPLICE DU NOIR

Or, ce n'était pas loin de cette place d'armes
Où sur les nègres vils n'ayant plus sang ni larmes,
Le colon excellait à se montrer cruel ;
Où l'on fit rompre vifs, la face vers le ciel,
Chavanne, Ogé, ces deux vaillants dont l'équipée [sic]
Sublime préluda la sublime épopée ;
Ce n'en fut pas bien loin qu'un crime sombre eût lieu,
Consummé par des blancs, sur un nègre, ... sous Dieu !

Il y avait pourtant de ces hommes austères
Pour qui les noirs courbés n'étaient pas moins des frères :

Et tous ce cœurs français au juste épanouis
S'abstiennent d'applaudir aux excès inouïs
Des colons en démente et de leurs prosélytes...
Dans la vaste avant-cour du couvent des Jésuites,
Sous un ciel plein d'azur, un ciel que ne ternit.
Aucune ombre, ils sont là, forts, en nombre infini,
Les colons, donnant l'âme à grande pensée !...
Déjà le noir tressaille, et la meute est lancée !...

Animés par la fin qui les ronge longtemps,
Sur le martyr serein tous ces chiens haletants
Bondissent ; ils ont l'œil en feu ; leur gueule écume
De rage ; chacun lève un museau tremblant, hume
Cette chair que l'on jette à leur mâle appétit ;
Mais, pourtant, pas un seul ne peut mordre : on eut dit
--A les voir reculer, traînant leurs flots de bave --
Qu'ils maudissent le maître et pleurent sur l'esclave.
Ils ont faim, mais devant ce noir ainsi lié,
On eut dit que le ciel leur donne la pitié
Que n'ont plus les colons...Maintenant, impassible,
Se dérobant quand même aux rigueurs inflexibles
Du maître, les voilà qui reculent, s'en vont !

Alors Pierre Boyer, surgissant, haut le front
Brandit son sabre avec une humeur souveraine,
Rassemble ses limiers, redescend dans l'arène,
Et tout fier des bravos mille fois répétés
Des tonnerres de cris des colons exaltés,
Accort, l'œil flamboyant, le frappe la victime :
Et, quand le sang jaillit, pour que l'excès du crime
Ne les ébranle pas, le féroce saisit
Les dogues effares qu'il lance !...Et c'est ainsi
Qu'en dépit du ciel même il inspire sa rage :
Et la tourbe enivrée exalte son courage,
Et compte le cynique au nombre des héros !
Alors, comme ces blancs, ces chiens se font bourreaux.
Excité par les cris incessants de la foule,
Par la vue et le flair du sang vermeil qui coule,
Ils plongent, pantelants, sur l'esclave martyr :
Et les colons ravis bien plus haut d'applaudir !
Il râle, et ces colons vierges d'une âme humaine,
Redoublent leur puissance au braiser de leur haine
Lancent de plus longs cris pour garder, en ces flancs,
La meute cramponnée à ses membres sanglants
C'est un esclave ! c'est un nègre ! Eh bien, qu'importe
Qu'il meurt ainsi ! ...Mais lui, gardant une âme forte,

Au dessus des douleurs qu'il souffre trop longtemps.
Lui ne les maudit pas de les voir si contents
Seul, décharné, rongé l'œil ouvert, il expire :
Et tous de répéter leurs longs éclats de rire !..
Le noir est mort. Les chiens sur ses membres épars
S'étendent ; les colons repaissent leurs regards
D'un spectacle si beau ; toute la foule aboie ;
Deux meutes, à présent, poussent des cris de joie ;
Deux meutes à présents, hurlent ; et, jusqu'au soir,
Pour jeter son outrage au squelette du noir,
Consommer tout el crime et s'en aller plus fière,
La meute des colons restera la dernière !

Or, vous avez bien fait, sublime Rochambeau !
Le nègre n'a point droit à l'amour, et c'est beau
Qu'on l'opprime toujours, qu'il souffre le martyr ;
Qu vous lanciez sur lui deux meutes en délire,

Que fouettent vos égaux ainsi que des valets.
Or, faites, Rochambeau ! toujours, nourrissez-les
De al chair et du sang du noir et du mulâtre :
Die voit et ne dit mot. Mais, en Dix-huit-cent-quatre,
Quand l'heure solennelle aura sonné pour nous
Et que Dieu tonnera ; quand l'esclave à genoux
Relèvera le front pour regarder le maître ;
Quand le nègre, brisé, las enfin de connaître
Vos tortures, vos crois, vos supplices trop longs,
Poursuivra sans remords la meute des colons ;
Quand les voyant traqués par des groupes d'esclaves
Vos dogues effarés harceleront vos braves :
Oh ! ne reprochez pas au nègre ses excès.
Abdiquant les vertus qui font les cœurs français,
Pour charmer vos loisirs vous vous montrer sublimes
En entassant toujours le crime sur le crime,

