

SUGAR TURNS TO COTTON: FRENCH RETELLINGS OF THE HAITIAN  
REVOLUTION AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

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## ABSTRACT

HELEN MATTHEWS: *Sugar Turns to Cotton: French Retellings of the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War*  
(Under the direction of Dr. Dominique Fisher)

This dissertation argues that an outpouring of French literature based on the American Civil War (1861-1865), fought under the Second Empire of Napoleon III, belongs to the same cultural legacy as the French textual response to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), fought under the First Empire of Napoleon. In my study, I demonstrate that the narrative and thematic currents of these two bodies of literature reveal parallel struggles of racial, social, and national repositioning, and that France's popular interest in the American Civil War reflects a reconciliation with and confrontation of its own historical investment in the institutions of colony and slavery. From the Haitian Revolution to the American Civil War, such works prioritize different visual means of representation through the often hybrid genres of historical fiction, biography, and travel narrative.

Chapter 1, "Sugar Turns to Cotton," establishes the French Imperial and public relationships to the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, particularly concerning print culture under the Napoleonic Empires. Chapter 2, "Fiction and History," explores the breadth of popular historical fiction on the topic of both wars. Chapter 3, "Biographies of Louverture and Lincoln," focuses on the

links between biography and portraiture in texts from both Empires describing the lives of abolitionist figures in the Americas. Chapter 4, "Travel Narrative and the American Eyewitness," demonstrates the privileged position of the eyewitness in nineteenth-century travel literature, both in the publishing market and in the portrayal of complex social strata in the Americas. In these works of fiction, biography, and travel narrative, the events of the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War provided a backdrop against which many French authors projected a collective French experience through the ever-changing social and political landscape of the nineteenth century.

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## CHAPTER 1

### SUGAR TURNS TO COTTON

*For — yes, let America know it, and ponder on it well — there is something more terrible than Cain slaying Abel: It is Washington slaying Spartacus!*

Victor Hugo

On December 2, 1859, Victor Hugo sent an impassioned letter to the London press begging America for the release of abolitionist John Brown, who was to be hanged for murder and treason in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry was one of the first events in the many years of violence that would become the American Civil War, as the United States was ripped in half. Hugo wrote his letter from the Hauteville House on the island of Guernsey, where he had been living for years in exile after the coup of Napoleon III that turned the French Republic into the Second Empire. Along with his letter, Hugo included an original drawing, *The Hanged Man, or John Brown*, depicting a lone figure surrounded by darkness on the gallows, theatrically illuminated from the above. Below the figure, Hugo penned four clear white letters: *ECCE*, imploring his viewer to behold the scene as though the power of the image itself might be enough to prevent the corruption of the American Republic.



France, and particularly French Republicans like Hugo, had much at stake in the experiment of American democracy, as described by Alexis de Tocqueville. Throughout the nineteenth century, while America had maintained the democracy won by its revolution, France's own democracy was overturned by monarchs and emperors, such as Napoleon III, whose ambitions saw the New World not as a beacon of liberty but as a territory to be conquered. The French relationship to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century was thus as equally shaped by France's complicated colonial history as it was by its democratic sisterhood.

From the establishment of the earliest French colonies to the sale of the Louisiana territory, early French investments in the New World were as driven by potential gain as they were defined by loss. The Haitian Revolution, fought under Napoleon in the First Empire, was a moment of profound Imperial defeat, as France saw its wealthiest sugar-producing colony, the so-called Pearl of the Caribbean, slipping through its fingers. Napoleon was so disheartened by the failure of his reach into the Americas that he hastily abandoned the French-owned Louisiana territory and moved his interests out of the New World. His nephew, Napoleon III, would be the next Emperor to cultivate French interests in the Americas. The American Civil War (1861-1865) took place under his reign during the Second Empire. The French response to both the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War was, for the most part, divided along political lines, as those in favor of abolition, democracy, Republic, or Empire found inspiration in

the wars waged across the Atlantic. The French literary legacy of these two revolutionary and abolitionist wars thus presents a fascinating glimpse into the ever-changing tensions between varying expressions of what it meant to be French in the socially and politically unstable nineteenth century.

This dissertation analyzes the ways in which several such texts concerning the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War served to stake a claim to French identity under the two nineteenth-century Napoleonic Empires. As we will note in the case of the Haitian Revolution, the immediate representation of the war through Napoleonic propaganda was as a way to hastily establish a unifying version of historical truth through theatrical and often grotesque representations of the people and events associated with the war. In the case of the American Civil War, French representations served as a means to express a new French identity during and after the Second Empire. Depictions of both wars asked readers the question: in the struggles of two warring factions, what resonates with that which defines French identity? The shifting and redefining nations of both Haiti and the United States thus served as foils against which France could attempt to glean traces of its own collective identity in the destabilizing shifts into and out of the Napoleonic Empires.

While the preponderance of recent scholarship on the Haitian Revolution would suggest, as we will see, that the memory of this war looms large in the public's realm of awareness, most such scholarship is based on the argument that the Haitian Revolution was largely forgotten, neglected even by the people and nations who lived it. As scholars such as Christopher L. Miller, Laurent

Dubois, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and J. Michael Dash have written, the French Atlantic literary tradition is markedly lacking the written history of the colonized by the colonized themselves, leaving us to pull together scraps of written memory through the voice of the colonizer. In the unique case of the Haitian Revolution, the first successful massive slave revolt and the establishment of the first Black Republic, we find a unique moment in which the French colonizer, the slaveholder, the master, could envision himself a victim, an underdog, and a slave himself.<sup>1</sup> While some nineteenth-century canonical authors, such as Hugo in *Bug-Jargal* (1830) and Alphonse de Lamartine in *Toussaint Louverture* (1850), produced later works that humanized and sympathized with the Haitian revolutionaries, earlier and lesser-known authors like French propagandist René Périn, in his 1802 novella, *L'incendie du cap*, painted a grimly animalistic portrait of the young nation's revolutionary leaders:

Lorsque de nouveaux troubles appellent la valeur française en d'autres climats, une horde d'Africains farouche, qu'une pitié mal étendue arracha au frein de l'esclavage, une poignée de brigands veut disputer à la France l'empire des Colonies, veut nous ravir cette belle et vaste partie de nos richesses, qui nous a coûté deux cent ans de travaux. (Périn xi)

Through Périn's description of the conflict leading up to the Haitian Revolution, we see a benevolent France, whose only fault is to have allowed French Republicans to act on their pity for slaves. In Périn's narrative and others of its kind, commissioned and endorsed by Napoleon himself, Haiti was stolen, not liberated, from France.

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<sup>1</sup> In the following chapters, I propose analyses of several such texts in which France is portrayed as a victim of Haitian aggression, including René Périn's *L'Incendie du Cap* and the Louverture biographies of Dubroca and Avallon.

Sixty years after Haiti declared its independence from France, the Confederate States of America declared its intention to separate from the American Union, as well as its intention to maintain the institution of slavery upon which its society had been founded. The American Civil War thus raised questions about nationhood, slavery, and democracy that largely reprised the long-silenced debates of the Haitian Revolution. In *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: the Promise and Peril of the Haitian Revolution*, Matthew J. Clavin beautifully outlines the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the American Civil War, and demonstrates the intersections between these two Atlantic wars of independence and abolition. As Clavin proves, the specter of the Haitian Revolution lingered above the United States throughout much of the nineteenth century, signaling the inevitable war that would end American slavery once and for all.

While the Haitian Revolution was a threatening portent of Civil War in the States, it haunted France as the ghost of one of the most embarrassing and unlikely military defeats of all time. The great Emperor Napoleon was scared out of the Atlantic by an informally trained army of slaves, and, despite his best efforts, he would never regain his footing in the Americas. Much would change in France from the First Empire to the Second, though little would change from one Napoleon to the next. Napoleon III declared himself Emperor of the French in 1852, just in time to take an Imperial interest in the mounting tension between the States. The French people, too, demonstrated a great popular interest in the American conflict, though many for different reasons than their Emperor.

Civil War America was a land divided by conflict, and a land equally divided by culture in the French literary imagination. Between a bustling axis of modernity and a nostalgic landscape of sugar plantations past, popular French depictions of Civil War America painted two distinct worlds. About the French view of America at the dawn of the Civil War, Jacques Portes writes that, “to the average French person, the Americans were... the representatives of a society that evoked a certain nostalgia for the French sugar islands” (Portes vii). Indeed, French government and industry saw a commercial interest in the war, as the South was the land of the booming cotton industry, and Union blockades put a dangerous threat on a lucrative Franco-American trade relationship. As evidenced by the popularity of recounting events and anecdotes in the French press,<sup>2</sup> the Civil War was a hotly debated topic of both passive and active French interests. Years after the war, as in the case of the Haitian Revolution, some authors dramatized the observed war in novels and novellas, such as Jules Verne’s *Les forceurs du blocus* (1871) and *Nord contre sud* (1887). In retrospect, the popularity of the anti-slavery literature produced by Verne might indicate that France, beyond Napoleon III’s political interests in the failure of the Union, collectively condemned the Confederacy. However, certain non-canonical<sup>3</sup> French literary works inspired by the war, such as Louise de

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<sup>2</sup> See Reclus, Elisée, and Soizic Alavoine-Muller’s *Les Etats-Unis Et La Guerre De Sécession: Articles Publiés Dans La Revue Des Deux Mondes*, a synthesis of articles published from 1861-1865.

<sup>3</sup> Here, I am referring to the “official canon” perceived by Alastair Fowler as works “institutionalized through education, patronage, and journalism” (Fowler 98). Fowler establishes that changes in the literary canon can be traced as a series of genres falling in and out of fashion.

Bellaigue's *Nos Américains* (1883), as well as the striking popularity of texts translated into French with a more tangible political slant, such as Edmund Kirke's 1862 *Among the Pines*,<sup>4</sup> support, and even romanticize, the plight of the South. The equal popularity of works that fell in support of either side of the American conflict indicates that French interest in the war went beyond questions of abolition and secession. As we will see in the analysis of texts surrounding both the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, much of the French writing pertaining to both wars centers more firmly on broader questions of determining national identity in France's ever-changing nineteenth-century social and political landscape.

The outpouring of French literature, pro-Northern, pro-Southern, and relatively neutral, related to the American Civil War demonstrates strong thematic and stylistic similarities to the French literary response to the Haitian Revolution, similarities that hint at the social and racial complexities faced by a country moving itself from Republic to Empire and back again, especially through the repeated abolition and reestablishment of slavery. While the extent and tenacity of the correlations between these two bodies of text are manifested multifold, the binding discourse between the two bodies of literature is one that reflects historical trauma and the malleability of collective memory in nineteenth-century France. Most of these texts straddle and bend the lines between fiction and history, as invented storylines are often interwoven with true-life events and

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<sup>4</sup> Translated in 1863 by Franck Bertin as *Les noirs et les petits blancs dans les États du Sud de l'Amérique du Nord*. Charpentier: Paris.

historical figures, and accompanied by historical notices in prefaces and footnotes.

### **France and the Haitian Revolution**

In recent years, there has been no shortage of excellent scholarship on the events, implications, and repercussions of the Haitian Revolution in the context of French history, the French Atlantic, and the history of ideas. The social currents pushed into motion by the war that marked not only the first successful slave revolt in history, but also the forcefully effective rejection of the colonial institution by the enslaved themselves, swept across the Atlantic in a world-changing movement. And yet, as works by scholars such as Michel Rolph Trouillot and J. Michael Dash have argued, one of the most remarkable aspects of the legacy left by the Haitian Revolution is how quickly it was forgotten, brushed aside by societies built far too solidly upon foundations of slavery and colonialism to risk questioning their tenets.

As public and scholarly interest in the birth of the Haitian nation continues to rise, historians have traced with further detail the events that led to and fueled the thirteen years of war that gave way to the formation of the world's first Black Republic. In particular, 2004, the bicentennial of the declaration of Haitian independence, saw a burst of interest in the history legacy of the Caribbean nation. To date, the most comprehensive work to lend narrative to the events leading up to and during Haiti's thirteen years of war is Laurent Dubois' 2004 *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Also in 2004,

*Yale French Studies* published a special issue on Haiti, featuring articles from scholars who were or would go on to be the preeminent voices of the newly shaping field. Deborah Jenson, who edited the issue, included a preface that artfully draws the comparison between the events of the French and Haitian Revolutions, and between Napoleon and the Haitian leader, Toussaint Louverture:

The French Revolution's black twin threatened to destabilize some individual identities as well: Napoleon Bonaparte experienced his first major defeat at the hands of the followers of the 'black Napoleon,' the former slave Toussaint Louverture. (Jenson 1-2)

The histories, and leaders, of France and Haiti were developing in tandem across the Atlantic.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the histories of France, Haiti, and the United States were naturally and inextricably intertwined. After France declared its independence from tyranny in 1789, the tides of Haiti's independence from French control took violent form across the Atlantic in 1791. As France found itself under the First Empire of Napoleon only a few years after founding the First Republic, Toussaint Louverture took the reins not only of the war, but of the nation of Haiti itself. In 2008's *Tree of Liberty: Cultured Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic*, Doris L. Garraway places the Haitian Revolution in the context of an "Age of Revolutions",<sup>5</sup> including that of the United States:

The revolution that has historically been silenced in accounts of the 'Age of Revolutions' is the one that exposed the ideological limitations of the French and American revolutions, in which vindications of individual

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<sup>5</sup> As does Sibylle Fischer in her 2004 *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*.



liberties rested on a tacit assumption of the right to human property.  
(Garraway 2)

In Garraway's analysis, the Haitian Revolution took part in a broadly contextualized questioning of these rights and liberties in a context that stretched beyond France and Haiti, and into the Atlantic at large. She sees the case of the Haitian Revolution as particularly monumental in the issues that it raised in determining the rights and liberties of three distinct socioethnic groups on one small island: white colonists, who sought political autonomy from France; freed people of color, who sought the opportunity to claim the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen; and slaves, who sought acknowledgment of the same basic claim to humanity and property as whites and freed people of color. Clearly, while all of these claims have to do in some way or another with France itself, the implications of each of these movements reverberated strongly in the United States, a nation having recently declared its own colonial autonomy, and a nation also heavily reliant upon the institution of slavery. While example of the Haitian Revolution would hover above the United States for many decades as a cautionary tale, its memory reverberated throughout France with an overriding sense of melancholy engendered by the fresh memory of colonial failure.

*In Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Sibylle Fischer describes the sense of historic melancholy that characterizes the memory of the Revolution:

Instead of a single revolutionary moment, we have multiple revolutionary moments, representing conflicting, even incompatible, emancipatory projects. The ideological and affective impact of the compulsive history of fitful starts and repetitions is compounded by the fact that a revocation of liberties is bound to be experienced with a heightened sense of injustice

and unnaturalness. So it is perhaps not surprising that the historical imaginary that develops in the course of the nineteenth century has a peculiarly warped and melancholic quality. (Fischer 133)

Undoubtedly, as Fischer argues, the melancholic effects of this legacy were felt throughout the Atlantic, as France came to terms with its troubling colonial loss and the United States came to terms with its potential future. Napoleon, in particular, needed to escape the embarrassment of his first major defeat, a major setback in the building of his Empire, hastily disposing of the Louisiana Territory and moving his interests outside of the Caribbean. However, as Christopher L. Miller argues in "Forget Haiti: Baron Roger and the New Africa," the Haitian Revolution was not as forgotten as Napoleon may have liked, citing the number of literary representations of the conflict that continued to surface in France throughout the nineteenth century:

The persistence of representations of the Haitian Revolution in French literature and in the nineteenth-century debates over the abolition of slavery, even many years after the revolution, showed that France was having a hard time forgetting its former colony and letting it go. (Miller 39)

Indeed, the Haitian Revolution did stake a claim on the French literary imagination, particularly in the minds of romantics and Republicans. From Claire de Duras' *Ourika* to Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal*, tales of martyrdom in the name of liberty and equality provided the perfect backdrop or point of reference for sensational narrative.<sup>6</sup>

However, there was also a different literature borne out of the Haitian Revolution, literature in the form of pamphlets and propaganda produced by both

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<sup>6</sup> While Hugo's work enjoyed rather immediate and visible success, Duras' *Ourika*, with a much more subtle nod to the events of the Haitian Revolution, earned its place in the forefront of such scholarship in the late twentieth century.

colonists and Napoleon in the effort to control public opinion about the slave revolts, as well as to encourage Napoleon's 1802 to 1803 attempts to reinvade Haiti and reinstitute the former colony. In *Friends and Enemies: The Social Politics of Post/Colonial Literature*, Chris Bongie describes this literature as the manifestation of the melancholic sentiment around France's troubling memories of colonial loss, and as a final attempt to rally France around the idea of itself as a colonial power in the Atlantic. As time wore on, and the probability of a successful French re-entry into Haiti lessened, the Republicans and romantics were the only writers clinging to the narrative. According to Bongie, the texts produced in favor of a reinvasion of Haiti:

... were essentially melancholic attempts at reincorporating the forever lost imperial object, and once the former colony was officially separated from the body of the French state in 1825, their production rapidly tailed off; Haiti's degraded status as neo-colonial vassal was hardly enough to compensate for the melancholy-inducing loss of the former 'perle des Antilles,' and its memory would be largely marginalized in French consciousness for the next two hundred years. (Bongie 47)

And so the discourse of nostalgia eventually gave way to silence, and to the 'forgetting' described by Miller.

While much of the literature produced by Haitian nationals is currently being mined with the mounting interest in minor literatures and postcolonial identity,<sup>7</sup> the works of propaganda produced by Napoleon and the colonists have been left largely untouched. Such texts, produced within this brief moment of

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<sup>7</sup> The concept of "minor literature," as described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* as characterized by the deterritorialization of a major language, its political nature, and its collective value, is particularly interesting in light of such texts written by those technically belonging to the major culture, but subverted by such a complex historical event as the Haitian Revolution.

imperial nostalgia, provide a glimpse into an important piece of France's cultural and literary history. While they likely circulated among the wealthier classes due to issues of literacy and cost, their production and distribution hints at a longing for the past that runs in direct contrast to the massive and collective "forgetting" that has informed much recent Haitian scholarship. About the literature produced by the colonists, and not by Napoleon, Leon-Francois Hoffman writes:

If the reading public was kept (or even made) aware of the Haitian Revolution once the Napoleonic adventure was over, it was for a time through the numerous booklets and pamphlets published by the former plantation owners and their salaried spokesmen. They were hoping to persuade public opinion to pressure the government into mounting another military expedition with the goal of returning the land and slaves to their 'rightful owners.' (Hoffman 340).

And so we see that there was a collective response to the troubling memory of the Haitian Revolution that was not based on the effort to forget, but on a very real effort to remember.

Some Haiti scholars have argued that the Haitian Revolution was such a transformative turning point in history that it was utterly impossible to forget in any historical sense. In *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic*, David Geggus compares the effect of the war to that of the Hiroshima bomb, writing that, "its meaning could be rationalized or repressed, but never really forgotten" (Geggus 4). In his analysis of the century following the Haitian Revolution, Geggus writes that, "imagery of the great upheaval hovered over the antislavery debates like a bloodstained ghost" (Geggus 5). The memory of the Revolution, looming large over the French colonial experience, thus permeated

discourse on slavery in the United States that was produced in Haiti, France, and the United States itself, though not always explicitly.