Or, demain qu'appliquant la loi du talion
Le nègre soit debout, se fasse aussi lion,
N'osez point le maudire et comprenez sa haine
L'ignorance est le lot qu'on lui jette en sa chaîne ;
Le mépris insolent, le sarcasme moqueur,
Sont les germes féconds répandus en son cœur
Eh bien, il gardera la multiple semence
Et, de tant d'éléments, combinant sa démence,
A vois soins généreux donnant leur juste prix,
Ils auront la vengeance, ils auront le mépris.

YANKISME

Il faut de l'or, --ou rien, -- pour être , --ou ne pas être ;
Time is money. Le crime aussi.
Or faisons fi du bien ; car l'honneur enchevêtre ;
C'est par le mal qu'on réussit.

Or, des droits du plus faibles et de toutes ces choses
Qu'on vient nous conter à présent,
De ces illusions dans les cerveaux écloses,
Moquons-nous-en ! Moquons-nous-en !

Et toujours de l'argent ! toujours de grosses sommes !
Beaucoup d'or pour l'Américain !
All right ! droit vers le but, que qu'il soit, où nous sommes
Attiré par l'espoir d'un gain !...

Cotton is king !...Ainsi, tandis qu'ils se réclament
De tant d'hommes, au cœur si droit ;
Ainsi, comme l'Anglais, ces fiers yankees proclament
Que la Force prime le Droit !..

Ah ! ce n'est pas ainsi que vous disiez, naguère ;
Ce n'est pas ainsi que, jadis,
Vous alliez, conviant pour la suprême guerre,
La France à soulever ses fils.

Et des noirs en étaient, pleins de leur foi rouste
Que combattaient sous vos drapeaux,
Qui faisaient triompher la cause la plus juste,
La plus digne pour des héros !

Oui, l'on vit tous ces noirs, que la sainte pensée
De la justice illumina,
Raviver, de leur sang, la liberté lassée
Devant les murs de Savannah.

Et --le savez-vous bien ? --ces chevaliers, ces braves,
Aux élans, aux cris merveilleux,
Ils venaient de cette île où grandissaient --esclaves
La pléiade de nos aïeux.

Alors, vous étiez beaux ! vous gardiez l'attitude
Des vengeurs de la liberté ;
Vous étiez grand alors, sans cette platitude,
Sans ce mépris de l'Equité.

Vous poussiez de longs cris de haine, d'anathème,
Contre ces grands, contre ces forts,
Qui foulent sous leurs pieds les lois de l'Honneur même !...
Vous étiez sublimes alors !

Vous n'aviez que dédain pour des peuples qui grouillent
De géants prêts au vil larcin,
Prêts à mettre a la gorge, en même temps qu'ils fouillent
La poche, un poignard d'assassin !...

Et c'est avec orgueil que votre voix proclame
Les Washington et les Franklin,
Dont le rayonnement ne vous meut rien dans l'âme,
Et dont vous hâtez le déclin !

Ah ! combien doivent donc tressaillir ces grands hommes,
Jusques au fond de leur tombeaux,
Quand vous ne menacer, oubliant que nous sommes,
Nous aussi, fils de tels héros !

Ah ! combien doivent-ils gémir de vous entendre
Nous traiter d'un air dédaigneux,
Nous, les fiers rejetons de ceux qu'ils durent prendre
Pour mieux lutter, pour vaincre mieux !...

Aussi dans nos esprits, voyant que ces génies
Qui de vos élans sont témoins,
Le sont encor, surtout, de vos ignominies,
Nos cœurs saignants, souffrent bien moins.

Car, dans tous ces accès où, pareils à tant d'autres,
Vous vous montrez lâches et fous,
Nous en appelons moins à nous aïeux qu'aux vôtres
Des attentats commis par vous !