In scholarship that deals with the later silencing of history around the Haitian Revolution, none is more celebrated or more artfully expressed than that of Trouillot. *Silencing the Past: The Power and Production of History* has irrevocably shaped the way in which scholarship deals not only with the question of the ramifications of the Haitian Revolution in the nineteenth century and beyond, but also the question of the ways in which humanity has used memory and text to cultivate and suppress histories and identities. As Trouillot writes:

If I write a story describing how U.S. troops entering a German prison at the end of World War II massacred five hundred Gypsies; if I claim this story is based on documents recently found in Soviet archives and corroborated by German sources, and if I fabricate such sources and publish my story as such, I have not written fiction. I have produced a fake. (Trouillot 6)

In Trouillot's analysis, the line between fiction and falsehood lies in the way in which the text is presented. In his example, the claim and fabrication of false facts and sources are what push fiction into the realm of deceit, and the brunt of this transformation thus takes place not in the creation of the text, but in the manner in which it is delivered to its audience. As we will see in the subsequent chapters dealing with the propaganda and censored literature of both the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, this line is further blurred by a consideration of public appetite and expectation.

## France and the American Civil War

The field of scholarship based around the interconnected histories and cultural relations between France and the United States is not a recently developed one, though its guiding questions and approaches have certainly echoed the scholarly tendencies of their times. Especially in the last thirty years, the question of identity has reigned over most such works. The chapters housed in Michèle R. Morris' edited volume, *Images of America in Revolutionary France* explore the ways in which French identity was changed and defined by American democracy during the French Revolution. Likewise, Jacques Portes' *Fascination and Misgivings: The United States in French Opinion, 1870-1914* presents and analyzes the writings of French travelers to the United States from the start of the Third Republic to the beginning of the First World War, whose works indicate that they were traveling more in search of defining French than American identity. Most such studies take care to draw the line between French government opinion and French public opinion of the United States, noting the different political events on either side of the Atlantic that would have impacted, and often reversed, these factors. In the length of French-American relations, nowhere is this distinction more complicated than in the case of the nineteenth century, and most particularly in the case of the American Civil War.

In *Napoleon's Troublesome Americans: Franco-American Relations, 1804-1815*, Peter P. Hill presents French-American relations under the First Empire as markedly defined by the Emperor's strong dislike of Americans as a people, a disdain that grew throughout this period as the result of his colonial

losses in the Americas and was aggravated by America's successful expansion resulting from such French losses. By the end of Napoleon's rule, the French presence in the United States, no longer secured by the Louisiana Territory, became one of legacy instead of politics. Ronald Creagh's *Nos cousins d'Amerique* (1988), which traces the arrivals, existences, and disappearances of French culture, people, and communities in America, counts the sale of the Louisiana Territory as the first step toward the end of a solid French presence in the United States. According to Creagh, the American Civil War marked the conclusion of American social and cultural allegiance to France.<sup>8</sup> As this presence waned, France and America were in a position to reevaluate their political and social positions in relation to one another. The American Civil War was one of the first major steps in this renegotiation.

In *Our Oldest Enemy: A History of America's Disastrous Relationship with France*, John J. Miller and Mark Molesky paint a long and complicated history filled with deception and disappointment. Published in 2004, and likely spurred by the American wave of animosity for perceived French treachery following the events of September 11, this book takes the reader through every historical moment in which America could be perceived as betrayed or attacked by France. Miller and Molesky see the Civil War as particularly poignant moment in this history of betrayal, arguing that Napoleon III's actions during the Civil War were guided by a "naked animus toward the United States" (Miller and Molesky 118). The Emperor, they write, was more interested in halting the advance of American

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<sup>8</sup> "De la civilisation de leurs pères seuls demeurent des vestiges, au cimetière Saint-Louis de la Nouvelle-Orleans ou dans les documents d'archives." (331)

power than advancing his own through the conflict. Miller and Molesky go on to position French actions during the Civil War as a historical moment that is often, like the Haitian Revolution, conveniently forgotten by France:

French leaders are always claiming that their country helped make American independence possible. Yet they never acknowledge France's role in a brazen effort to dissolve the American Union. Had Napoleon III succeeded in splitting the United States in two and establishing a monarchy in Mexico, he would have harmed Americans as much as Louis XVI had helped them nearly a century earlier. (Miller and Molesky 133)

While Miller and Molesky push the limits of reason by insinuating that France was to blame for the near failure of the American Union, their unrelenting contempt for French conduct during the Civil War demonstrates that the war was and is a moment of significance in the complicated history of French-American relations.

Toward understanding the legacy of this relationship, George McCoy Blackburn's *French Newspaper Opinion of the American Civil War* outlines not only the coverage of the Civil War in the French press, but also the body of scholarship concerning France and the Civil War to date. According to Blackburn's analysis of the history of French-American Civil War studies:

An examination of French reaction or attitudes toward the Civil War involves two major aspects. One aspect is the *desired* outcome of the war: some Frenchmen championed the Northern cause while others championed the Southern cause. A second aspect is the *anticipated* outcome of the Civil War: a belief that the North would triumph militarily and maintain the American Union or a belief that the South would achieve independence. (Blackburn x)

Indeed, these lines, crossed not only along support for the North and support for the South, but also along the distinction between desire and anticipation, can be traced in most of the early works included in this body of scholarship. For example, Warren Reed West's 1924 *Contemporary French Opinion on the*



*American Civil War*, the first scholarly book on the topic, establishes that conservative Imperialists who supported Napoleon III also supported the Confederacy, but did so as enemies of the Union instead of as supporters of slavery. Likewise, Donaldson Jordan and Edwin Pratt's 1931 *Europe and the American Civil War* presents a France divided into two camps: the conservative and Imperialist supporters of the South and the liberal and Republican supporters of the North. In 1968, Serge Gavronsky's *The French Liberal Opposition and the American Civil War* suggested that the liberals who supported the North were doing so more as an affirmation of democracy than one of the American Union, while conservatives who sided with the South were doing so in opposition to the general principle of democracy. In a chapter entitled "France and the Civil War" in Harold Hyman's *Heard Round the World: The Impact Abroad of the Civil War* (1969), David H. Pinkney notes that the French people reacted more strongly to the Civil War than did the French government. As Pinkney demonstrates, Napoleon III, despite an Imperial interest in the dissolution of the Union, launched a largely ambivalent public movement in response to the Civil War due to fear of British and American retribution. It was thus in the realm of the masses that the war of public opinion was to take place in France, though not without the heavy hand of Imperial propagandists and censors.

Edwin de Leon, the Confederacy's minister to France, led the cause of promoting French support of Southern secession with a minimal amount of Napoleonic intervention. De Leon spent \$30,000 on the circulation of Confederate propaganda in France, while also providing French politicians and

press leaders with 500,000 bales of cotton in order to further Confederate interests.<sup>9</sup> Of Napoleon III's reaction to the Confederate push for explicit support of the South, Henry Blumenthal writes:

French public opinion with respect to the American war was thus divided. Napoleon III, who is said to have paid much attention to public sentiment, found himself, therefore, in the dilemma of alienating part of the French or American people, no matter what he did. (Blumenthal 137)

Napoleon III, to whom public opinion was so important, was faced with a difficult decision in reacting to the American Civil War, and the ways in which he handled the conflict continue to be at the center of a debate, particularly concerning the ways in which his actions reflected or conflicted against public opinion.

This tension between the interests of the French Empire and the interests of the French people led to a legacy that largely reads as ambivalent. Philippe Roger's 2005 *The American Enemy* devotes a chapter to analyzing the French ambivalence during the American Civil War. According to Roger, the French press was entirely in agreement on three points: the legitimacy of the Confederacy's right to secede; the immorality of the institution of slavery in the United States; and that a complete and total victory by either North or South would be impossible (Roger 71). In Roger's argument, agreement on these three principles remains the cause of much confusion to historians attempting to stake out the clean lines of distinction between the positions of Imperial Confederates and Republican Unionists, as "a majority sympathetic to the South coexisted with a massive condemnation of slavery" (Roger 79). Roger also discusses the tactics used by propagandists to promote French support in light of this strange binary in

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<sup>9</sup> Blumenthal, *A reappraisal of Franco-American Relations, 1830-1871*, p. 133

public opinion: “In order to win France’s sympathy, the South had to be portrayed as the victim, yet the Confederacy also had to appear indomitable and durable” (Roger 83). Likewise, propaganda in support of the Union needed to acknowledge the South’s right to secession, all while condemning its reliance upon the institution of slavery. Such discourse surrounding the rights of slaves and secessionists would permeate the French fascination with the American Civil War, as well as demonstrate the ways in which Imperial censorship further complicated the French texts and opinions spawned by the conflict.

### **Publishing Under Two Empires**

In his article, “The Censorship Under Napoleon I,” J. Holland Rose argues that the practices of censorship and propaganda under Napoleon in the First Empire, though revolutionary in many ways, were primarily based on tactics used by the Revolutionists of 1789. While Napoleon’s regime did not pioneer the regulation of cultural production, history has certainly credited Napoleon with some of the most powerful censorship tactics in European history. Shutting down the majority of theaters, newspapers, and printing presses in Paris, Napoleon’s regime certainly believed in the potential danger of the printed word and image. Napoleon’s rapid control of the theater and the press, in particular, was astounding, especially considering the fact that these institutions had been liberated only years before, and had been growing at a rapid rate until the First

Empire.<sup>10</sup> As Rose writes, any cultural production referring to modern times had the potential to be particularly troubling to Napoleon, and, in controlling the press and other major outlets of cultural production, he favored tales of antiquity as long as they did not include themes that may have been interpreted as “anti-tyrant” (Rose 62). As Robert Holtman demonstrates in *Napoleonic Propaganda*, the French government under Napoleon devoted a great amount of attention and consideration to cultivating a positive public opinion, and recognized the written word as a very powerful tool well before the revolutions in typography and literacy of the 1830s.

Propaganda, Napoleonic and otherwise, played a significant role in Napoleon’s handling of the Haitian Revolution. Many French colonists and historians blamed the transatlantic spread of humanitarian and democratic propaganda spawned by the Revolution on 1789 for the slave revolts, believing that the principles of liberty had been misdirected and had opened a Pandora’s Box of bedlam in the French Atlantic.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Napoleon’s propagandist

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<sup>10</sup> “He reduced the Parisian press from 72 newspapers to 4, closed two-thirds of the city’s printshops, and reduced the number of Parisian theaters from 33 to 8. By 1810-11 he reintroduced or continued virtually all pre-1789 censorship controls, including licensing of printers, book-shops, and theater, prior censorship of drama and the press, and genre restrictions for theatres. Napoleon personally supervised a rigid theater censorship, for example completely banning all references to the deposed Bourbons as well as to other threatening topics such as the punishment of tyrants and (when he decided to leave his wife Josephine) divorce.” Robert Justin Goldstein, *The Frightful Stage: Political Censorship of the Theater in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> In David Patrick Geggus’ analysis of Bryan Edwards, *Survey of St. Domingo* in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, Geggus analyzes Edwards’ text as one example of a tradition of texts that present the Haitian Revolution as a direct, though bastardized, result of the French Revolution.

system was cranked to high gear before the Emperor's final and unsuccessful attempt to reinvade and once again take possession of Haiti.

Napoleonic censorship under the First Empire was thus effective enough to either prevent or destroy the apparition of most republican cultural production under its reign, leaving little of a textual trail about the Haitian Revolution that was not either produced or sanctioned by Napoleon's regime. Under Napoleon III in the Second Empire, however, cultural and technological shifts made that level of control nearly unattainable, or at least undesirable. While the first Napoleon's censorship was built on force, Napoleon III's needed to rely on prevention. As Denis Hollier writes of the Second Empire in *A New History of French Literature*:

Liberals and monarchists were allowed to express themselves as long as they did not attack Napoleon by name. But the threat of censorship, leading to fines that might put a publication out of business, frequently succeeded in moderating their antagonism. On the other hand, Napoleon believed the republicans could not be reconciled to the regime, and they were more or less systematically silenced. (Hollier 721)

The particular circumstance of republicans, as opposed to liberals and monarchists, may have also been due to their history of successful propaganda campaigns, as borrowed with favorable results by Napoleon during the First Empire. In fact, much social and political unrest during the Second Empire was often blamed on the wide circulation of printed materials that followed the Revolution of 1848. As Roger Price explains in *The French Second Empire: an Anatomy of Political Power*, effective control over the press became an immediate and central concern of the government after Napoleon III's 1851 coup d'état. As Price cites, the suspension and suppression of newspapers was authorized in the decrees of December 6 and 13, 1851:

No newspaper should appear without your authorization. You will not tolerate any discussion of the legality of recent events. Neither will you allow articles whose effect is to weaken the authority of the government. (Price 171)

Most of the Republican newspapers that survived the coup, including *Le Siècle*, did so only because of the force of public opinion, with Napoleon's regime fearing that the closing of these wildly popular papers would incite mass revolt. These daily papers would thus be driven to self-censorship for fear of the prosecution, hefty fines, and even jail sentences imposed by the Empire in case of any transgression, giving way to an era of politically neutered, though not entirely neutral journalism.

Other printers and booksellers also had to deal with strict controls set forth by the Second Empire, though the execution of these regulations was complicated by the Empire's own interest in promoting wealth and growth. In *Reading and Riding: Hachette's Railroad Bookstore in Nineteenth-Century France*, Eileen S. DeMarco studies the birth and spread of the Hachette company, long the only option for print purchases at rail stations as they themselves spread across France. Ultimately, she concludes that, while much of Hachette's material was self-censored to cater to socially conservative taste at the time, Napoleon III had little interest in restricting the growth of such a lucrative industry: "For the Second Empire, promoting commercial expansion was more important than enforcing the letter of the law on book trade regulations" (DeMarco 118). With relatively lax enforcements of censorship regulations on the book trade, many republicans favored this medium for the creation and transmission of republican-leaning works. Texts that may have been construed

as less than favorable towards the Second Empire, however, still needed to take great precaution to avoid punishment.

The tactics used to evade censorship under the Second Empire are, naturally, rather difficult to trace, as are the many means of prohibitive measures put in place by the Emperor's regime. In the case of the cheaper, more popular presses, even less is known about the extent of censorship under Napoleon III.<sup>12</sup> According to Robert Justin Goldstein's "Fighting French Censorship, 1815-1881," the most explicit forms of censorship under the Second Empire were focused more on visual than on written expressions of dissent, despite recent advances in national literacy, and perhaps due to the increasing appearance of political caricatures and the preponderance of easily distributed lithographic prints. While Napoleon III knew that he would never win the support of literate Republicans, he feared the influence that such images might have on the masses.<sup>13</sup> As Goldstein writes:

The French authorities were even more afraid of the potential impact of visual, as contrasted with written expressions of dissent, such as might be offered by caricature and the theater. This was because a large percentage of the especially-feared 'dark masses' were illiterate and thus

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<sup>12</sup> In "The Failings of Popular News Censorship in Nineteenth-Century France," (*Book History*. Volume 4, (2001) pp. 49-80) Thomas J. Cragin explores the many ways in which the proliferation of print culture in the mid-nineteenth century prevented Napoleon III's control over what was being published in France during the Second Empire. As he demonstrates, the many established newspapers that had been established during the Republic that preceded his reign were particularly difficult to monitor.

<sup>13</sup> See Goldstein's *The War for the Public Mind: Political Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Westport: Praeger, 2000), which outlines the political divide that Napoleon III faced while negotiating control of the print culture of the Second Republic, and the ways in which the Emperor made concessions in dealing with a mass of passionately journalistic Republicans.

'immune' to the written word, but they were not blind and thus were perceived as highly susceptible to subversive imagery, which was, moreover, viewed as having a far greater visceral impact than was the written word. (Goldstein 785)

While a censorship that focused on the power of images was not new to France under the Second Empire,<sup>14</sup> the public's capacity for evading censorship, due to the relatively lax enforcement of the popular commercial press, revolutionized the way in which publishers were able to sidestep governmental regulations for a mass audience. As Goldstein argues, the Second Empire's insistence upon protecting its control by preventing its subjects from exposure to the corrupting influence of images and physical representations gave way to an evasion of censorship that focused, likewise, primarily on images and visual themes.

#### The Image of French Identity

In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault describes a fundamental reconfiguration of the conception of history that took place in France at the end of the eighteenth century. As France attempted to come to terms with the changes brought forth by the Revolution of 1789, modernity hurtled forward, a symptom, precursor to, and result of the upheavals engendered by democracy. The development of information-transmitting technology was moving faster than the rise in literacy among the lower classes, thus privileging the spread of information through other, more visual and less textual means. As literacy rates eventually

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<sup>14</sup> Goldstein cites the following statement from the Minister of Justice Jean-Charles Persil on the reimposition of the censorship of drawings and theater in 1835: "Mais lorsque les opinions sont converties en actes, lorsque, par la représentation d'une pièce ou l'exposition d'un dessin, on s'adresse aux hommes réunis, on parle à leurs yeux, il y a un fait, une mise en action, une vie don't ne s'occupe pas l'article 7 de la Charte" (*Archives parlementaires*, 257-8).



caught up with technology, text itself adopted the themes and conventions of modes of visual transmission. The effects of this relationship between textual and visual cultures in France manifested itself in many lesser-analyzed, popular works of fiction, biography, and travel narrative, such as those analyzed by this dissertation. However, its effects were equally seen in many canonical texts of nineteenth-century French literature, particularly in the realist movement.

According to Margaret Cohen, the nineteenth-century birth of the realist movement in French literature coincides with the dawn of modernity. She describes realism as “a state-of-the-art visual and textual practice” that renewed French interest in its current identity as much as in its own history (Cohen x). In other literary movements, including in the writing of history, the visual aspect of this textual practice was particularly linked to French national identity. As images were reproduced with greater ease through technology, the public developed an appetite for visual representation. As Guy Debord begins his analysis of the modern impulse of transforming lived experience into visual representation in *Society of the Spectacle*:

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. (Debord 1)

According to Debord, the spectacle itself is not merely a collection of images, but the visual enactment of a social relationship, a relationship between people that is expressed through images. The nineteenth-century popularity of moving images, panoramic platforms, and lithographs all indicate a thirst for the reproduction, or reflection, of a collective tangible reality that expressed a solid

truth. Indeed, knowledge and experience seemed to become inextricably linked in nineteenth-century France. Just as the prioritization of the visual served as a means to reinforce fact, the transformation of the visual into the spectacle served as a means of reinforcing a collectivity along with fact.

As much as visual culture in nineteenth-century France prioritized the accuracy of historical depictions, as we will see in the following chapter, the phenomenon of the spectacle was equally an opportunity to forget, and even negate, widely-held beliefs. In his analysis of Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, Jonathan Crary writes that, for Debord, the core of the spectacle is the "annihilation of historical knowledge- in particular the destruction of the recent past" (Crary 106). Instead of historical time, the spectacle sets forth a never-ending present, safe from the dangers of historical reflection. However, Maurice Samuels has demonstrated, nineteenth-century French visual culture was fixated on the past. Whether in an attempt to annihilate a widely held historical belief or to reinforce a certain aspect of collective memory, the obsession with spectacle in nineteenth-century France was based upon a visual categorization of social and historical elements. As we will see in the following chapters, visual modes of transmitting and classifying information were crucial to the portrayal of the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War in nineteenth-century France.

The nineteenth-century appeal of experiencing historical events synthetically, whether through visual or textual means, was thus based in the quest for an authentic as much as a collective experience. In the case of French writings on the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, particularly those that were

written and published immediately following the wars themselves, the concretization of historical events needed to negotiate the transition from the memory of the event itself to the historical representation of the event. In this way, such texts invited even those readers who had experienced the events in the restructuring of individual experience into national legacy, or from memory into history.

### **Colonial Memory and History**

The tension between memory and history has been and continues to be contested by theorists and historians. Pierre Nora, in *Les Lieux de Mémoire* describes the acceleration of history as a continuous slide of the present into the past in a disconcerting experience of loss and transition. *Lieux de mémoire*, or places of memory, where memory is crystallized, serve as refuges from this constantly rupturing equilibrium (Nora 235). The tension between memory and history manifests itself singularly through the manner in which both relate to fiction, a *lieux de mémoire* in and of itself. It is the narrative, whether explicitly fictional or expressly historiographic, that negotiates the line between both. In *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur uses historical and fictional narratives to consider history's questioning of memory, and memory's questioning of history. In Ricoeur's work, time and narrative function side by side in a portrayal of a broad temporal experience:

Narration, we say, implies memory and prediction implies expectation. Now, what is it to remember? It is to have an image of the past. How is this possible? Because this image is an impression left by events, an impression that remains in the mind. (Ricoeur 10)

Ricoeur's understanding of the function of memory in the narrative, and thus in the transmission of history, relies upon a metaphor of image. To remember is to hold an image of the past, and the transmission of memory takes root specifically in the transmission of images.

While many other theorists have questioned the role of memory in historical construction,<sup>15</sup> the relationship takes a new light in the face of theories dealing with the experience of colonization, decolonization, and the postcolonial world. Edouard Glissant, for instance, writes on the manner in which troubling historical issues, such as slavery, have been formed and reformed in cultural memory. In these contexts, the establishment and transmission of history centers on the formation of national identity, and the functions of collectivity become part of a larger network of discourses surrounding memory. In *Mémoires des Esclavages*, Glissant writes of the significant role played by memory in the constructions of nations and national identities in colonial and postcolonial contexts, particularly pertaining to memories that cause national shame instead of national pride. According to Glissant, there are two fundamental kinds of memory in the production of history: the first, "mémoire de la tribu," is so inherent in the foundation of a social group that it seems to be passed genetically. This memory serves a seminal purpose in establishing or maintaining the existence or

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<sup>15</sup> See J. Candau's *Anthropologie de la mémoire*, an anthropological consideration of Memory as a construction, equally of things remembered and forgotten, to reflect or respond to the present; and Maurice Halbwachs' *On Collective Memory*, which argues that the past is constructed of and through the present, and that all memory, acting in and on the present, is essentially collective and selective.

status of the group that has created and perpetuated it.<sup>16</sup> Tribal memory sustains a group, but is equally dangerous because, with stakes deeply rooted in a collective identity, it is the fuel of turmoil when any group or individual transgresses that identity. The second kind of historical memory described by Glissant is the “*mémoire collective de la Terre*” (collective world memory), a memory that crosses social and national boundaries, created by and belonging to the entire world.<sup>17</sup> The understanding of history in Glissant’s argument is marked by these “*histoires cachées*” (hidden histories), the unfurling of tribal memories without a broad understanding of their collective consequences, which, as Glissant writes, “*se disent sans se dire tout en se disant*” (tell themselves without telling themselves, all while telling themselves). Often, the lack of historical perspective is ignored simply because it is uncomfortable to recognize the cost of memory, or to recognize that the memory upon which an entire nation or school of belief may have been founded was entirely misguided. In the case of the Haitian Revolution, the Napoleonic propaganda produced in the wake of the war

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<sup>16</sup> Tribal memory can thus serve as the cornerstone of a collective experience, and as an integral component in the establishment of communities. According to Glissant, these memories are “*toutes fondées sur une expérience commune d’un passé reconnu comme tel et qui déclenchera chez les individus des réactions différentes...sur un fond généralement agréé par tous. Les fantasmes nourris par cette mémoire s’effacent peu à peu, mais sont remplacés par d’autres*” (Glissant 164). The original experience around which the memory was formed becomes less important as it is replaced by the memory of the collectivity that formed around it.

<sup>17</sup> To Glissant, these memories can be formed as the collective experience of one nationality, but transgress the confines of national or social boundaries because of their universality. According to Glissant, “*chaque collectivité ou nation détermine pour sa part mais partage d’emblée avec toutes les autres, mémoire grossie au monde, quelquefois acquise au cours et au prix d’une errance ou d’un déracinement individuels*” (Glissant 23).

perfectly demonstrates the negation of historical perspective in favor of avoiding the memory of Napoleon's misguided unsuccessful efforts to reinstate slavery in the colonies.

In *Les abus de la mémoire*, Tzvetan Todorov writes of the creation of memory as a process of selection, in which elements are either preserved or discarded by the rememberer, rather than as a process of production. Memory, he writes, is at the base of all social links, and thus has the capacity to either create or destroy social foundations; therefore, in order to understand the ways in which memory is serving a personal or communal purpose, one must examine the criteria with which the rememberer is undergoing the process of selection. Memory, he writes, is created in two primary forms that function in vastly different ways: "literal memory," which is regarded as existing solely in the past and is thus inapplicable to any event outside of itself, and "exemplary memory," which is analogous in nature, and can be used to provide an affirmative or cautionary lesson in the context of a more current situation.<sup>18</sup> To Todorov, exemplary memory is at the root of justice, providing relativity to historical memories, but it is just as subject to misuse as its literal counterpart. As Todorov writes, there are three main abuses of memory, all of which are found in literature designed to

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<sup>18</sup> In this, Todorov points out that the individual human experience of memory is not at all a storage of events, but is constantly selective and exclusive : "La restitution intégrale du passé est une chose bien sûr impossible...et, par ailleurs, effrayante ; la mémoire, elle, est forcément une sélection : certains traits de l'événement seront conservés, d'autres seront immédiatement ou progressivement écartés, et donc oubliés. C'est bien pourquoi il est profondément déroutant de voir appelée *mémoire* la capacité qu'ont les ordinateurs de conserver de l'information : il manque à cette dernière opération un trait constitutif de la mémoire, à savoir la sélection" (Todorov 14).

propagate ideas in a social or political context: (1) the use of memory to establish a comfortable, yet hasty, collectivity; (2) the use of memory as a self-gratifying escape from modernity by pitying its victims; and (3) the use of memory as a means of establishing social currency through the status of having been a victim, to gain the rights of complaint, self-pity, retribution, or vengeance, which are, often, more socially valuable than restitution. When the abuses of memory, as described by Todorov, enter into a force as powerful and inherent as tribal memory, as described by Glissant, the results can redefine histories and reshape nations, as we will see in the tactics of propaganda and evasions of censorship in French texts on the topic of the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War.

*Poétique et Politique du Témoignage*, Derrida writes of the fundamental role of testimony in the creation and identification of memory, and thus in the building of nations. The witness, he writes, is the building block of all memory. However, testimony is even more spectral than memory, because the destination from witness to audience, and from creation to reception, is fraught with barriers: the distance between the witness and the moment of the gaze, the distance between the gaze and discourse, the distance between discourse and reader, and the essential distance between witness and audience. Because of all of these distances, the act of consuming testimony requires a leap of faith on the part of the consumer of testimony. Once that leap has been made, the contents of a testimony, while they immediately exist in a larger collective memory, can be so prevailing that they filter into tribal memory. Somewhere between the creation of a document of witnessing and the entry into tribal memory, there is a form of

hybrid testimony, a tribal memory document that recalls the witnessing, with an unmistakable desire to reinforce certain aspects, whether actually present or entirely imagined, therein. In this way, we can consider the infiltrations of the abuses of memory, as outlined by Todorov, into the establishment of tribal memory as indicative of such a historical reinforcement of collective memory. These infiltrations are particularly fascinating to consider in the case of the nineteenth-century French works about the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, which were subjected not only to the distance between author and reader, but to the intervention of political influences and regulations.

Not entirely historical fiction, as they aren't presented as entirely fictional, these kinds of identity-supporting texts could be considered "fictional history," to borrow a term from Hayden White.<sup>19</sup> Exemplary by nature, it is through these texts that we can examine the criteria, as described by Todorov, that were selected either by author or by government during the attempted transition from testimony to tribal memory. It is through metaphorical images, physical appearances, and the eyewitness that these works navigate the shift from travel narratives and historiography to works of fiction during the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War.

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<sup>19</sup> In *Metahistory*, White writes that anyone engaged in the writing of any kind of history "must choose the elements of the story he would tell. He makes his story by including some events and excluding others, by stressing some and subordinating others. This process... is carried out in the interest of constituting a *story of a particular kind*" (White 6). Like Todorov, White explains the function of memory as an inherently selective process. White's analysis, however, focuses on the process of producing narrative rather than on the establishment of individual memory.



Through the varying and often hybrid genres of historical fiction, biography, and travel narrative, these works demonstrate the establishment of French identity in the unsteady transitions between Republics and Empires. Works of popular fiction presented a succession of scenes depicting well-known events from the wars to create a collective experience. Biography, on the other hand, relied upon physiognomic descriptions of major wartime figures to unveil essential truths about the nationhood in question. Travel narrative, an ever-evolving genre, privileged the position of the eyewitness in determining the complicated social and national American identities that were in flux.

The following chapter, "Fiction and History," will examine Gustave de Beaumont's 1835 *Marie, ou l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis* and Louise de Bellaigue's 1881 *Nos Américains*, highlighting the intersections between fiction and history that pervade both. To explain the popularity of these works, we will also consider Tocqueville's *De la démocratie en Amérique*, and the popularity of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in France, exploring upon the many ways in which these seminal works shaped the relationship between France and America in the nineteenth century. We will examine the evolution of these themes from similar such texts about the Haitian Revolution, particularly René Périn's *L'incendie du cap*, an 1802 novella that demonstrates in equal measure the techniques of historical fiction later employed by Beaumont and Bellaigue. *Marie, ou l'esclavage*, *Nos Américains*, and *L'Incendie du Cap* all propose to leap across time and geography, and demonstrate ways in which the authors intended their works to be received through the reinforcement of a position of "us" and

“them.” As we will see, the “us” and “them” depicted in these works both separate France from America and France from its own history, distinctions that become almost seamless in the literature surrounding the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War. Eager to depict American slavery as an institution that clings hopelessly to the past, Beaumont and Bellaigue succeed in further distancing themselves, and their readers, from the Haitian Revolution, and thus from their own familiarity with colonial loss.

Chapter 3, “Biographies of Louverture and Lincoln,” will explore the role of physical appearances in nineteenth-century biographical depictions of Toussaint Louverture and Abraham Lincoln. To this end, we will analyze two 1802 propagandist biographies of Toussaint Louverture : Louis Dubroca’s *Vie de Toussaint Louverture* and Cousin d’Avallon’s *Histoire de Toussaint-Louverture*; along with three French biographies of Abraham Lincoln : Félix Bungener’s *Lincoln: sa vie, son œuvre, sa mort*, Achille Arnaud’s *Abraham Lincoln: sa naissance, sa vie, sa mort*, and Alphone Jouault’s *Abraham Lincoln: sa jeunesse et sa vie politique, histoire de l’abolition de l’esclavage aux Etats-Unis*. While the Louverture biographies were propagandist works commissioned directly by Napoleon, depicting Louverture as a duplicitous character whose true nature is hidden by his appearance, the three Lincoln biographies were written by anti-Imperialists hoping to evade censorship by avoiding direct criticism of the Emperor through praise of Lincoln, and depict Lincoln as a powerhouse of physical strength and moral fortitude.

Despite the differences in the political circumstances and opinions of their authors, the biographies of these prominent wartime figures highlight the historiographic tendency to align the struggles of a nation with the struggles of an individual, placing both Louverture and Lincoln, in turn, as representatives not only of people, but of nations. Furthermore, these texts emphasize the corporality of the two men, inviting their readers to witness both conflicts, the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, as living and breathing bodies in conflict. The lines between biography and portraiture become nebulous in these biographers' portrayals of their subjects, encouraging a clear visualization of Louverture and Lincoln that rivals, and is in some cases accompanied by, printed images included in the text.

Chapter 4, "Eyewitness Travel Narratives," closes the analysis with a consideration of the creation and reception of the evolving Civil War-era travel narratives of musicians Oscar Comettant and Henri Herz. Both authors, eyewitnesses to racial conflicts in the Americas, place a premium on what was and was not visible in the determination of social identity in the United States. Comettant published four texts about Civil War-era America, *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis: étude des mœurs et coutumes américaines* (1857), *Le nouveau monde: scènes de la vie américaine* (1861), *L'Amérique telle qu'elle est: Voyage anecdotique de Marcel Bonneau dans le nord et le sud des Etats-Unis* (1864), and *Voyage pittoresque et anecdotique dans le nord et le sud des Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (1866). Each of these works corresponds to a moment of particularly heightened French fascination with the American conflict, and privileges itself in

one way or another with Comettant's relatively brief moment of witnessing, a three-year journey in the United States that spawned four texts stretching beyond ten years after his return to France. His friend, Henri Herz, published his own account of American travels in 1866's *Mes voyages en Amérique*, and relies not only upon his own visual proximity to Civil War action, but to Comettant's visual proximity as well, citing his friend's works throughout his own.

Both writers, approaching their targeted subject and moment of witnessing in retrospect, highlight social divisions in America in an attempt to categorize or classify the causes and results of the American conflict. Both authors, and much of France, needed to redefine not only the United States, but also the Americas, upon the last breath of slavery in the slowly and violently solidifying New World.

## CHAPTER 2

### FICTION AND HISTORY

In *Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth-Century France*, Maurice Samuels explores nineteenth-century France's spectacular mode of viewing history, detailing the function of spectacle in literary and visual expressions that took history as their object. According to Samuels, romantic forms of historical representation, both in the forms of historiography and novels, induce a realistic vision of the past, offering this illusion to the reader or viewer as a ground for the formation of identity. The spectacle, proposing a truth that is understood to be fiction, is, in its purest form, "something to be seen for a price" (Samuels 13). The return for this price, in the case of historical representation with a common and unquestionable message, is the enactment of a unifying identity. According to Samuels, the past came to be known in nineteenth-century France through explicitly material conditions, resulting in the transformation of commodified history into something to be seen. In short, "history became a spectacle" (Samuels 6). While Samuels primarily discusses this phenomenon in the form of panoramic platforms upon which the viewer could witness historical events, fantasmagoric magic shows in which the viewer could witness the ghostly apparition of history, and wax museums in which the viewer could ascertain the physical characteristics of historical figures, his analysis of these modes of

conceptualizing history as spectacle in nineteenth-century France are particularly pertinent in a consideration of much of the nineteenth-century French popular fiction produced in response to the Haitian Revolution and to the American Civil War.

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin describes the nineteenth-century creation of what he calls “panoramic literature” as consisting of individual sketches, or vignettes, which, like the panorama, correspond to a “plastically arranged foreground” (Benjamin 6). In this way, panoramic literature proposes a series of interrelated but independent scenes to be contemplated through primarily visual terms by its readers, who are in this sense transformed into viewers. While Benjamin’s description of panoramic literature focuses principally on textual works that incorporate literal images, the visual and piece-meal style of the genre permeated the marketplace of popular nineteenth-century French literature in general. According to Alexander Zevin in “Panoramic Literature in Nineteenth-Century Paris: Robert Macaire as a Type of Everyday,” panoramic literature grew in popularity because it was both a readable text and a consumable product, appealing to the nineteenth-century French hunger for information, novelty, and, of course, images.

The basic principles of the panorama, in its representations of popular history, and panoramic literature, in its visual modes of literary transmission, apply to the representation of the Americas in the works of Beaumont, Bellaigue, and Périn. Proposing to leap across both geographical and temporal boundaries, these texts provide a similar experience to that of the nineteenth-century

panoramic platform, proposing a still-life, metaphorically visual representation, particularly of historical events. Although understood to be falsifications, each of these works presents itself with a painstaking concern for authenticity, so that a collective suspension of disbelief affords the experience of temporary reinstatement of memory in the establishment or reinforcement of a collective national or cultural identity. The visual metaphors of spectacle are present in the prefaces and historical notices that surround these works of fictional history, boasting the most accurate depiction by any means necessary. The same elements of phantasmagoric spectacle can also be traced through the very narratives of the works produced in the aftermath of the two wars, from an almost uniform concern expressed in the preface as to the role of the eyewitness in the creation of the text, to the metaphors and scenes that construct the narrative itself. In the case of these works, the urgency for an actuality of history is joined by the urgency for geographical dislocation. The ability of such works to “turn readers into viewers” (Samuels 167), especially in light of their popular dissemination, demonstrates the scale of the desired effect of ritualized unity produced by spectacularly visual texts.

### **Beaumont’s America**

Along with his friend and travel partner Alexis de Tocqueville, Gustave de Beaumont was sent to America under a commission from King Louis-Philippe to travel to America to inspect American prison systems over the course of nine months. In 1833, Beaumont and Tocqueville published their jointly written *Du*

*système pénitentiaire aux Etats-Unis et de son application en France* in two volumes. Two years later, in 1835, each man published his own work on America, both through the Librairie de Gosselin in Paris: Tocqueville, the first volume of the definitive treatise on the state of American democracy, *De la Démocratie en Amérique* ; and Beaumont, a work of popular fiction proclaimed to be rooted firmly in fact, *Marie, ou l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis*. Beaumont's novel *Marie* was, by all measures, a success, but was ultimately eclipsed by the success of *De la Démocratie en Amérique*. Though Beaumont's work enjoyed five subsequent editions over the next seven years, Tocqueville had earned himself a place as the French authority on the study of America.<sup>20</sup>

The question of reception becomes extremely important in interpreting the noteworthy differences between Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique* and Gustave de Beaumont's *Marie, ou l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis*, as Beaumont mentions Tocqueville's nonfictional work in relation to his own fiction, explaining the divergences between the works' creations and anticipated receptions. As Beaumont writes:

M. de Tocqueville et moi publions en même temps chacun un livre sur des sujets aussi distincts l'un de l'autre que le gouvernement d'un peuple peut être séparé de ses mœurs. Celui qui lira ces deux ouvrages recevra peut-être sur l'Amérique des impressions différentes, et pourra penser que nous n'avons pas jugé de même

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<sup>20</sup> For a fascinating analysis of the life intersections of Beaumont and Tocqueville, see Tom Garvin and Andreas Hess' chapter, "Tocqueville's Dark Shadow: Gustave de Beaumont as Public Sociologist and Intellectual *Avant la Lettre*" in *Intellectuals and Their Publics: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, ed. Christian Fleck, Andreas Hess and E. Stina Lyon. Garvin and Hess lament the lack of comprehensive scholarship on Beaumont and his underestimation both in the creation of Tocqueville's work and on the history of French-American relations.



le pays que nous avons parcouru ensemble. Telle n'est point la cause de la dissidence apparente qui serait remarquée. La raison véritable est celle-ci : M. de Tocqueville a décrit les institutions ; j'ai taché, moi, d'esquisser les mœurs. (Beaumont 7)

As Tocqueville proposes to present the institutions through nonfiction, Beaumont aims to depict the social mores of the new nation across the Atlantic through fiction, using the verb “décrire” to name Tocqueville’s task, while he envisions himself as more of an artist, aiming to “esquisser”<sup>21</sup> the object of his study.