CAUCHEMAR

L'étranger insulteur : voilà mon cauchemar.
Oui, la Force, agitant son farouche étendard,
Voulant que la justice a ses pieds s'humilie,

Pour ne se redresser que souillée, avilie ;

Oui, vous tous qui voulez que le Droit –tel que nous
Devant vous menaçants fléchisse les genoux,
Que la vérité soit méprisée, oppressée,
Vous êtes ce qui vient tourmenter ma pensée,
Ce qui passe effrayant pour maculer ma nuit ;
Oui, vous êtes l'horreur sombre qui me poursuit...
Il vous faut de l'argent, et vous voici ! Qu'importe
Le prétexte, pourvu qu'on vous ouvre la porte,
Pourvu qu'en souriant l'on compte la rançon,
Ou qu'à coups de boulets vous vous fassiez raison.
La force est votre droit, le droit est notre crime.
Qu'un peuple noir soit libre et travaille et s'anime
Et lentement prospère, et vive sous les cieux :
Que cela soit ainsi, c'est un crime à vos yeux.

Et bien, applaudissez ; riez de voir s'effondre
Notre œuvre sous vos coups, car nous n'osons répondre
A vos canons d'airain pas plus qu'à vos affronts ;
Nous n'avons qu'à nous plaindre en inclinant nos fronts
Quand vous voudrez, un jour, que vos preux nous abreuvent
De honte, ou que sur nous vos boulets chargés pleuvent.
Et vous n'aurez pas tort de faire tout cela ;
Le soleil qui se couche est jaloux de l'éclat
De la lune limpide et calme qui se lève ;
Le vieux chêne qui tombe est jaloux de la sève
Qui fait gonfler le gland, le chêne de demain.
Et puis, comment daigner nous tendre encor la main,
Alors que vous criez que l'on n'est pas des hommes
Etant des nègres. Soit, mais nègres que nous sommes,

C'est pourtant sans forfaits, c'est sans être jaloux,
Sans haïr les petits, que nous grandissons, nous.
Car nous ne sommes pas descendants de vandales ;
Nos pères n'avaient point de ces fureurs brutales
Que Dieu vengeur du Droit, ne sanctionne pas.
Aigles des hauts sommets ils n'allaient point si bas ;
Ce qu'ils broyaient, avec une joie infinie,
Dans leurs serres, c'est vous, horreur et tyrannie.

Nous n'avons pas pris place au rang des nations
Comme un être chargé de prostitutions,
De crimes noirs, de faits de lèse conscience ;
Nos pères, conservant leur mâle patience,
Conservant leurs espoirs plus d'une fois déçus,

N'ont rien fait que de grand pour nous voir tous issus
 Sans crainte, sans remords, sans honte, sans bassesse,
 Mais le front haut, avec un titre de noblesse,
 Nos fiers aïeux n'avaient quelque fois massacré,
 Incendié, détruit, qu'au nom du Droit sacré ;
 Et leur pitié, d'ailleurs, répondait à des crimes ;
 Et pourtant, ils savaient épargner leurs victimes ;
 A ceux qui leur disaient : « Oeil pour œil, dent pour dent, »
 Ils savaient, -eux le Droit, -pardonner, cependant !
 Voilà notre bilan. Faites-nous voir le vôtre,
 Etranger insulteur ; prouvez qu'il ne s'y vautre
 Aucune de ces lis que réproûve le Bien ;
 Montrez-y des vertus que l'on n'immole à rien.
 S'il n'en peut être ainsi, donc c'est beau, c'est très juste
 Que le droit soit pour vous de ces mots qu'on incruste
 En des discours tremblants !...Or, ce n'est plus assez
 Des menaces ; sans peur, sans scrupule, agissez.
 Oh ! des droits du plus faibles on ne tiendra pas compte ;
 Venez donc ! agissez consommez notre honte ;
 Que rien ne soit debout où grondent vos canons ;
 Qu'on apprenne à trembler en entendant vos noms,
 Attilas ! que jamais ne croisse plus une herbe
 Ou vous passez, drapés dans votre orgueil superbe.
 Etre grands, désormais, implique être inhumains
 Et, bien, à la faveur de l'ombre, que vos mains
 Cinglent de leurs soufflets notre joue encor vierge.
 Oui, vous aurez raison. Qu'importe, avec sa verge,
 L'Avenir qui regarde, indigné, plein du feu
 D'une colère immense et vous montrant à Dieu !
 Qu'importe, oubliez tout ; oubliez que l'Histoire
 A de sombres regards pour toiser votre gloire
 Teinté de sang ; qu'elle a ses colères aussi ;
 Qu'elle insulte les grands et les forts, sans souci
 De force ou de grandeur ; qu'elle n'a pas à craindre
 L'oppression farouche accourant pour éteindre
 La Justice, et foulant des siècles sous ses pas ;
 Oui, tonnez : oubliez que l'Histoire n'a pas
 A redouter sans cesse –ainsi qu'un jeune peuple
 La démence des Batchs, la rage qui dépeuple
 Les cités, la terreur dédaignant la raison
 Du Droit et se faisant cracher quelque rançon ;
 Oubliez tout cela, pour descendre en vos fanges,
 Superbes, encensé de flatteuses louanges,
 Jusqu'un jour où, vengeant les faibles de vos coups,
 La colère du ciel aura passé sur vous.