Having traveled the United States together, it is clear that, as proper “witnesses,” they had similar American experiences. The differing structures and receptions of their exceedingly disparate works, resulting from the same journey, highlight the popularity of the recounting of American warfare. Stories of inequality in America were popular across many different literary modes of transmission, and an equally wide breadth of audiences. Though at times anecdotal, Tocqueville’s *De la Démocratie en Amérique* would have read been much less appealing to the average consumer of the roman feuilleton than Beaumont’s sensational and melodramatic *Marie, ou l’esclavage*. Beaumont himself seems to struggle with the pitfalls of his self-imposed generic constrictions, distinguishing at the outset between “le public sérieux,” who will be turned off by the melodrama of his piece, and the “lecteur frivole,” who will reject its serious subject matter (Beaumont 5). Despite this declaration that his text will

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<sup>21</sup> Émile Littré’s nineteenth-century *Dictionnaire de la langue française* defines “esquisser” as having two meanings. The first, “Faire une esquisse. Esquisser une figure, un tableau.” The second, “Décrire sommairement. Esquisser rapidement le tableau d’une époque,” highlights the nineteenth-century emphasis on the connection between the description of a concept or event and its and visualization.

have no truly appreciative audience, Beaumont forges ahead, writing that his observations of these social mores will be applied to an ambiguous “utilité” (Beaumont 4).

In the words of Beaumont, the experience of writing this text, and the manner in which it is meant to be received, are explicitly transformative. Beaumont describes a temporary self-alteration, the displacement of his own identity and geography, for the sake of his work’s “utilité.” He writes that his technique in voicing the opinions of many of the more offensive characters was “entrant dans les préjugés de mon voisin” (Beaumont 7). Even his contract of fiction includes an advance apology: “les opinions qui sont exprimées par les personnages mis en scène ne sont pas toujours celles de l’auteur” (Beaumont 8). The notion of a *mise-en-scène*, implying a staging of the characters and their opinions, places Beaumont at the head of his creation as an artist or dramatist. The idea of Beaumont as the creator of a spectacle, placing characters in the positions from which they will provide the most faithful representations of their real-life objects of imitation, further reinforces the theatricality and the spectacular quality of his work’s presentation.

As in many of the other nineteenth-century French fictional texts on the Americas, including *Nos Américains* and *L’Incendie du Cap*, the text is presented by a protagonist who is also a Frenchman. In the case of *Marie, ou l’esclavage*, the text offers multiple narrative points of entry, presented from the perspectives of three different characters, and offering several “tableaux portraits” (Beaumont 17) of the mores that are the object of study. As Beaumont states that his goal is

to enter the prejudices of his neighbor in taking the voices of different characters, Beaumont places himself at the heart of his own narrative, stepping outside of the actions of his fictional characters to provide a personal anecdote, explicitly with the goal of guaranteeing the authenticity of one of the major plotlines of his work:

Pour donner au lecteur une idée de la barrière placée entre les deux races, je crois devoir citer un fait dont j'ai été témoin... La première fois que j'entrai dans un théâtre aux Etats-Unis, je fus surpris du soin avec lequel les spectateurs de couleur blanche étaient distingués du public à figure noire... Cependant mes yeux étant portés sur la galerie des mulâtres, j'y aperçus une jeune femme d'une éclatante beauté, et dont le teint, d'une parfaite blancheur, annonçait le plus pur sang d'Europe. Entrant dans les préjugés de mon voisin, je lui demandai comment une femme d'origine anglaise était assez dénuée de pudeur pour se mêler à des Africaines.

- Cette femme, me répondit-il, est *de couleur*.
- Comment ! *de couleur* ? Elle est plus blanche qu'un lis !
- Elle est *de couleur*, reprit-il froidement ; la tradition du pays établit son origine, et tout le monde sait qu'elle compte un mulâtre parmi ses aïeux. (Beaumont vi-viii)

Beaumont's description of this personal anecdote emphasizes his proximity to the events of his narrative. Highlighting his own role as "témoin" in order to legitimize the fictional narrative of his novel, Beaumont makes a concession to the privilege of the actual eyewitness over the fictional character. The fact that this anecdote takes place in a theater, a place so closely associated with seeing and being seen, with the narrator's gaze falling down upon the gallery to distinguish the physical qualities of the audience below him, highlights the theatrical nature of the scene. The two men look out onto the spectators, as spectators, from a distance, socially free to comment aloud and debate the

difference between the race and color of the women in question.<sup>22</sup> Beaumont, proclaiming surprise at the disconnection between the woman's physical appearance and her racial identification, indicates that the injustice of this particular situation lies in the random determination of race in America rather than in unequal treatment between the races. Beaumont suggests that racial determination is arbitrary if it is not plainly visible, and that the way in which America defines race is thus unjust.

In the second edition of *Marie*, Beaumont even includes a lengthy footnote, addressing the necessity for this guarantor and emphasizing the degree of separation between France and this “odieux préjugé” (vi). In proclaimed surprise of the fact that one woman, whom Beaumont deems to be the color of a “mulatre,” is permitted to sit in the “galérie des blancs,” Beaumont recalls an earlier incident involving a Frenchman in a New York theater:

Au mois de janvier 1832, un Français, créole de Saint-Domingue, dont le teint est un peu rembruni, se trouvant à New York, alla au théâtre où il se plaça parmi les blancs. Le public américain, l'ayant pris pour un homme de couleur, lui intima l'ordre de se retirer, et, sur son refus, l'expulsa de la salle avec violence. (Beaumont ix)

Beaumont's evocation of a “créole de Saint-Domingue” in 1831, mere years after Charles X finally acknowledged the sovereignty of the Black Republic for the sum of a hefty indemnity, cannot help but call to mind the rampant discourse

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<sup>22</sup> In Chapter 4, “Eyewitness Travel Narratives,” I will further analyze the importance the difference between race and color in nineteenth-century French texts on the United States.

concerning race and bloodlines in at the turn of the century in Saint-Domingue.<sup>23</sup>

Considering their historical proximity, the necessity for the geographic and historical divide as portrayed by Beaumont's anecdote becomes clearer.

Even as late as 1819, Pamphile de Lacroix's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Saint-Domingue* begins with an author's note "Rélativité à la population de couleur," describing the complicated position of "sangs-mêlés ni noirs ni blancs" (Lacroix ix), followed by a five-page chart detailing the different possible bloodline combinations that can preclude a person from being considered "blanc." He writes:

D'après le système, tout homme qui n'a point huit parties de blanc est réputé noir. Marchant de cette couleur vers le blanc, on distingue neuf souches principales qui ont encore entre elles des variétés d'après le plus ou moins parties qu'elles retiennent de l'une ou de l'autre couleur. (Lacroix x)

The common circulation of this racially, and not entirely color-based, discourse about bloodlines, privileging the principle of heredity, calls into question Beaumont's insistence upon the fact that French readers would have trouble even understanding such concepts. The theatrical perspective of Beaumont's anecdote allows the reader to experience Beaumont's shock along with him. The only Frenchman in the room, as narrator, he serves as the instrument through which through which the author and reader share a collective viewing of a clearly

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<sup>23</sup> In *Before Haiti: race and citizenship in French Saint-Domingue*, John D. Garrigus outlines a reconfiguration of the complicated racial identities in Saint-Domingue in the mid-eighteenth century, demonstrating that such determinations could be particularly fluid in the face of money and social status. In this way, Beaumont's characterization of an arbitrarily determined system of racial classification can be seen as a criticism of former French colonial practices.

distinguished “them.” The reader is thus forgiven any prejudice, excused of historical discomfort, and allowed to stand on the scaffold as innocent of any past transgressions. Clearly, it is the American, and not the Frenchman, who is guilty of such arbitrary and unjust racial determination. Lacroix’s reference to a “Français, créole de Saint-Domingue”, rejected from America’s complicated social system, only reinforces France’s lack of complicity in these embarrassing and unnecessary prejudices.

Moving past the “Avant-Propos” of *Marie, ou l’esclavage* and into the text itself, we find similar techniques of mise-en-scène to the spectrum of narrative voices. The primary, nameless, Frenchman followed by the omniscient narrator wanders through the American woods as much in search of food as he is of an essentially idealized American experience. The first person that the nameless wanderer encounters in the wilderness happens to be another Frenchman. Having exchanged greetings, “Ce peu de mots avaient prouvé à l’un et à l’autre qu’ils étaient Français, et une douce émotion était descendue dans leurs âmes” (Beaumont 14). In on this complicity with the wanderer and his French host, the French reader witnesses an abject form of homecoming. It quickly becomes clear that, while the first man is new to the country and eager to witness the equality of institutions about which he has read, the second has already had enough of an American experience to rid him of any such illusions. As he begins to tell his own story, the reader sees a contrast between the two men that lingers as foreshadowing, and the first man’s idealism is contrasted with the figure of the solitary, downtrodden man in front of him. Here, the reader witnesses the

moment in which the panorama's ending is connected to its beginning: the history has been revealed, and the story is left to be told.

The tale offered forth by the wanderer's host, now known as Ludovic, is one that paints an American social system torn by the very threads with which it is woven. He tells of traveling to Baltimore and falling in love with Marie, the very picture of beautiful and selfless perfection, "Corinne et Sapho réunies dans une seule âme" (Beaumont 20).<sup>24</sup> Ludovic, having already been exposed to enough coquetterie and false enthusiasm for fine European arts, is thrilled to have found a calm and mature soul in the daughter of a Puritan named Nelson. Her only secret seems to be that she regularly volunteers at an alms' house, wherein she takes a particular interest in an escaped slave who slipped into insanity, until the non-slave owning Nelson discloses to Ludovic a secret that promises to tear the two lovers apart.

Nelson, with Ludovic as his enrapt audience, thus tells his own story. Having travelled to New Orleans hoping to get rich, he met and fell in love with an American woman named Theresa Spencer. After marrying and having two children, George and Ludovic's beloved Marie, a jealous ex-suitor seeking to ruin Theresa's life exposed with irrefutable evidence that her bloodline was, unbeknownst to her, tainted with mulatto blood. Emotionally and socially unable to withstand this revelation, Theresa began to crumble physically, leaving Nelson

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<sup>24</sup> Ludovic here references Madame de Staël's *Corinne, ou Italie* and *Sapho*, both of which evoke not only the images of strong, intelligent women, but also of a French citizen unaligned with France itself. Under the First Empire of Napoleon, Staël, a staunch Republican, was forced to seek asylum outside of France.

to be the lonely parent of two children with lily-white skin, deemed black by American society. After moving to Baltimore to escape the social stigma that stained their reputation in New Orleans, the Nelson family now lives in fear that their terrible secret will be discovered.

Ludovic, still new to America and without the nuanced comprehension to understand why this revelation makes his dreams of marrying Marie impossible, declares that her race has little bearing on his love for her. At Nelson's protests, Ludovic cries, "Quittons ce pays, allons en France. Là, nous trouverons point de préjugés contre les familles de couleur" (Beaumont 78). Marie, however, refuses to leave her family and her country. It is Nelson's concession that Ludovic can marry his daughter only after he spends several months traveling the country, in order to understand the prejudices with which their union would be faced. It is through this lens that Beaumont's traveling exploration of social mores is launched. The text is thus structured with a triple narrative filter, and the readers already know where the story will end: in a lonely cabin in the middle of the Missouri woods. In this way, the subsequent narrative merely highlights different facets of the same object of depiction, enacting the ritual, unifying process of the experience.

### **La Case de l'Oncle Tom**

Almost twenty years after the publication of Beaumont's work, France would once again be reminded of the arbitrary and unjust racial situation in America with the cultural phenomenon that arrived on its shores in the form of



Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life among the Lowly*.<sup>25</sup> Her work, first published to great success in America in 1852, crossed the Atlantic and into England the same year.<sup>26</sup> By October of that year, Stowe's work was the subject of two French reviews, despite the book's lack of a published French-language edition. The first review, written by John Lemoine for the *Journal des Débats*, ignited French interest in the novel by lauding its strong moral message as much as the controversy that the novel had stirred in America. Lemoine declared, "Ce livre plein de larmes et plein de feu fait en ce moment le tour du monde, c'est multiplié par centaines de mille qu'il parcourt les deux hémisphères" (*Journal des Débats*, October 1852). Lemoine's emphasis on the book as a sensation, and not merely a text, inspired an Uncle Tom hysteria in France similar to the one brewing in England. The daily papers, including *La Presse*, *Le Siècle*, and *Le Pays*, began to announce forthcoming translations in their feuillets merely ten days after Lemoine's review, each claiming to have the best and most accurate translation. *La Presse* described their translator, Léon Pilatte, as having recently returned from America, thus touting his understanding of the nuances of the current American cultural landscape as much as of the art of translation.

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<sup>25</sup> Claire Parfait presents an excellent analysis of the "book history" surrounding the French translations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in "Un succès américain en France: *La Case de l'Oncle Tom*," *Instantes de ville/City Instantes*, 7.2, 2010. In her article, Parfait enumerates the number of and differences between French translations of Stowe's work, as well as the different publishing houses from which they appeared.

<sup>26</sup> Before 1891, the United States had not yet signed an international copyright contract, allowing both European and American publishers alike to pirate and publish content from across the Atlantic at will.

By the time that the feuilletons had arrived at the end of their installments of *La Case de l'Oncle Tom, ou la vie des nègres aux Etats-Unis*, the book editions of the translations had already begun appearing from the publication houses. Between 1852 and 1853, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was subjected to eleven French translations,<sup>27</sup> and in 1853, Harriet Beecher Stowe herself enjoyed a warm reception in Paris, *Le Journal des Débats* having advertised her arrival almost as royalty. While Lemoine esteems the massive public interest surrounding Stowe's reception in England and the United States, emphasizing the hype of the cultural phenomenon, the *Revue des Deux Mondes'* 1852 reviewer, Émile Montégut, was less than thrilled with such sensationalism. For Montégut, the hoopla around Stowe's work reflected nothing more than the desire for melodrama in nineteenth-century France. Montégut laments the condition of modern literature for basing itself solely around the act of lamentation:

La littérature moderne n'est pas matière à amusements: c'est un véritable cauchemar, une navrante et fatigante fantasmagorie... Ce spectacle, dis-je, est tout nouveau. Jadis les écrivains et les poètes se contentaient d'exprimer les sentiments moyens de l'âme humaine... (*Revue des Deux Mondes* Octobre 1852)

Montégut goes on to blame Christianity for the creation and perpetuation of a literature that existed and was read solely to denounce injustice.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Comparatively, as Parfait points out, the immensely popular *Ivanhoe* underwent six French translations between 1820 and 1850.

<sup>28</sup> For a further exploration of these literatures, see Marc Augerot's *La parole pamphletaire*, which outlines such intersections and departures between media and popular literature, detailing forms of textual expression that function in both realms.

According to him, the popularly beloved literature of his day had two determining qualities: the first, a perpetual and at times involuntary denunciation of injustice, and the second, “une grande inquiétude morale” (Montégut 157).

After a lengthy treatise on the state of modern literature, and on the state of general social consciousness, Montégut arrives at the review of the proposed text:

La dernière dénonciation de l'injustice sociale qui se soit produite nous arrive d'Amérique sous ce titre: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, et nous fait assister au spectacle plein d'horreur, et d'une horreur très variée, de la vie des nègres dans les états du sud. (Montégut 160-161)

Stowe's is a work, he says, that falls into fashion despite its mediocrity, because it appeals to the public fad of lamentation. Posing at certain points the question as to whether any woman could produce a work of quality “grâce à leur susceptibilité nerveuse, à leur impressionable imagination” (Montégut 161), Montégut arrives at the conclusion that, while *Uncle Tom's Cabin* lacks unity and style, its sole saving grace is its lack of proselytizing, “qualité rare aujourd'hui” (Montégut 165).<sup>29</sup> Despite all of his protests concerning both the quality of the work and the fact that slavery could not be abolished merely by principle, as Tocqueville argued, Montégut resigned himself to the novel's immense success

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<sup>29</sup> As Doris Y. Kadish writes in *Translating slavery: gender and race in French women's writing, 1783-1892*, antislavery writings by French women in the early nineteenth-century contributed to the creation of a fictive discourse on slavery almost as much as they contributed to a “tradition of resistance” against the practice (Kadish 1).

in both America and England, and immediately recognized the enormous popularity that the text would enjoy in France.

The most popular translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to transition from feuilleton to fully published novel was that of the “récemment arrivé d'Amérique” Léon Pilatte, published in 1853 by Librairie Nouvelle-Victor Lecou. Pilatte's edition came complete with a “notice sur l'auteur,” as well as a translator's introduction, both of which set the scene for a reading of the text that is more pro-Stowe than anti-slavery, especially in comparison to the dismissive tone of Montégut. Writing of Stowe's childhood travels to Kentucky, Pilatte declares:

Elle apprit là ce qu'est l'esclavage, et étudia dans les scènes journalières dont elle était témoin, non seulement les sujets des descriptions si variées de *La Case de l'Oncle Tom*, mais encore ce style aux libres allures qui donne tant de prix à son ouvrage.  
(Pilatte vi)

Pilatte thus touts the authenticity and vraisemblance of Stowe's work in terms of her position as witness, privileging her physical and visual proximity to her subject, an interesting consideration along with the fact that Pilatte's translation itself was prized for his temporal and geographic proximity to the object of the book. While Émile Montégut is disgusted with the literary sensations and the literature of morals that flourished in 1852, Pilatte is eager to boast these qualities in Stowe's work, though quick to point out that interest in the novel should not lie solely in its enormous success:

Nous tenons à déclarer, toutefois, ce n'est pas cet incomparable succès qui nous a inspiré le désir de faire connaître en France l'ouvrage de Madame Stowe: s'il ne s'agissait que de fournir un aliment à la curiosité malade, au besoin de distractions et d'émotions qui dévore la multitude des lecteurs désœuvrés, nous

aurions trouvé les romans du jour plus que suffisants pour cela.  
(Pilatte viii)

According to Pilatte, the “souffle intérieur” is meant to be that which draws the reader into Stowe’s text, but its American identity, and its subject matter, slavery, are not to be ignored in Pilatte’s reading. Though beginning, as Montégut, with an overhead view of a sea of moral and literary currents, the national and racial identities at stake in the text manifest themselves in Pilatte’s overview.

Unlike the United States, Pilatte writes, France does not need to be converted to the abolitionist cause, though it could use a reminder as to the religious undercurrents that support its stance. Stowe’s text, according to Pilatte, “elevé aux yeux de l’univers le grand drapeau américain, et elle montre, au milieu de ses étoiles et de ses banderoles, une tache large et profonde” (Pilatte ix).

Pilatte is quick to write, however, that his primary purpose is not to make America look unfavorable in this spectacle, noting that the preface of a British edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* even admits that England introduced slavery to America.