DEFAILLANCE

J'en vois tant dont la bouche est encor toute pleine
D'harmonie, cet qui n'ont que le doute et la haine
Dans un cœur qu'on dirait plein d'amour et de foi ;
J'en vois tant que ce doute implacable travaille,
Que je sens, par moments, ma ferveur qui défaille,
Et que je me surprends qui me demande à moi.

A quoi servent ces chants, malgré toute harmonie
Dont je les remplirais ; que soit le génie
Dont le souffle viendrait faire vibrer mon cœur ?
A quoi servent ces chants, toutes ces strophes vaines
Dont, pour moi, chaque vers, est le sang de mes veines
Goutte à goutte tombant, trahissant ma douleur ?

Ainsi, me voilà donc sous l'étreinte du doute ;
Tente de m'arrêter à moitié de la route,
Gémissant, le front bas, je me demande à moi
Si je peux jusqu'au bout aller sans défaillance,
Si nul instinct honteux ne soutient ma vaillance,
Et si mon livre même est une œuvre de foi.

Me voilà lentement obsédé d'un long rêve,
Interrogeant mon cœur, lui demandant sans trêve
S'il ne me berce en vain ; si, quelque jour, demain,
L'on ne me verra pas, chercher de gloire vile,
Agiter le drapeau de la guerre civile,
Et puis, sur mes autels, le planter, -- de ma main ;

Lui demandant, enfin, si quelque jour, moi-même
Qui parle de Justice, et consacre à ce thème
Ce que peut-être en moi j'ai de meilleurs accents,
Je n'irais pas aussi, fier, devant quelque traître,
Dont un sort rigoureux nous aurait fait un maître,
Fléchir mes deux genoux pour brûler mon encens.

Et mon cœur, soupirant, m'a répondu : J'ignore,
Car on m'a bien trompé ; car il n'est plus encore
De ces cœurs généreux qu'inspire leur dédain,
Dont la foi se complait au malheur qui cimente
Et qui savent toujours au fort de la tourmente
Fermer le gouffre énorme en s'y jetant soudain !

LE POETE A DIEU

La Patrie est en proie à son dernier martyr :
Vois, mon Dieu ! sous les coups de ses fils elle expire !...
Pourtant je garde encore la foi ;
Et tandis qu'en mon cœur le désespoir me crie
Que vains sont nos efforts, que morte est la Patrie,
J'espère encor, toujours, en toi !

En toi la grande force et l'éternelle gloire !
En toi, qui, seul, mon Dieu ! peux donner la victoire
A la mère sur les enfants !
Oui, tu mettras un frein à nos guerres civiles,
En faisant rayonner dans nos champs, dans nos villes
La Paix et l'Amour triomphants !

Car voulant, avec nous, que, belles dans leur gloire,
Dans sa fille Haïti vive la race noire,
Tu les béniras toutes deux ;
Tu les arracheras aux fréquentes étreintes
De ceux qui, malgré tout : leurs prières, leurs plaintes
S'érigent en bourreaux hideux !

A tous ces insensés qui surgissent contre elles
Aiguisant le poignard des passions cruelles,
Seul, mon Dieu, tu t'opposeras !
Seul, tu feras gémir dans leur géhenne sombre,
Spectres hagards livrés à des remords sans nombre
Tous ces forts et tous ces ingrats

Parle, toi-même, Dieu ! Livre à leur conscience
Ceux qui bravent ainsi ta sainte patience :
Fais-les obéir à tes lois !
Qu'en voyant la Patrie à ce point abaissée,
Ils sentent tout l'enfer au fond de leur pensée,
Ils reprouvent leurs vils exploits !

Car nous ne gardon plus, au milieu de ces guerres
Exécrables, l'espoir de désarmer nos frères
En leur prêchant toujours la paix ;
Notre voix ne peut rien dans la lutte sauvage
Où le cynisme aveugle est surnomme courage,
Où l'on sourit à des forfaits !