Pilatte himself mentions slavery in many “colonies européennes” (Pilatte x), though not specifically French, arriving at the statement that:

Il ne faut, donc, en aucune manière, faire peser la responsabilité de l’esclavage sur la grande confédération américaine dans son ensemble; les États libres de la confédération en sont aussi innocents que n’importe quel Etat d’Europe. (Pilatte xii)

The reader’s gaze is thus moved from a geographical, cultural space towards a more personal, historical space of self-reflection. “Au commencement de 1848,” he writes, “les esclaves des colonies françaises n’avaient pas plus lieu d’espérer la liberté que n’ont aujourd’hui les noirs des Etats américains” (Pilatte xiii).

Pilatte's historical shift, quickly joining the prospect of American abolition to the liberation of slaves in the French colonies, indicates just how intertwined the Haitian Revolution and the prospect of American abolition had become in the historical imaginary. All references to abolition harkened back to the colonies, and, under all guises, references to the colonies often called Haiti to mind.

As Tocqueville wrote in the introduction to *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, public desire for the opportunity to in some way witness what was happening in America, as in the metaphor of Pilatte's large stained flag, was as much about understanding the social and political currents swirling in France as it was about understanding those in America:

Alors je reportais ma pensée vers notre hémisphère, et il me sembla que j'y distinguais quelque chose d'analogue au spectacle que m'offrait le Nouveau-Monde. Je vis l'égalité des conditions qui, sans y avoir atteint comme aux Etats-Unis ses limites extrêmes, s'en rapprochait chaque jour davantage ; et cette même démocratie, qui régnait sur les sociétés américaines me parut en Europe s'avancer rapidement vers le pouvoir. (Tocqueville 2)

The same America that had once been, in Tocqueville's analysis, a brilliant portent of governmental and social advancement, had become, by Léon Pilatte's 1853 introduction to *La Case de l'Oncle Tom*, a sad reminder of colonial days past. The literary shift from depictions of a shining land of modernity to a pitifully backwards land of injustice would be baffling if not for a consideration of Beaumont's *Marie*. As we've seen, at the times of Tocqueville and Beaumont's publications, the French vision of America was already divided, compartmentalized into two distinct realms of either structure or content, stage and players of the American spectacle. These two views of America, though

expressly different, were born of two very different eyewitnesses who had two very similar American experiences.

### **Nos Américains**

The evolution of popular French perspectives on America from Tocqueville to Stowe reflect many different seams of division, and exposed an America divided between institutions and mores, black and white, North and South, past and future. Most of the French fiction that takes America as its subject in the nineteenth century chooses a clear preference in the divide between North and South, and the debate turns with particular intensity in the struggle between the past and future. To this end, we can count Pilatte's concession that slaves in French colonies had just as much hope as slaves in pre-Civil War America, and the impression that America was suffering from delayed cultural development, needing to catch up with European intellectual currents. To the contrary, thirty years after the success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in France, we find Louise de Bellaigue's *Nos Américains, Episodes de la Guerre de Secession* (1881).

The Countess Louise Dubois de Beauchesne Bellaigue de Bughas published several works under the simplified name, Louise de Bellaigue, often targeting children as her audience. Most of her works appeared from the Société Générale de Librairie Catholique publishing house, well-known for being a staunch defender of the Catholic Church and for publishing works that advanced

its mission.<sup>30</sup> The fact that Bellaigue's decidedly pro-Confederate novel appeared under this publishing house suggests that the work is a holdover from the Civil War-era conception of a French-Confederate alliance based primarily on religion, the South being seen as the hub of Catholicism while Protestantism swept the North.

Like the works of Beaumont, Tocqueville, and Stowe, Bellaigue's text emphasizes its position as an "eyewitness" account,<sup>31</sup> dedicated to her brother-in-law, Alexandre de Bellaigue, who had travelled extensively in the states during the Civil War as Consul Général. In the preface, dedicated to the eyewitness whose stories inspired her fiction, Bellaigue writes:

Ces lignes que j'écris pour mes fils et ma fille, je les dédie à votre amitié. Inspirées par les récits de voyages dont vous charmiez nos bons et beaux jours de réunion de famille... mon but sera atteint si... en tournant les feuillets de ce livre, nos enfants peuvent y puiser un nouvel amour des grands devoirs qu'ils ont à remplir envers Dieu, envers la famille et envers la patrie. (Bellaigue ii)

Bellaigue thus defines her intention in creating the text, moving a step beyond Gustave de Beaumont's declared purpose of "utilité," into a consideration of "devoirs." The America presented by Bellaigue is gently divided, struggling

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<sup>30</sup> See Robert F. Byrnes, "The French Publishing Industry and its Crisis in the 1890s." *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 23, No. 3, Sep. 1951.

<sup>31</sup> As Derrida writes in *Poétique et politique du témoignage*, the act of witnessing is a particularly charged, almost sacred, moment in which the witness is most intimately involved with his/her object of witness. Later, in the act of testimony, the witness and audience are both frustrated by the physical and temporal distance between the witness and the object of witness. In the case of Bellaigue's text, the author emphasizes her position as an eyewitness to highlight her intimacy with the events that she describes, and thus implies the authenticity of her account.



between past and future. Her American protagonists, a pair of orphaned twins named Georges and Madeleine, were born in Charleston but raised in France, with a French mother and a Creole father. The twins themselves, even in their physical appearances, demonstrate an America united in its division, as we learn that “par un caprice de la nature, elle était brune, il était blond” (Bellaigue 9). Although they can barely remember the land of their birth, they feel the call of their *patrie* and set forth to join the Confederacy as soon as news of the start of the Civil War arrives in France. Joining them on this journey is their lovingly devoted servant/slave, Flavia, who, as we will see, is not at all interested in the abolitionist movement, but rather more content to stay lovingly alongside her child *bienfaiteurs*. As Georges and Madeleine’s mother wrote to Flavia in her will:

Mes enfants t’aimeront comme je t’ai aimée. Ils te garderont toujours à leur foyer. S’ils sont malades, tu les soigneras en souvenir de moi. L’heure de l’émancipation n’est pas encore venue, mais tu es libre... Ton tendre dévouement est le seul lien qui t’attache désormais à nous tous. (Bellaigue 25)

What follows in the journey of these two French-American Civil War witnesses reflects the stylistic tendencies of the panoramic literature described by Benjamin. Leaping across time, geography, and battlefields, Georges depicts his eyewitness account of the American social and political landscape in his letters to his sweetheart back in France. He carefully explains to her that, while the South is equally concerned as the North with the emancipation of slaves, which seems ever imminent, the South must protect itself from Northern exploitation before it can turn to tackle its own domestic problems:

Nos rivaux du Nord veulent, au mépris des lois constitutives de l’Union, nous courber sous leur joug, ruiner notre gratitude pour les

tarifs faits au bénéfice exclusif de leurs manufactures. L'esclavage assurément doit disparaître un jour, le public s'y prépare graduellement. (Bellaigue 108)

The imminent abolition of slavery, and the need for internal reform of an agricultural economy before the external imposition of a debilitating regulation, are themes that are here being reprised from works stretching back to the Haitian Revolution, including Tocqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, which argued that the future of the American South had been built on slavery, and could thus not proceed into abolition without a serious reevaluation of its foundations. Emile Montégut's review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, we will remember, also adopted the same stance. It is interesting, however, to see these themes reprised in a work written and published well after the end of the Civil War, the death of the Confederacy, and the abolition of both American and French institutions of slavery. In *Nos Américains*, as Georges witnesses the kindness and gentility of the American South, we read that the newspapers in both France and America were painting a different picture.<sup>32</sup>

Les journaux d'Amérique, sur lesquels nos amis se jetaient avec avidité, ne contenaient plus que des récits des villes qui soulevaient, d'armées qui se formaient, de cris d'animosité, de vengeance, de haine. (Bellaigue 107)

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<sup>32</sup> Here, Georges may be referring to the coverage of the Civil War in France during the Second Empire. As noted in Chapter 1, readers of the press under Napoleon III's Second Empire may have correctly been suspicious of whether their news was received with interference, Napoleonic or otherwise. Georges' mistrust of journalistic reports back in France echoes Bellaigue's attempt to establish accounts or testimony produced directly by witnesses as the most reliable source of information.

This seeming mistrust of journalistic reports highlights the desire for an interpersonal expression of wartime events, as Georges ignores newspaper reports in favor of the firsthand letters from his uncle on the battlefield. The general impression given, though such statements, is that the authentic story of the Civil War had yet to be revealed.

In this way, Georges also sets the record straight concerning the relationship between the institution of slavery and the lives of the slaves themselves. The slaves, he writes, understand and admire the devotion to *patrie* demonstrated by their Confederate masters, and will, like Flavia, patiently help them fight the Northern aggression, in sympathy with the social and financial restructuration that must take place before abolition. Contrary to the works, like Beaumont's *Marie*, that paint the Confederates as slave-owning brutes who delight in the exertion of their cruel power, *Nos Américains* praises the fallen Confederacy as a place of honor and patriotic loyalty.

There are many intersections between fiction and history in the collected scenes of the Civil War presented in Bellaigue's text, though perhaps the most fascinating and explicit such instances involve the brief cameos of several key historical figures, some French, upon whom Georges happens to stumble in his tour.<sup>33</sup> Among these real-life celebrities is the Prince de Joinville, whose massive tome of Civil War history continues to serve scholars to this day. Joinville and his nephews, the Duc de Chartres and the Comte de Paris, traveled to America

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<sup>33</sup> As Chapter 3 will demonstrate, famous figures of the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War were often the subject of biographies that privileged a physiognomic mode of visual representation.

during the Civil War on a diplomatic mission, and decided to stay in order to further develop their military prowess under General George McClellan's Army of the Potomac, much to the chagrin of the Southern-leaning Napoleon III. De Bellaigue, however, is quick to emphasize that the three Frenchmen were not entirely blind to the noble plight of the Confederacy:

Trois Français, grands par le sang et par la valeur, venus dans le noble but de contribuer à l'affranchissement des nègres, prirent rang dans l'armée du Nord que commandait Mac Clellan. Le Prince de Joinville, en rendant compte de cette guerre de sécession, peint avec une précision et une justesse d'esprit admirables les différentes situations dans lesquelles se trouvèrent les deux armées ennemies. S'il y fait ressortir le succès que, par la suite, le Nord remporta sur le Sud, il parle aussi 'de la panique, de l'effarement et de la peur' qui, à plusieurs reprises, mirent l'armée nordiste en déroute, de même que son Altesse rend hommage au courageux patriotisme des soldats du Sud que les revers n'ont pas abattus, mais qui grandissait au fur et à mesure que se poursuivait la lutte gigantesque qu'il était appelé à soutenir. (Bellaigue 144-145)

De Bellaigue has thus taken the image of three very famous pro-Northern Frenchmen, and twisted the lens to show that the struggle was not as straightforward as other texts had thenceforth suggested. When he sees Prince Napoleon on the battlefield of Bull Run, where he hopes to "apprendre des témoins oculaires tous les détails de combat" (Bellaigue 147), Georges notes the seemingly inherent political divide between the Prince and the troops:

Ces héritiers des théories politiques de Georges Washington, qui ne croient à la prospérité des sociétés qu'autant qu'elles reposent sur l'usage des libertés et sur l'entier respect des convictions de chacun, ne prêtèrent qu'une oreille distante aux paroles du prince. (Bellaigue 148-149)

Georges notes this innate difference as he passes by the image of this scene, simultaneously acknowledging and excusing an unavoidable lack of total

comprehension on the part of the American soldiers. Georges, and his destined audience of French children, profit in this instance from their position as spectators, with the ability to pause and reflect upon these national and idealistic differences.

At one point, Bellaigue invites her reader to contemplate the image of a country in ruins, with its neighbors passively watching from a distance:

Tandis que la guerre déchire un pays, tandis que la famine en décime un autre, les continents voisins, que dis-je, les peuples limitrophes, s'enveloppant dans la toge de leur neutralité, assistent impassibles à ce spectacle et se contentent de lire dans les feuilles publiques la statistique des morts. (Bellaigue 215)

Explicitly describing the conflict in the Americas as a “spectacle,” Bellaigue reinforces the image of the U.S. Civil War as unraveling before the eyes of the world. Furthermore, she links the act of reading with the act of passive observance, describing the passive viewers as contented with reading superficial accounts of the action in “feuilles publiques.”

Another such moment that demands the attention of Bellaigue’s reader is the description of an uprising of slaves, “cette multitude grossière qu’excitent quelques soldats nordistes” (Bellaigue 296), like a spark to a haystack, which Flavia watches from afar. In this long and violent scene, hardly a vicious incident is described without a striking sense of visual perspective, as the reader follows the action through Flavia’s gaze: “Flavia, l’œil humide, suit les différentes phases de ces scènes sauvages...son œil inquiet suivait ces mouvements désordonnés, et son cœur battait à se rompre” (Bellaigue 296-297). That the reader purveys unrolling violence through the eyes and thoughts of Flavia, the docile slave,

serves to reinforce Bellaigue's proclamation that the violence associated with the Civil War was solely founded upon the question of race, as Flavia remains lovingly faithful to her masters.

This scene of the slave uprising is theatrical in its action as much as in its description, as an insurgent slave, swept up in the carnival of the moment, dons the plantation mistress' silk dress, and proceeds to deck herself in the jewels that were the spoils of pillage. The other slaves watch, and then participate in the performance:

Cette femme faisait l'admiration générale des amis qui, moins par complaisance pour la négresse que par dérision pour la dame qu'on voulait imiter, apportaient des bracelets, des nœuds de dentelle, des boucles, des rubans, fruits de leur larcins, dont ils attifaient la négresse qui riait aux éclats de son déguisement...devenue grande dame, [elle] se mit à arpenter la terrasse à pas précipités et, tournant la tête de droite, de gauche, avec un geste de bras superbe, elle agitait un éventail qu'elle tenait à la main. L'hilarité, qui était générale, devenait de la frénésie chaque fois que la traine de la robe, gênant la marche de la négresse, celle-ci lui imprimait un mouvement de recul par un coup de pied, lance vigoureusement en arrière. Un nègre, d'une douzaine d'années, accourut remplir le rôle de porte-queue, aux applaudissements de la foule sauvage qui, dans son délire, finit par porter en triomphe la négresse et son suivant. (Bellaigue 297-299)

The scene thus paints a crowd of anonymous, speechless beings, savagely and collectively erupting into fits of laughter and outrage, complete with its own performers, costuming, and spectators. As Flavia leaves the scene of the uprising, Bellaigue once again reminds the reader of her position as eyewitness, along with Flavia, to a spectacle, and indicates the way in which the reader should be reacting to these violent events: "toute tremblante, ne pouvait cependant détacher ses yeux de ce hideux spectacle" (Bellaigue 299). Flavia,

however, cannot escape her narrative position as horrified witness, though she escapes this violent scene of carnival. Upon returning to the cottage, Flavia finds Madeleine, Mme. Burden, and Georgiana to be similarly surrounded by insurrection. Within the temporarily protected space of the house, the women watch from a window as the bedlam approaches outside. “D’un bond Flavia fut debout, tandis que ses maitresses, cachées derrière les rideaux, suivaient d’un œil anxieux les démonstrations joyeuses” (Bellaigue 300).

The stage is thus set, and reveals Flavia’s double function as viewer, witness to the action, and viewed, the object of Bellaigue’s text. While the white women watch with a singular “œil anxieux,” carefully hidden behind the curtains that set and contain the scene, Flavia steps forward, featured between the curtains as witness and performer. She walks toward the slave quarters to learn the cause of the chaos, only to find a man sent from the insurrection down the road to recruit more slaves. Poor Flavia is thus forced to listen to a recounting of the scene that she herself had just witnessed, though to a very different reaction. The man who has come to “raconter aux nègres les joies de là-bas” (Bellaigue 300) offers not only to tell of the events, but to “passer sous leurs yeux le tableau de tous les plaisirs dont on s’enivrait à cette fete, et les engager à y venir” (Bellaigue 300-301). He promises that the action will continue well into the night, and that the grand finale will be the burning of the plantation house, “ce qui ferait une jolie illumination sur la contrée” (Bellaigue 302).

## L'Incendie du Cap

Bellaigue's description of slave revolt ignited by talk of abolition and culminating in a brilliant and destructive fire, would certainly evoke in its nineteenth-century readership narratives of the revolts of the Haitian Revolution, narratives that often featured similarly theatrical and melodramatic literary functions. The most strikingly similar such text is René Périn's 1802 novella, *L'Incendie du Cap, ou le règne de Toussaint Louverture*. Published during Napoleon's 1802 attempt to reinvade and conquer Haiti, Périn's work appeared from the Marchand publishing house and was at least sanctioned, if not commissioned, by Napoleon.<sup>34</sup> In *Friends and Enemies*, Chris Bongie describes *L'Incendie du Cap* as "a particularly inept diatribe against Toussaint Louverture" and a "half-hearted attempt at a novel" (Bongie 69), and though little is known about the circumstances of the work's publication, it does afford a great deal of insight into the narrative tactics that were used in the production and dissemination of indirect, even literary, forms of Napoleonic propaganda.

*L'Incendie du Cap* tells the story of a wealthy French landowner, Senneville, a character based on a real plantation owner on Saint-Domingue who died years before the 1791 revolt that serves as the context for the narrative. In Périn's work, Senneville's young daughter, Ermina, though devoted to her gallant French fiancé, Florello, is subjected to the amorous advances of her father's

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<sup>34</sup> As explained in Chapter 1, Napoleon maintained an impressively strong control over all of the print material that appeared in France under his regime. Any such text published and distributed under the First Empire would have been strongly monitored by, if not directly created by the Emperor himself, particularly on the topic of French military actions.



black servant, Christophe, whom the reader knows to be the Christophe later to become King of Haiti, thanks to a footnote. Though his affections toward Ermina begin rather tenderly and with a hint of innocence, Christophe quickly shows his evil side as he spies on and later attacks the defenseless girl. To protect his daughter, Senneville sends her away to Guadeloupe, thus further enraging Christophe, who vows to get his revenge. Once he catches wind of the revolutionary *Déclaration des droits de l'homme* in France, he uses its ideas to enrage the slaves on Senneville's plantation, who had until then been merrily content in their position, into a violent rebellion. After Christophe has ignited the abolitionist fever, the slaves become bloodthirsty, and turn on their master. Before the end of Périn's narrative, the entire plantation, and most of the island, is engulfed in flames.

Though written more as a call to arms against Haiti than a gentle reminder of devotion to *patrie*, Périn's text does mirror Bellaigue's in several ways beyond their respective fiery slave revolts. First and foremost, we can compare the two texts' emphases on the role of the eyewitness in the establishment of authenticity. Along the same vein, both texts provide a similar style of presenting brief descriptive scenes that serve to call upon, and expound upon, the reader's previous knowledge of historical events.

As described in its *Discours Préliminaire*, the purpose of Périn's text is to expose the true nature of the revolts and warfare that led to the Haitian Revolution. The author describes his own work as a penetrative account, an up-close look that, properly received, will undoubtedly result in sorrow:

Je vais pénétrer dans l'intérieur de la ville du Cap, y chercher les victimes de ce nègre atroce, et offrir un tableau, sur lequel, lecteur, tu seras peut-être forcé de verser quelques larmes!!! (Périn xiv)

The deliberate framing of the narrative as a "tableau," along with a "tu" that indicates complicity between narrator and reader, set the scene for collective reaction to the proposed scene. The reader is invited directly into the text as a character and as a witness. The visual emphasis of Périn's text is echoed throughout the novel, with narrative pauses that, as in Bellaigue's novel, invite a repositioning of perspective, positioning the given scenario into a grand geographic or national plane. After a description of the riots that chase Senneville from his plantation, as the narrative eye falls upon "le crime à soif de sang" (Périn 50), the narrator even exclaims in an aside that words fail him in the effort to depict such horrors:

Muse plaintive! avec ton énergie touchante, et le pouvoir que tu as d'ébranler, d'attendrir nos âmes par des paroles, et des sons qui portent la douleur et l'agonie dans les cœurs, inspire-moi et prête-moi tes crayons pour tracer cette scène déchirante! (Périn 50)

The reader is thus left with an image of the writer as an intermediary between event and word, an artist whose sole effort is to faithfully reproduce history. The narrator goes on in his request to the muse, asking for the most truthful representation of his protagonist: "Offre-moi le respectable Senneville... Présente-moi ce respectable français... Présente-le-moi!" (Périn 51) Senneville is hence the object of history, offered forth to the author to be transmitted from event to reader.

Indeed, the reader of Périn's text is faced with a fictional history replete with well-known figures, such as Christophe, standing as objects to the text's,

and thus history's, subjective eye. From this perspective, the past, present, and future unfurl alongside one another, and every event is considered along with its own causes and eventualities. As we've seen, the reader is introduced to Christophe as a lovelorn servant, all the while having noted through the preface that the character holds great historical significance. The ominous feeling that pervades the island before the first revolts are perhaps the clearest indicator of this mutual positioning of past and future:

Les premiers germes de la division avaient déjà pris naissance au sein de la France, et les Colonies voyaient chaque jour, dans le silence, s'approcher le moment de leur chute et l'époque des plus grands malheurs. (Périn 18)

Périn's story describes colonial dissent as a sort of biological phenomenon, "germes" that spread from France's internal problems into its satellite colonies. As the discord expanded, all that France could do was remain passive to its own dysfunction:

Et les vents cruels nous forçaient d'être spectateurs de ces événements sinistres, sans pouvoir porter des secours aux malheureux... Le Cap n'offrait que le tableau le plus effrayant... Quel spectacle! (Périn 153)

Thus condemned to watch in silent horror as the island erupts into flames, originally distanced by geography and now distanced by time, France must watch these events unfold once again in through Périn's text.

Referencing the first abolition of 1794 by the Republican National Convention, Périn continues to address his reader as "tu," in this case implying that the reader is an active participant in the horrific events that took place at the Cap. His harangue against this *tu*, the harbinger of the slave revolts, is

constructed in the sensational rhetoric of propaganda. Périn makes sure to not only implicate the French revolutionaries in Haitian violence, but insists once again upon the tragedy of family torn apart:

O... toi qui provoquas cette loi, je te demande aujourd'hui compte du sang qui a coulé, dans ces tristes contrées; des fils te redemandent leurs pères; des épouses éplorées leurs maris; des amis leurs bienfaiteurs; celui qui arme l'assassin, est plus cruel que lui-même... Je te laisse à la postérité, à l'historien sévère, à marquer ta place. (Périn 41)

This portrayal of a form of history that waits in the wings to judge the people and events that pass through its doors, a totally deifying view of time and posterity, suggests that Périn's narrative may have been created to serve as witness in such a trial. The sanctity of collectively acknowledged history, however, is not entirely protected from imposters, according to Périn:

Et cependant voilà l'homme qui prétend siéger au temple de mémoire. Oui, tu peux y avoir une place comme écrivain; comme grand homme jamais; mais pourquoi en parler davantage, Erato est juste, et ton portrait est déjà trace par elle! (Périn 42)

The negotiation between writer, collective memory, and history is thus even further troubled, though memory attains a higher status through the establishment of a sacred "temple de memoire" (Périn 42).<sup>35</sup> It is therefore understandable that Périn takes care to remain faithful to his construction of narrative as a series of images to be reproduced in their total capacity as the irrefutable proof of concretely resounding emotions.

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<sup>35</sup> The idea of a *temple de mémoire* certainly evokes Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, highlighting the significance of these *memory points* in the creation of collective identity. As Todorov and Glissant have demonstrated, this metaphorical *temple de mémoire* relies upon its sacred status in its continued perpetuation.

It is not solely in the careful positioning of his work in relation to history, however, that Périn demonstrates the theatrical nature of his text. Returning to the metaphor of veiling as an indicator of historical veracity, one of the earliest scenes in *L'Incendie du Cap* finds Christophe hiding behind a curtain in Ermina's private quarters:

Christophe, dérobé à ses regards par un léger rideau, fixait sur elle des yeux pleins de flamme; il aurait voulu deviner ce qu'elle écrivait, il aurait voulu tenir cette lettre fatale; car Ermina, en l'écrivant, avait vingt fois répété le nom de Florello... Témoin de tous ces combats, Christophe souffrait; que dis-je, il écumait de rage: c'était le délire d'un tygre, qui veut et qui craint se jeter sur sa proie. Ermina fit un mouvement, Christophe tressaillit; le rideau voltigea, et elle crut appercevoir quelque chose... Christophe vit son trouble, et ne jugeant pas encore nécessaire de paraître, il resta derrière le voile favorable, sans mouvement, l'haleine captive, et dans une immobilité absolue. (Périn 22-3)

Christophe, unseen witness to Ermina's solitary intimacy, highlights the question of perspective that served as the focus of Périn's *Discours Préliminaire*.

Christophe himself becomes a personification of the invisible yet inevitable intrusion that incites and characterizes the entire revolution in *L'Incendie du Cap*.

Christophe, with a wavering control over his own physicality, chooses to avoid his revelation while Ermina, aware by instinct that something is amiss in the situation, shruggingly decides to continue without alarm, naïve to what lurks behind the curtain. Meanwhile, the reader/spectator has the whole view of the scene, and gains insight from the narrator's tableau into the character of Christophe. Part forlorn lover, "Christophe qui souffrait" (Périn 22), and part wild animal, "que dis-je, il écumait de rage" (Périn 22), ready to throw himself upon his pretty victim, Christophe displays his double-nature when afforded too much

trust by his white counterparts. Once his rage reaches a boiling point, he loses his faculty and almost betrays his safe position. He is, however, quickly able to regain his composure into an “immobilité absolue” (Périn 23) in order to protect himself.

Although the figure of Toussaint Louverture is proposed as the subject of Périn’s text, Périn does not give him a central place in the action of the narrative. In this way, Périn allows Louverture to serve as the omnipresent emblem of Haitian violence. He exists throughout the text as an omniscient puppet master, seeing and controlling all of the violence while remaining outside of the explicit action.<sup>36</sup> Where he does appear, however, he displays qualities strikingly similar to those displayed by Christophe, an ungrateful beast of a man hiding behind a curtain, barely able to contain his own nature:

Toussaint Louverture, qui a oublié les bontés dont la France a daigné le combler, qui a grossi ses richesses des dépouilles de ses victimes, qui a trahi, persécuté ceux qui avaient abrite son enfance, cet hypocrite ignorant qui, dans son fol orgueil, au milieu d’une orgie, osait dire que Raynal l’avait désigné, vient enfin de jeter le masque politique dont il se couvrait, et d’arborer l’étendard de la révolte. (Périn xiiij)

The figure of a two-faced Louverture, and more particularly of a masked Louverture, resurfaces several times throughout *L’Incendie du Cap*, highlighting the half-human qualities of Périn’s insurgents.

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<sup>36</sup> In the following chapter, I will explore the figure of Toussaint Louverture in early nineteenth-century French biographies. Such texts often afforded him a similar “absent but responsible” status while hinting at the power of his physical presence, similarly allowing him to exist as a mysterious, and therefore more frightening, figure.

The metaphorical mask is what hides the true nature of Toussaint Louverture and Christophe from their “bienfaiteurs,” just as there exists between history and reader a sort of barrier that can only be crossed, or covered, by the author. At many times in *L’Incendie du Cap*, this metaphorical blockade is described explicitly. For instance, as Périn proposes the launch of his tale, he writes, “Soulevons un instant le crêpe de la mort, qui se déroule sur toute la Colonie!” (Périn 44), indicating that for Périn, the writing and reading of history are founded upon a revelatory action on the part of the author for the benefit of the reader.

The narrative effects of this relationship are multifold: primarily, they highlight the French colonies as a European space, in which typical and universal romances flourish and die, in which women drop tears onto tender letters and men brave death to be reunited with their beloveds. This transatlantic projection reinforces the sense, as is explicitly stated throughout *L’Incendie du Cap*, that the Haitian Revolution was an affront to France itself. Its violence touches its French characters, and implies its French readership, so closely that its events may as well have taken place in France. Senneville is not portrayed as an opportunistic land-owner, but as the gentle and benevolent patriarch of a picturesque plantation. It is his home, and yet he serves as an intermediary between France and the Americas, just as Georges and Madeleine in Bellaigue’s *Nos Américains*, and Ludovic in Beaumont’s *Marie*. The Frenchness of each of these characters serves as a point of reference in the literary and historical configuration of the

Americas in each text, functioning as much in the capacity of a narrative lens as a point of comparison with the American subject.

As guides in the retelling of these two wars, the French characters in these works establish the clearest point of entry in the quest for a unified French experience. Never tainted with flaw or prejudice as are their American counterparts, they serve as reactionary perspectives to the perceived spectacle of the Americas, witnesses to violence and injustice. *Marie, ou l'esclavage*, *Nos Américains*, and *L'Incendie du Cap* all propose to leap across time and geography, offering the metaphorical removal of a veil from their representational object, the Americas. Compounded with an emphasis on the role of the eyewitness in the transmission of history and the metaphors of revelation that run throughout the works, the insistence upon witnessing the scenes of the Haitian Revolution and the U.S. Civil War takes a position of great importance. The position of witness to the events that took place, the prejudices or violence in action, is a privileged status bestowed upon only the very few. Eyewitness accounts, however, lived on through the retelling, the literary and historical recreation of the eyewitness experience. Author and characters serve as instruments in the restaging of the past, demonstrating the collective way in which the action should be experienced in the reinforcement of a position of *us* and *them*, clearly distinguishing France from the Americas. As we have seen, the *us* and *them* depicted in these works both separate France from America and France from its own past, distinctions that become almost seamless in the literature surrounding the Haitian Revolution and the U.S. Civil War. Eager to



depict American slavery as an institution that clings hopelessly to the past, Beaumont and Bellaigue succeed in further distancing themselves, and their readers, from the Haitian Revolution, and their own familiarity with colonial loss. Périn, on the other hand, seeks to demonstrate France's proximity to the events of the Haitian Revolution, reveling in the injustice of this colonial loss in order to incite fury, and subsequent action.

## CHAPTER 3

### BIOGRAPHIES OF LOUVERTURE AND LINCOLN

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, the placement of an individual as the focal point of an historical event was a common approach to the writing of historical fiction. In the popular genre of nineteenth-century biography, the historical figure at the center of the text often served as a representation of themes and identities that stretched beyond the individual, as the biographical subject becomes a synecdoche for broad social and political movements. Thus, in biography, the body of the individual often represents a collective body, and the physical appearance of the individual becomes a visual means through which to analyze a larger picture.

Several early biographical works on the lives of Toussaint Louverture and Abraham Lincoln emphasize the relationship between appearances and actions to cultivate a reader response to the biographical subject that rings either uncanny,<sup>37</sup> in the case of Louverture, or comforting, in the case of Lincoln. This chapter will analyze two 1802 biographies of Toussaint Louverture, Louis Dubroca's *Vie de Toussaint-Louverture* and Cousin d'Avallon's *Histoire de*

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<sup>37</sup> Here, I'm referring to a conception of the uncanny, described by Freud in his 1919 essay, "The Uncanny," as the result of an object or experience that is concurrently attractive because of its familiarity and repulsive in its alienation, particularly in the perception of a dissonance between an object and the way in which it is perceived.

*Toussaint-Louverture*, along with three biographies of Abraham Lincoln, Félix Bungener's 1865 *Lincoln: sa vie, son œuvre, sa mort*, Achille Arnaud's biography published the same year, *Abraham Lincoln: sa naissance, sa vie, sa mort* and Alphone Jouault's 1865 *Abraham Lincoln: sa jeunesse et sa vie politique, histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis*. As we will see, biographies of Louverture describe their subject as a malicious individual hiding behind a pleasant countenance, while biographies of Lincoln often painted a man of integrity whose constitutional strength was echoed by his strong physicality.

Though these two sets of biographies were published under differing social and political circumstances, and under different Napoleons, each of the texts indicates an effort understand the revolutionary wars through the physical appearances of the individuals at the heart of their movements. Each of these biographies includes a detailed physical representation of its subject, both in the form of lithographic images attached to the text and verbal descriptions of Louverture and Lincoln. Likewise, the texts themselves suggest similar stylistic tendencies to the historical fictions analyzed in the previous chapter. A series of narrative tableaux, textual pauses inviting the reader to contemplate an image or purposeful fumbling at the inability to properly express a particularly dramatic scene through words, are often paired with images that may fill the gaps between the words, and outwardly invite the reader's gaze upon a certain scene or individual.

Many scholars who have analyzed biography as a genre, such as A.O.J. Cockshut, André Maurois, and Sabina Loriga, have approached it through the

seam between fact and fiction, noting that the line between the two becomes even more complicated in the case of biography, which, like historical fiction, often sets forth to reconcile a testament of historical veracity with a compelling narrative structure. In his 1974 *Truth to Life: the Art of Biography in the Nineteenth Century*, A.O.J. Cockshut describes the task of the biographer as the negotiation of a gap between interpretation and evidence (Cockshut 12), a divide to be crossed with an eye to historical validity as well as popular taste. According to Cockshut, the establishment of popular biography in the nineteenth century was based upon “a universal trust in documents” as well as “a persistent attempt to establish heroism” (Cockshut 16), both of which tendencies abound in the nineteenth-century biographies of Toussaint Louverture and Lincoln. Cockshut also explores the broader implications of nineteenth-century biography, writing that, “There is almost always a further idea present, sometimes overtly expressed, sometimes vaguely adumbrated, of spiritual formation by forces beyond man’s control, and indeed beyond his understanding” (Cockshut 21). Likewise, many nineteenth-century biographies of Toussaint Louverture and Abraham Lincoln portray men shaping history.

The differences between biography and historiography are often nebulous, and the pitfalls of both are markedly similar. As Cockshut writes, just like the historian, “the biographer plunges down into a mass of documents, testimonies, and (sometimes) personal memories. He emerges with a view of a man’s character. He then has to submit his interpretation to the pressure of facts” (Cockshut 12). André Maurois, in a series of lectures delivered at Trinity College

in 1928, thought similarly, declaring that the biographer has even more difficulty remaining objective (“maintaining the spirit of free inquiry”) than the historian, as the biographer is faced with a love or hatred of his subject which, inevitably, affects the textual portrayal.

Maurois saw biography as a reconciliation between art and science because of the documentary and interpretational necessities of its creation, and noted an evolution in biographical style that was based not on literary progress, but on public taste, writing that, “the modern man does not look in a biography for exactly what the seventeenth-century man was seeking. [The modern man] is grateful to those more human biographies for showing him that even the hero is a divided soul” (Maurois 34-5). The significance of the portrayal of a “divided soul” lies in the implication that the historical “hero” who is the object of biography is depicted as a reactive being, not driving history, but in its grasp.

Historian Sabina Loriga notes a similar biographical/historical shift in *Le Petit X: de la biographie à l'histoire*, chronicling an evolution of trends in historical writing. The crux of her history of biography (and titular reference) is based upon German philosopher Johan Gustav Droysen’s proposition that individual legacies are formed by *a*, a collection of external circumstances, and *x*, the personal contribution or internal constitution of the individual. According to her, nineteenth-century biographers were tasked with the safeguarding of the “dimension individuelle de l’histoire” (Loriga 13), evidencing a long-developing passage from universal to individual history at the end of the eighteenth century. Loriga thus delineates the nineteenth century as utter height of “histoire individuelle,” as later

historical tendencies shifted back toward collective histories in what she calls the “perte de pluralité” (Loriga 11). Loriga also implies the grouping of biographies with autobiographies, which enjoyed enormous success in nineteenth century France.<sup>38</sup>

The distinction between autobiography and biography can be as theoretically fraught as that between biography and historiography. A.O.J. Cockshut describes, in a schematic way, the primary and essential difference between the two as the principle that, while documents are the source of biography, memory is the source of autobiography (Cockshut 17). This distinction, however, is not always entirely clear, as other scholars have explored the additional heft of legitimacy provided by biographies whose biographers were acquainted with their subjects. As Catherine N. Parke explains in *Biography: Writing Lives*, “Acquaintance is still considered by many biographers and readers alike to be an empowering qualification, if not an essential one, for writing a life” (Parke 4). The necessity of acquaintance, however, has evolved over time, from Voltaire’s exclamation that “’tis a monstrous piece of charlantry to pretend to paint a personage with whom you have never lived” (Parke 25). As Parke points out, a narrative whose author did have first-hand knowledge of its subject can call the reader to question the biographer’s bias.

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<sup>38</sup> Popular French biographies in the mid-nineteenth century ranged from the life of Mozart, by Mathilde Froment, to the life of Jonathan Swift, by Hermile Reynald, who wrote that the biography was a typically English genre, describing it as: “Suivre un écrivain ou un homme politique depuis sa naissance jusqu’à sa mort, en recueillant tout ce qui, de près ou de loin, se rattache à sa personne.” (Reynald 1)

Voltaire, in describing the biographer's task as to "paint a personage," draws attention to the connection between biography and portraiture, a relationship that in itself has been debated by scholars of biography. The determination as to whether a visual representation of an individual, in the form of a portrait or a statue, should or can be considered biographical hinges upon a clear definition of biography as an either principally artistic or principally scientific genre. However, many biographical scholars develop such a definition based primarily on exclusion, arriving at what biography is not. In *Literary Biography*, Michael Benton dedicates a chapter to "Literary Biography and Portraiture," arriving at the conclusion that portraiture is tangential to biography, as "portrait-painting owes more to the conventions and contexts of visual art than it does to biography, to which it bears only a tangential relationship" (Benton 93). Furthermore, he writes, "most portraits are painted of living subjects; most biographies chronicle the dead" (Benton 94). Benton's distinction thus forms around convention and context, and, though describing the two in tangent, does not elaborate the ways in which the portrait may inform upon the biography, or vice versa.

In nineteenth-century France, the popularity of physiognomy would certainly have affected any such biographical contemplations, especially those that fixated on the physical appearance of their subjects. Physiognomy, the study of a person's external appearance in an effort to ascertain his/her moral and temperamental constitution, was firmly anchored in the social climate, and language, of its time. As Sharrona Pearl and Lucy Hartly argue, the scientific art

of physiognomy in the nineteenth century was primarily used to justify popular social claims about human nature, particularly in determining the inclusion or exclusion of social groups. The popularity of nineteenth-century physiognomy was thus rooted, similarly to that of the panoramic platform, in the visual cataloguing and classification of information. While most nineteenth-century physiognomic studies focus primarily on the facial characteristics of an individual, Melissa Percival notes that physiognomy, at its core, suggests a basic correspondance between inner and outer that was often seen to reflect the relationship between “physical and moral” (Percival 3). In this way, she writes, the essence of physiognomy is the attempt to attain an intangible truth.