Et bien, parle pour nous, brise la coupe amère ;
Fais entendre ta voix, ressuscite la mer

Déjà couchée en son linceul.
Notre espoir est brisé, notre force est finie ;
Mais ce que ne peut pas l'amour ou le génie,
Tu le pourras, mon Dieu, toi seul !

L'EVEIL

Les voilà, tenaillés pas leurs désirs tenaces !
Ils parlent de venir nous outrager encore,
De nous faire céder quand même à leurs menaces,
Et de nous dépouiller, bientôt, de tout notre or !

Ils rêvent, ces puissants, de faire table rase
De nos droits, d'imposer, -- à l'aide du canon, --
Leur seule volonté de garder la Navase,
Et de tenter bien pis si nous leur disons : Non !

Ils s'avisent, enfin, d'avoir: les uns, le Môle;
Les autres, la Tortue ; et les autres enfin...
Que sais-je ? ...oubliant, tous, que la haine s'immole,
Que l'union renaît, quand le danger survient !

Et lorsque, dans la foule, une voix passe et crie
« Caveant consules ! frères, j'entends des pas ! »
Veillons sur le drapeau ! veillons sur la patrie ! »
On le nomme alarmiste et l'on n'écoute pas !...

Oui, si quelqu'un, scrutant de perverses pensées,
Embouche le clairon et sonne le réveil,
On demande pourquoi ces rumeurs insensées,
Pourquoi l'ombre vient-elle offusquer le soleil !...

Pourquoi ??? qu'a-t-on besoin, chaque jour, de te dire ?
N'a-t-on plus souvenance ? Aurait on oublié
Combien de fois ces forts, jaloux de nous détruire,
Sont venus nous choquer, sans raison, sans pitié ?...

Pourquoi ? C'est que, devant une inique furie,
On ne peut de ses droits se montrer trop jaloux ;
On ne peut trop crier quand dans la bergerie
De timides pasteurs laissent glisser les loups !...

Pourquoi ? C'est qu'on a vu de ces âmes serviles,
Qui, ne se pavanant qu'en leur peau d'étranger,
Ont soufflé leur venir dans nous guerres civiles
Et nous avons insultés à l'heure du danger ;

C'est qu'on en a bien vu te clouer des épines,
Te ternir chaque fois qu'à leurs yeux tu brillas,
Et s'en aller, après, tout charges de rapines,
Ne voyant plus en nous que de vils parias ;

C'est qu'on en a bien vu, que nous saoulions naguère,
Se réveiller parfois, au jour du lendemain,
Ne laissant jusqu'au fond rien que la lie amère,
Et rire, en nous voyant la coupe dans la main ;

C'est qu'on en a trop vu !... Cette clique farouche
Du maîtres de chez nous qui sont chez eux valets,
C'est pour te la montrer que malgré tout, j'embouche
Le clairon, ô patrie, et te redis : Crains-les !

Crains-les tous tant qu'ils sont, ô Mère encore meurtrie !
Crains les dans leurs conseils, crains-les dans leurs présents ;
Car c'est pour les avoir trop écoutés, Patrie,
Que tu n'as point vécu tes quatre-vingt-six ans !

Crains-les !..et si, malgré ton extrême prudence,
Malgré ce que tu fais pour grandir sans remords
Ils venaient se heurter à ton indépendance,
Oh ! redresse-toi donc, lève-toi donc alors !

Et quitte à te sentir la balle meurtrière
Aux flancs, secoue alors ton sommeil de lion :
Au flair du vieux chasseur hérissé ta crinière ;
Rugis, toi-même aussi ; prétends au talion !

Prouve enfin qu'en cédant à des lois rigoureuses,
Lorsqu'avec toi, jadis, on faisait l'exigeant,
C'est avec le mépris des âmes généreuses,
Et non avec la peur, que tu crachais l'argent !

ADIEU

Mon livre, élance-toi dans l'arène, et combats,
N'écoute point ceux-la qu'étonne ton audace,
Sans morgue, pour l'honneur du Pays, prends ta place,
O mon livre, parmi les plus vaillants soldats.

T'armant de vérités, et ta foi pour cuirasse,
Plante dans la mêlée, et ne recule, pas ;
Et qu'il tombe d'en haut ou qu'il monte d'en bas,
A travers tout va-t'en, sans jamais crier grâce.

Oui, c'est ce que je rêve, oui, c'est ce que je veux
Que, pour les démasquer, tu traînes aux cheveux
Les erreurs piétinent la mère endolorie ;

Que tu montres que rien n'est encore perdu,
Et que tu sois enfin le clairon éperdu
Soufflent dans tous les cœurs l'âme de la Patrie !

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