Nigel Hamilton broadly defines biography from the outset as “our creative and non-fictional output devoted to reading and interpreting lives” (Hamilton 1). Though other scholars of biography might find issue with the “non-fictional” component of his definition,<sup>39</sup> Hamilton’s definition does significantly enlarge the scope of what may be considered biography. In his analysis, Hamilton describes the connection between portraiture and biography, particularly with the development of photography in the nineteenth century, writing that, “The precision of photography made it possible to extend the documentary scope of biographical depictions” (Hamilton 120), pointing to the broad influence of Alexander Gardner’s famous photographic portraits of Abraham Lincoln. It would seem that the link between biography and portraiture, with the development of such new technologies that also afforded the popular distribution of books

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<sup>39</sup> Cockshut and Benton, for instance, both elaborate the conventions of narrative “fiction” essential to the creation of biography.



supplemented by images, was not at all tenuous in the case of nineteenth-century biographies. In fact, with similar broad definitions of biography, such as John Garraty's statement that biography can be merely any "record of a life" (Garraty 3), these included images, in the form of portraits, become an integral part of biography. Standing in support of one another as records of a life, textual biographical depictions and visual biographical depictions interacted quite clearly on the pages of the published book. In some instances, the combination of the two may serve as a kind of reconciliation between the "documentary biography" and the "aesthetic biography" pitted against one another by Cockshut and Benton. Though image is certainly not immune to many of the conventions and pitfalls of biography (the problem of representation, the act of framing, etc.), the included portrait or image provides the biography reader with the impression of a more coherent understanding of the biographical subject.

Whether the provided image seems to bolster or contradict the textual depiction, the relationship between the two is integral to the reception of their combined presence. In the biographical tension between, as Cockshut describes, "interpretation and evidence" (Cockshut 12), these images are presented to strengthen the conveyance of both.<sup>40</sup> As André Maurois demonstrates that biographical methods and fashions are determined largely by public demand, which is reflective of the era's personality, the shifts between early nineteenth-century biographies of Toussaint Louverture and mid-nineteenth-century

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<sup>40</sup> Thus, this analysis will be focused less on authorial intent as it is on the collectively constructed "record of a life," and the ways in which this collective construction may sometimes hint at a public appetite for and consumption of such works.

biographies of Abraham Lincoln speak to a cultural evolution, or shift, of even broader implications.

### **The Duplicity of Louverture**

In 1802, as Napoleon's regime began preparations for General Charles Leclerc's invasion of the fully revolted Saint-Domingue, Toussaint Louverture was already a rather notorious figure in France and beyond. In order to prevent any democratic or abolitionist uprising on the part of Republicans, Napoleon himself having reinstated slavery in the early Empire, the Napoleonic regime began to commission propaganda against the movement taking place in the West Indies. Naturally, a central figure of this campaign was Louverture himself. Two Louverture biographies commissioned by the Napoleonic regime and published in 1802, Louis Dubroca's *La vie de Toussaint-Louverture: chef des noirs insurges de Saint-Domingue* and Cousin d'Avallon's *Histoire de Toussaint-Louverture: chef des noirs insurges de Saint-Domingue*, both contain similar versions of Louverture's life story, along with two of the first portraits of Louverture to circulate in France. These visual representations of the "anti-hero" of Saint-Domingue were placed at the frontispieces of the two biographies, inviting the reader to first contemplate the image of the man before reading his story. Interestingly, though the reader may already expect slanderous accounts within the texts themselves, the almost indistinguishable images of Louverture are rather docile, indicating little more than an ambiguously black military figure.

With his right shoulder and cheek toward the artist's gaze, Louverture is dressed in traditional military garb, a bicorn hat topped with feathers, military sash and full collar with embellished lapels. The only marked differences between the two are the angle of his hat and his slightly different facial features. Fritz Daguillard, in his extensive analysis of early images of Louverture, argues that these two particular portraits are most likely based on pure fantasy, rather than on eyewitness accounts or on previous renderings.<sup>41</sup> As Madison Smartt Bell writes about the Dubroca portrait, Louverture looks "less typically African" (Bell, "The Image of Louverture") than other early Louverture images, at least according to the artistic standards of the day. The most, and almost sole, strikingly visual element that distinguishes Louverture from any white general seems to be the deep shading of his skin. These portraits of Louverture calmly staring out from beneath his bicorn hat are a blank slate compared to the descriptions with which they are matched. Entering the biographical narratives that follow, it becomes clear that the placid images are a foil upon which the reader may infer a heap of monstrous hypocrisies.

Dubroca's text, much shorter than that of Avallon, is the abridged, introductory version of its lengthier counterpart. Published several months before Avallon's, Dubroca's would officially be the first biography of Louverture published in France. In his London-published 1814 *History of Toussaint Louverture*, M.D. Stephens writes that Dubroca was hired directly by Napoleon's regime to lead the propaganda war against Louverture. The fact that the works

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<sup>41</sup> "The True Likeness of Toussaint Louverture." *Americas (English Edition)*, Vol. 55, July 2003.

appeared from Dubroca's own publishing house, under the First Empire, would seem to corroborate this claim. In any case, his is one of the most seething presentations of Louverture, and would certainly have contributed to an Imperial French thirst for retribution.

From the outset, Dubroca establishes that, in the case of the Revolution of Saint-Domingue, the truth is not as it appears. His mission in writing this text, as he states it, is to guard against even more mass destruction at the hands of Louverture by preventing his image in France from carrying anything other than the burden of his treacherous actions. In this endeavor, Dubroca was faced with the ever-present social and political favor of abolition in the French colonies mounted by the currents and events of the French Revolution, a movement that Napoleon needed to silence in order to regain footing in the Caribbean. Dubroca begins his text with the following declaration of Louverture as a public enemy whose actions were based on treason, and not on the principles of liberty:

Au moment où le voile est déchiré sur l'hypocrisie profonde et sur les projets ambitieux de Toussaint-Louverture; au moment où la trahison de ce chef des noirs est consommée, et où, sur les ruines fumantes d'une cité embrasée de ses propres mains, les valeureux conquérants de la liberté française, en Europe, s'avancent pour punir en lui l'ennemi de leur patrie et de l'humanité entière; quel Français ne lira pas avec intérêt la vie de cet homme déjà trop fameux, et qu'une longue impunité a enhardi à tous les crimes? (Dubroca 1-2)

With this introductory graphic and violent metaphor, Dubroca makes it clear that Louverture has committed, and will continue to commit crimes against all of humanity, but that French hands in particular will punish him. Simultaneously stating the current and future significance of his works, Dubroca demonstrates

the principle elaborated by Maurois, that public appetite is the chief determiner of bibliographic content.

Perhaps an even more effective strategy from a propagandic standpoint, Dubroca also makes it clear that he is explicitly biased against his subject, as Maurois also described the possibility that any such bias on the part of the biographer would result in “warped judgement” (Maurois 16). In the case of Dubroca’s biography, this fact is explicit from the very beginning. The reader, from the outset, is expecting to read the life story of a villain, a traitor to France. Having quickly established his appartenance to a French collectivity, one that has been collectively betrayed by Toussaint Louverture, Dubroca establishes a very clear racial and national distinction between “us” and “him.”

Dubroca even writes that it is the kindness of Napoleon’s regime that has thus far prevented him from writing this account:

Retenu jusqu’a présent par le respect qu’inspire un gouvernement pacificateur, dont il n’appartient pas à un simple citoyen de troubler les vues par une impulsion contraire, je me suis abstenu d’écrire la vie de cet Africain couvert de sang et de forfaits, et j’ai imposé silence aux pressentiments cruel que les apparences même de sa modération rendaient plus profonds encore dans mon âme; mais à présent quel intérêt pourrait s’opposer à la publicité d’une histoire qui, si elle n’arrête pas les cours des évènements, peut du moins justifier l’importance des mesures qui sont prises contre celui qui en est l’objet, et offrir un aliment intéressant à la juste impatience du public depuis si longtemps induit en erreur sur le compte de ce chef des noirs. (Dubroca 12)

The clichéd description of Louverture as an “Africain couvert de sang,” beyond recalling stereotypes of African violence, indicates that the Napoleonic regime is not merely considering Louverture an enemy for the “forfaits” of his race, but for his actions against the French people. Here, Dubroca explicitly states his own

bias and also makes another very important revelation as to the purpose of his text: to explain the course of military action that will be taken by the French as a result of Louverture's behavior.

At the root of this behavior lies the ever-present theme of hypocrisy. According to Dubroca's introduction, it is Louverture's hypocrisy, "les apparences... de sa moderation" (Dubroca 12), which were most troubling in conducting the writing of his biography. The idea that Louverture is not as he appears, covered by a "voile de hypocrisie," (Dubroca 1) draws the reader back to the image at the frontispiece, the blank expression, the Caucasian features and relaxed shoulders now asked to coexist with the textual description of Louverture: "Africain couvert de sang" (Dubroca 2). The contrast between appearance and actions, between portrait biography and textual biography, fuels an uncanny disconnect that only adds to the horror of Dubroca's description.

Indeed, Dubroca's biography of Louverture is also replete with other references to the metaphorical unveiling of history beyond the physical description of Louverture himself, including several references to the framing of the narrative, and to the need to capture the gaze of the reader. For example, as he describes an early battle in which Louverture participated, Dubroca pauses to once again imagine the war's journey from event to history, and the ways in which it will be recorded:

Quand on écrira l'histoire de cette guerre, il faudra mettre sous les yeux des lecteurs, l'affreux tableau d'hommes sciés en deux, d'hommes mutilés dans tous les sens, d'hommes brûlés à petit feu, d'hommes attachés par les pieds à un arbre et écorchés vivants. (Dubroca 11)

Using similar graphic language to that of Rene Périn,<sup>42</sup> Dubroca outwardly declares that words fail in the attempt to fully understand the described events, that they must be experienced in conjunction with this imaginary and horrific tableau. The implication of Dubroca's insistence upon visualizing the horrific elements of his narrative is that in order to fully understand the devastation of these events, these scenes must be witnessed by the reader in order to be understood. Pulled momentarily out of the textual description, the reader may be tempted to turn back to the only visual aid included in the volume: the coolly staring eyes of Louverture's portrait.

Having described several such scenes of war and destruction, a bird's eye view of early revolutionary events, pausing to focus on Louverture's role in certain anecdotes, Dubroca truncates his narrative. The narrative aspect of the biography, which has not included much indication of Louverture's physical presence throughout the description of his early years, rise to power, or multiple treasons, now closes with a four-page addendum pertinently entitled "Portrait de Toussaint-Louverture." The end-cap of the portrait at the frontispiece, this textual portrayal begins with a physical description that quickly turns into caricature:

Toussaint Louverture est d'une taille médiocre, et d'une complexion faible en apparence; il a l'œil vif; son regard est rapide et pénétrant... Il monte bien à cheval, et marche toute une journée sans se fatiguer; presque toujours il arrive seul, ou presque seul, au terme de ses courses, ses aides-de-camp ou ses domestiques n'ayant pu le suivre pendant une marche souvent de cinquante ou soixante lieues, exécutée avec une rapidité inconcevable. Il se couche presque toujours habillé, et donne très peu de temps à ses repas. (Dubroca 49-50)

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<sup>42</sup> In his 1802 *L'Incendie du Cap*, as described in the previous chapter.

Beginning this physical description with a focus on his mediocrity, and closing with anecdotal examples of superhuman and brutal prowess, Dubroca again highlights the many deceptive appearances of Toussaint Louverture. He also provides the reader with yet another opportunity to feel horror at the mediocre appearance of Louverture, lending his strength and tenacity an unnatural quality. This is, truly, a formidable opponent, an enemy against whom all of France must contend, and whatever Napoleon's regime must do to incapacitate this villain is justified.<sup>43</sup>

In Dubroca's description, Louverture's physical appearance proves to be a deceptive indicator of his strength and character, and his actions are equally not as they appear. Dubroca once again emphasizes the illusion of appearances first mentioned in the introduction:

Toutes ses actions sont couvertes d'un voile d'hypocrisie si profond, que quoique sa vie entière soit une suite continuelle de trahisons et de perfidies, il a encore l'art de tromper tous ceux qui l'approchent, sur la pureté de ses sentiments. (Dubroca 50)

In including this statement in his description of Louverture, Dubroca plants the seed in the mind of the reader that, no matter what they may see or hear about Toussaint Louverture, it is likely shrouded or distorted by the ever-convincing veil of hypocrisy, a metaphorically visual impediment to the truth, and is not entirely reliable. This suggestion is particularly pertinent in light of the nineteenth century's "universal trust in documents" (Cockshut 16) as described by A.O.J. Cockshut. Dubroca does concede, however, that a more thorough history of the

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<sup>43</sup> For an interesting comparison, refer to Dubroca's laudatory biography of Napoleon, *Vie de Bonaparte*, also published in 1802.



life of Toussaint Louverture would shed even more light on the truth. The narrative closes with a testimony to the veracity of Dubroca's description:

... tel est le portrait de Toussaint-Louverture, dont la vie, écrite avec plus de détail, sera un exemple frappant des crimes où peut conduire l'ambition, quand la probité, l'éducation et l'honneur n'en répriment pas les excès. (Dubroca 62)

This declaration suggests that, while Dubroca's brief text serves as a warning against Toussaint Louverture, a more thorough version may open the analysis to a universal study of human character. In the words of Garraty, "People are interested in people" (Garraty 9), particularly in the cult of the individual as described by Loriga. It is in opening the possibility that Dubroca paves the way for the creation and reception of the Toussaint Louverture biography published later that year by Cousin d'Avallon, a text three times the length of Dubroca's that often treads the same territory.

Another experienced biographer of his time, Charles-Yves Cousin, popularly known as Cousin d'Avallon, published his Louverture biography mere months after that of Dubroca.<sup>44</sup> Cousin d'Avallon was born in Avallon in 1769, and was well-known for his series of mini-biographical anecdotes, called *Anas*, about the lives of famous personalities from history and literature. Published by Pillot, Avallon's Louverture biography elaborates upon Dubroca's text, even explicitly discussing the relation between the two, which is admittedly rather complicated:

Cet ouvrage était depuis longtemps en porte-feuille; on attendait le moment propice pour le mettre au jour. La vie de Toussaint-Louverture

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<sup>44</sup> Avallon, like Dubroca, published an imperially sanctioned official biography of Napoleon in 1802, entitled *Bonapartiana*.

par Dubroca, vient de hâter son impression. Cet auteur n'a donné qu'une esquisse légère et très imparfaite de la vie et des actions de ce chef des noirs, et on se flatte avec raison d'avoir rempli les lacunes d'un ouvrage qui, dans ce moment, est du plus grand intérêt. (Avallon ij-iiij)

Though both biographies were commissioned by Napoleon's regime, Avallon puts his version of Louverture's life into direct competition with Dubroca's. Dubroca's text, the "esquisse légère et très imparfaite" (Avallon ij) is to be supplemented by Avallon's more comprehensive work. Earlier in his introduction Avallon declares, though not mentioning Dubroca by name in this instance, "On vient de donner au public une espece de croquis de la vie de Toussaint-Louverture" (Avallon i) which he judges as the "fruit d'une speculation mercantile" (Avallon i). Again, Avallon states his mission, and the purpose of his work as to "réparer cette omission" (Avallon i).

Interestingly, in his thinly veiled criticisms of Dubroca's biography, Avallon relies upon a terminology that is steeped in references to the visual arts ("esquisse légère," "croquis de la vie"). His criticisms of Dubroca's text largely based in these terms, Avallon proposes to fill out the bare-bones image more thoroughly than his counterpart. Avallon plays to the nineteenth century's "universal trust in documents," as described by Cockshut, both by hinting that Dubroca's biography is incomplete, and by enumerating his own sources. Avallon declares that he not only consulted all available printed sources about the life of Toussaint Louverture, but that he also identified and filtered out those that were false or unreliable:

J'ai recueilli dans les mille et une brochures qui ont paru pendant six ans, tout ce qui a trait à Toussaint Louverture; impassible comme la vérité, j'a rejeté tout ce qui avait été dicté par les circonstances et par l'égarement

des passions, ayant adopté cette maxime sacrée: *Amicus Aristoteles, amicus Plato, magis amica veritas.* (Avallon ij)

With his unflinching allegiance pledged to truth above all else, Avallon casts doubt in the minds of his reader as to the legitimacy of any other published text on Louverture, choosing not to name which if any were deemed unsuitable. The only text mentioned outright is Dubroca's, which is not dismissed entirely, but rather criticized for its sketch-like nature.

It is worth noting, however, that Avallon includes the exact same physical description, recounted verbatim, as is found in Dubroca's addendum, "Portrait de Toussaint-Louverture." Four entire pages, lifted unchanged from Dubroca's narrative and placed into Avallon's under the heading "Portrait physique et moral de Toussaint Louverture," it would seem that Avallon's minor titular transformation, like his critique of Dubroca's text, hints at a thoroughness that goes, at least in name, beyond the physical and into the physiognomic.

Avallon's biography also allows for more exploration of Louverture's childhood, which was passed over rather quickly in favor of military anecdotes in Dubroca's biography. Beginning the section entitled "Histoire de Toussaint-Louverture" with the birth of the anti-hero "au sein de l'esclavage" (Avallon 17), Avallon makes no effort to conceal his "génie" (Avallon 17), though at this early point, Louverture's genius is coupled with a rather innocent ambition. The first thing that Louverture does to earn power in his community, according to Avallon, is to teach himself to read and write. In a footnote, the biographer declares "la lecture et l'écriture sont, parmi les nègres, le nec le plus ultra des connaissances humaines" (Avallon 17). Having earned this power, Louverture immediately finds

himself above the other slaves surrounding him, themselves “condamnés” to their own ignorance (Avallon 18). Almost immediately, Louverture abandons his position as a shepherd and begins his ascent to power. From this point, Avallon launches the biographical narrative into a series of anecdotal events, largely based around someone whose trust was earned and subsequently betrayed by Louverture. This rise to power, due to his “double talent” (Avallon 17) as literate and respected, is marked with deceit and hypocrisy.

Though Avallon’s biography certainly cannot be said to depict Louverture as any less of a villain than Dubroca’s, his approach to the character of Louverture is, in many ways, more nuanced. Playing to the imperative of “divided soul” biographies as described by Maurois, Avallon’s Toussaint is not flatly dual-natured, but is rather the victim of a series of circumstances that put a man of little character into a position that should have been filled by a man of great character:

... la plume se refuse à tracer de telles horreurs, et l’esprit aurait peine à y croire, si l’on ne savait ce que peuvent l’ambition et le fanatisme sur une âme faible qui se voit lancée dans une carrière qu’elle n’aurait du jamais espérer de parcourir. (Avallon 32)

Indeed, according to Avallon’s biography, ambitions of leadership and abolition were not part of Louverture’s early career and rise to power. Toussaint Louverture is, in this way, painted as an anomaly and an aberration, more monstrous than superhuman. This slave who “ne prévoyait guère le rôle qu’il devait un jour jouer dans la révolution de Saint-Domingue” (Avallon 19), thrust himself into a situation much bigger than himself, and can only act as it is in his (racial) nature to act. In Avallon’s text, the abnormality of Toussaint Louverture

seems to lie in his identity as an educated black man, a status that he has attained, according to Avallon, unnaturally. Surrounded by “ignorance,” Louverture is painted as the other modern Prometheus, having accused and attained a power unnatural to his station.<sup>45</sup> The focus of Avallon’s biography applies this broad racial determination to the individual, in the form of Toussaint Louverture.

An often-noted tendency of biographical writing, particularly as described by Sabina Loriga, is the synechdocal placement of the individual into the role of national representative.<sup>46</sup> Avallon’s Louverture biography, to the contrary, sidesteps this convention, taking care at several points to state that Louverture had captivated the other Revolutionaries with his charm and hypocrisy. Avallon makes it clear from the outset that the problem in Saint-Domingue is a problem caused by a singular individual. The implication thus being that the eradication of this problematic individual, Toussaint Louverture, would entirely solve the problem, again paving the way for public support of any anti-Louverture action taken by Napoleon or General Leclerc:

C’est sur ce rebelle que nous allons aujourd’hui attacher les regards du public et fixer sa curiosité. On aime à connaître les moindres particularités qui regardent un individu, qui, du sein de l’esclavage, parvenu au faite des grandeurs, veut traiter de puissance à puissance, et conserver un pouvoir

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<sup>45</sup> This discourse, centered on a power held but not controlled by the blacks of Hispaniola, can be traced from the earliest documents about the Haitian Revolution and well into the early years of the Haitian Republic. During the Haitian Revolution, the principles of Haitian democracy were often described as a bastardized version of the French Republic. Later authors would depict a Haitian Republic that did not know what to do with its own freedom.

<sup>46</sup> As we will see, this tendency will be even more prominent in French biographies of Abraham Lincoln.

légitime, plus son élévation fut rapide, plus sa chute doit être terrible.  
(Avallon vij)

The eyes of the public finding Louverture as their sole target, the central figure plays a tragic role. Predicting his fall by his rise, Avallon invites his reader to take part in witnessing the inevitable ending by invoking the standard conventions of classical theater.

As Maurois writes in *Aspects of Biography*, the biography of a well-known subject holds a unique status within the genre. Already familiar with key events, and potentially even with the end of the life in question, the reader is greeted with a sense of familiarity and comfort at the recounting of these events, but is also endowed with “that poetic grandeur” (Maurois 45) of knowing the end. Though, at the time of publication, Avallon’s reader would not have known of the end of Louverture’s life, the biographer’s assurance of his subject’s future demise certainly served a similar purpose. Less a call to action than a character study, Avallon’s biography favors the emphasis upon the individual Louverture, placing him at the center of a well-worn drama, and inviting France to watch as his *x*, to again borrow the theory of Droyson, is faced with a succession of *a*’s. Louverture’s resulting *A*, or entire life, in the biography of Avallon, is that of a man without the proper constitution to handle the circumstances that come his way.

### **The Honesty of Lincoln**

Considering the role of the biographer in conveying the way in which these two elements combine to form the life story of the subject in question, the French

biographies published about Abraham Lincoln in the years following his assassination are a fascinating contrast to those published about Toussaint Louverture in the years preceding his execution. Under the Second Empire, and the reign of Napoleon III, a new, though equally rigid, law of censorship controlled the texts that could be published. Anti-Napoleonic texts, of course, were strictly forbidden, and a popular way for those in favor of democracy to express their disdain for the Empire grew in printed material, particularly images, that took Abraham Lincoln as their subject. The trend was popular during his lifetime, with the movement experiencing a great surge in popularity after his assassination.

While physical keepsakes, such as lithographs or *cartes de visite*, boasting any symbol of French democracy would have come under scrutiny by Imperial censors, images in the form of photographs and lithographs representing American democracy, and the protection of the American Union, were not forbidden.<sup>47</sup> It was widely known, however, that a friend of Abraham Lincoln's was not a friend of Napoleon III's. Printed images of Lincoln were thus as politically charged as they were common. The culmination of the visual fanaticism around Abraham Lincoln arrived with the creation of the Lincoln Mourning Medal, conceived as a gift of support to his widow, Mary Todd Lincoln. The idea behind the creation of these coins involved a subscription by donation of ten centimes, and the issue of a bronze medal featuring the profile of Lincoln on the front and a monument to democracy, supported by liberated slaves, on

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<sup>47</sup> Napoleon III, with his non-explicit support of the Confederacy, did not go so far as to outright condemn favor of the Union.

the back.<sup>48</sup> While many newspapers, under Napoleonic pressure, refused to print advertisements for the Lincoln Mourning Medal project, the movement garnered the support of big-named liberals such as Victor Hugo and Louis Blanc.<sup>49</sup> A copy of the medal was, in the end, sent to Mary Todd Lincoln, with a letter signed by twenty such celebrity liberals declaring that, “If France had the freedom enjoyed by republican America, not thousands, but millions among us would have been counted as admirers.”

### **Lincoln in Biography**

Admiration for Abraham Lincoln did indeed grow deep, as evidenced by Lincoln’s inclusion in Benjamin Gastineau’s 1865 *Les génies de la liberté*, a chronicle of what the author sees as a progressive universal movement toward democracy. Gastineau’s text is an enumeration and praise of the men (and two women) whose *génie* pushed this democratic movement, from Dante to Lincoln. Gastineau sees the genie of these men in direct contrast with the “tyrannie” of others, facing Shakespeare against Nero, and Molière against Louis XIV.

Arriving at the final section of his democratic exploration, entitled “l’Amérique et la Révolution française,” Gastineau provides a brief biography of Abraham Lincoln. Though this entire section is devoted to the life and works of

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<sup>48</sup> For more on this fascinating phenomenon, see Gabor S. Boritt, Mark E. Neely, Jr., and Harold Holzer’s article, “The European Image of Abraham Lincoln,” in *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 21, No. 2/3, Summer-Autumn, which examines the popularity of purpose of widely circulated images of Lincoln.

<sup>49</sup> Napoleon III managed to voice disapproval of this project by printing a denouncement of the campaign’s lack of proper bureaucratic sales permits.



Lincoln, the title indicates that this biography is framed from an explicitly European angle. Traipsing through Lincoln's youth and rise to power, and pausing briefly at his leadership during the war, Gastineau is clearly more interested in the President's assassination. After dedicating a proportionally large number of pages to the scene of Lincoln's death, Gastineau describes, in great detail, the immediate French response to the news, citing newspapers and speeches that demonstrate French compassion for and solidarity with the mourning United States. Gastineau describes a joint journalistic response on the part of *Le Temps*, *L'Opinion Nationale*, *l'Avenir National*, and *Le Siècle*, in the form of a letter sent to President Johnson declaring: "Abraham Lincoln sera regretté comme il était admiré par la démocratie française" (Gastineau 242). According to Gastineau, a similar response was issued to a democratic youth group in France:

Nous sommes concitoyens de John Brown, d'Abraham Lincoln, de Seward. A nous jeunes à qui l'avenir appartient il faudra de grandes énergies pour fonder une vraie démocratie. Nous porterons nos regards de l'autre côté de l'Océan pour apprendre comment un peuple qui a su se faire libre sait conserver sa liberté. (Gastineau 243)

Both of these proclamations of sympathy for the United States are pervaded by a passive criticism of the fall of French democracy, once again hinting at the complicated relationship between the two nations, particularly at the death of America's president and after the reunification of the states. After having enumerated these condolences, Gastineau launches into a tirade against what he perceives as American ingratitude toward the French, who, in his argument, were the inspiration for American democracy. This sudden nationalistic line is in

apparent contrast to all that Gastineau has declared previously concerning the *génies de la liberté* who bear no nationality.<sup>50</sup> Gastineau closes his chapter with the following declaration:

Que les Etats-Unis se débarrassent de leur égoïsme politique, de leur fanatisme chrétien, de leur fureur mercantile et conquérante; qu'ils se rappellent que la Révolution française a été la vraie conquérante, car elle a émancipé l'esprit humain, brisé les fers des esclaves blancs et noirs, et créé la seule religion politique de ce monde, celle qui relie tous les membres de la grande famille humaine sous les faisceaux de la justice et de la liberté! (Gastineau 252)

Gastineau's own fanaticism about the French Revolution profoundly affecting his interpretation of Lincoln's life and death, this brief and early Lincoln biography demonstrates several similar biographical principles to the more comprehensive Lincoln biographies later published in France. A primary point of interest in these biographies is the portrayed universality of Lincoln, often including the author's relationship to his subject, the contemplation of the image of Lincoln, and what insight into his character might be gleaned through a physiognomic study of his appearance.

A popular Lincoln biography published in 1865, Achille Arnaud's *Abraham Lincoln: sa naissance, sa vie, sa mort*, published with Charlieu Frères in Paris, is, like the Lincoln Mourning Medal, dedicated to "Madame Abraham Lincoln." The biography also includes a sketched image of the medal, suggesting that the publication of the text may have coincided with the medal's inception or presentation. Published with Georges Bridel in Lausanne the same year, Félix

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<sup>50</sup> Gastineau argues at length earlier in the text that Shakespeare belongs to the whole world, and not just to England. Though it would seem, according to his argument, that Shakespeare may be more French than universal.

Bungener's *Lincoln: sa vie, son œuvre et sa mort*, a similar text, focuses more comprehensively on Lincoln's wartime leadership. The only French Lincoln biographer to claim direct contact with the president himself, Alphonse Jouault's *Abraham Lincoln: sa jeunesse et sa vie politique; histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis*, a work the author claims to have begun mere moments after Lincoln's assassination but published with Hachette ten years later, in 1875, is a highly anecdotal presentation of Lincoln's youth and political ascent. In each of these three biographies, Lincoln's physical presence plays a large role in the biographer's depiction of his life. Lincoln's physicality, whether presented as fiercely dominant or strangely distorted, is often held in direct comparison with his emotional constitution.

Perhaps the most striking example of this physical emphasis is Arnaud's Lincoln biography, which features several drawings throughout the text, often depicting Lincoln engaged in manual labor. While Arnaud does not, like Dubroca and Avallon, set aside an explicitly separate verbal "portrait" of Lincoln, it is clear from the outset that the reader is encouraged to view Lincoln as an emphatically corporal being. Arnaud praises Lincoln's physical constitution, saying that his pioneer upbringing is to thank for his mental as well as physical strength. According to Arnaud, Lincoln would have paid dearly in "la virilité de son énergie morale" (Arnaud 4) if he had received "l'éducation de nos collègues français, sous une discipline faite pour annihiler sa nature physique" (Arnaud 4). Statements such as this coupled with images of Lincoln as a timber-rafter, in full rowing stance with muscles bulging, and Lincoln as a rail-splitter, arms raised and about

to take down a large tree. Arnaud's emphasis, and the images' emphasis, on Lincoln's physicality suggest a near deification of the president, endowed with similar superhuman strengths to those of Louverture, though using his powers nobly. Lincoln's body serves as the perfect vessel through which the principles of democracy can be reflected. After the assassination, even as Lincoln lies dead, Arnaud assures his reader: "les traits de M. Lincoln ont conservé leur expression naturelle de douceur et de placidité, et la décoloration produite par les blessures était loin de le défigurer" (Arnaud 90). There is, however, no accompanying image for this scene, or any scene corresponding to the assassination, Arnaud's biography preferring to emphasize the vivacity and virility of its subject.

Bungener's Lincoln biography, though its original printing was not accompanied by any visual depiction, relies upon language that equally emphasizes the physical appearance of its subject. This visualization, though not nearly as virile as that of Arnaud, is inextricably linked to Bungener's depiction of Lincoln's character. Like Arnaud's, this text begins with Lincoln's childhood and ends with his death. Bungener, however, does not dwell on the president's youth, instead choosing to introduce his subject by painting three scenes that are meant to represent Lincoln's life in different stages. To this end, Bungener chooses three events that took place over the course of three years: the announcement of his candidacy, in which he is unnamed and represented solely by two fence-rails; his appearance in a Sunday school, in which he names himself to the children; and, finally, the scene in which he is named President of the United States. These three scenes, laden with symbolism, reflect a pristine, almost holy, image

of Lincoln. The physical description of Lincoln as he enters the Sunday school reflects such a textual reverence, and hints at an imperfect body rendered perfect by his interior qualities: “Un homme de grande taille, d’une figure, non pas belle, mais remarquablement intelligente, ouverte, et, quoique rude, bonne et douce” (Bungener 6).

Jouault’s description of Lincoln also places an emphasis on the divide between his physical appearance and his character. Though the only of the biographers who claims to have actually seen Lincoln in person, Jouault invites the reader to contemplate the portrait provided at the title page, in lieu of articulating his own first-hand description:

Etudiez le portrait de Lincoln. Les pommettes sont saillantes; les lèvres s’étendent sur une ligne droite d’un côté de la barbe à l’autre, arrêtées brusquement par deux sillons profonds creusés trop près des oreilles; le nez se projette de la face avec un air inquiet, comme s’il flairait quelque chose dans l’air: tout cela est mal façonné, mais cela n’est pas tout l’homme. Cette enveloppe grossière servait de gaine à une âme merveilleuse de grandeur et de beauté morale. Sur le front tout sillonné de rides, se lisaient les pensées et les soucis de l’homme d’Etat. (Jouault 2-4)

The grotesque physical features initially described are thus lent a certain amount of respectability, solely in that they represent the strength of Lincoln’s character. Jouault’s Lincoln is rendered even more endearing by his lack of confidence in his political abilities, trusting only in what he knows of his own physicality. When initially presented with the idea that he might enter legal practice, Lincoln declares: “Moi, devenir homme de loi, avocat! Mais je songe à me faire forgeron; j’ai de bons bras dont je suis sûr, et je doute fort de mon éloquence” (Jouault 51-52).

Like Bungener, Jouault presents his reader with three scenes that stand out in a visual manner: the three times that the biographer met his subject in person. The first, Lincoln's second inauguration, is marked by the arrival of Lincoln on the platform:

L'allure était lourde, nonchalante, irrégulière; le corps long, maigre; plus de six pieds, des épaules voûtées, de grands bras de batelier, de grandes mains de charpentier, des mains extraordinaires, mais qui n'avaient pourtant rien de disproportionné si on les comparait à ses pieds. (Jouault 3)

Lincoln's awkward physicality, it seems, only adds to the profundity of the moment. The author is astounded, and reverent, at the sight of "ce grand homme étrange auquel le peuple américain avait eu le bonheur de confier ses destinées" (Jouault 3).

Jouault briefly describes having seen Lincoln at a ball and banquet, before mentioning his last Lincoln sighting, writing that it was: "la dernière pour le monde comme pour moi, au petit théâtre Ford" (Jouault 7-8). A direct eyewitness to the president's assassination, the biographer has earned an additional token of biographical respectability: the first-hand account. Launching into his description of the events of the assassination, Jouault declares, "Quel spectacle dans cette loge!" (Jouault 8-9), emphasizing the theatricality of the moment. Interestingly, after his brief description of these three first-hand accounts of Lincoln, Jouault does not figure into his biography, perhaps wanting to avoid the problem of bias as described by Parke. Jouault relies heavily upon other respected and well-known texts on the subject of Lincoln and the U.S. Civil War, referencing authors such as Adolphe de Chambrun, Ernest Duvergier de

Hauranne, and Edward Lee Childe. Playing into the nineteenth-century's "universal trust in documents," again as described by Cockshut, Jouault thus bolsters a sense of legitimacy in his work.

Bungener's Lincoln biography, though not as thoroughly steeped in citations as that of Jouault, relies heavily on an article describing Lincoln's life that was published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* in May of 1865, lifting direct citations with the disclaimer: "Laissons parler un témoin" (Bungener 95). These moments of deference to "témoignage" allow Bungener's narrative to be enhanced with a much more flowery and detailed description of the event in question without being suspected of leaning too far into the realm of aesthetic biography.<sup>51</sup> For instance, as Lincoln meets with an abolitionist, the scene is described with a literary flourish and visual precision that might undermine the biographical representation of a non-witness: "sur le rectangle lumineux de sa fenêtre, traversée par un flot de soleil, son profil se détachait en noir" (Bungener 96).

These authors' insistence upon the documentary validity of their biographies both highlights the use of this biographical principle and illustrates the depth of French textual and visual coverage of the life and death of Abraham Lincoln. The profound response, in the presentation of the Lincoln Mourning Medal as in the biographies that followed his death, shares a common discourse in the attempt to establish the universality of Lincoln's importance. While some

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<sup>51</sup> "Aesthetic biography," as described by Michael Benton, is a biography that concerns itself more with its style of narrative than with its documentary support: "Some texts will reflect an emphasis upon documentary information about a life, others upon the narrative shape that gives coherence to a life" (Benton 45).

texts allow Lincoln to stand as the ultimate representation of America, others cross national boundaries and seek to prove his universal relevance. Arnaud's biography combines the two, describing both what is typically American about Lincoln and what Europe should find worthy of respect in his life and character. According to Arnaud, the appeal of Lincoln stretches down to the most basic level of humanity:

Pour étudier et écrire l'histoire de César, il faut être César lui-même ou avoir le génie de Plutarque; pour comprendre et raconter la vie d'Abraham Lincoln, il faut simplement sentir le bien et l'aimer. (Arnaud 8)

Arnaud, negating the necessity for any documentary evidence, clearly aligns himself with the aesthetic biography, concerning itself more with narrative than with proof. Arnaud also implies that Lincoln represents something so universal, and so pure, that it may be understood and learned even across national boundaries, escaping the pitfalls of generic travel writing. He declares:

Je n'ai qu'une ambition, celle de faire estimer et admirer par les autres, comme je l'estime et l'admire moi-même, le grand homme que tous, même ses ennemis, appelaient "l'honnête." (Arnaud 8)

Thus, Abraham Lincoln is presented by Arnaud as not only the symbol of America or of democracy but as the universal symbol of honesty and goodness.

Bungener and Jouault, though both emphasizing Lincoln's universal appeal, concentrate more on his image as an American. Bungener takes the role of cultural mediator between his subject and his readers, often explaining that something that may seem odd to Europeans is quite normal for Americans. His focus on Lincoln's pervasive importance seems to be motivated primarily by religion. The final line of his biography is: "le Dieu de Lincoln était, ne l'oublions



pas, le Dieu de l'Évangile" (Bungener 140), adopting a tone similar to the universal nationality described by Gastineau, the great man who belongs, not to his nation, but to all of history and humanity.

The biographical legacies of these two men thus demonstrate similar tendencies in the connection and correspondence to the caricatured images that their biographers seek to convey using standard nineteenth-century principles of both physiognomy and biography. In the propagandist biographies of Toussaint Louverture, Dubroca and Avallon both insist upon a visual conception that does not match the character described by their texts. A man of tremendous strength, but of average size, is described to establish a discomfort in the reader's conceptualization of the biographical subject. To the contrary, Lincoln's biographers seek to closely align his physical image with his character. Whether depicted as a physical powerhouse, as in Arnaud's text, or as a face marked with years of internal turmoil, as in Bungener's, the author establishes a strong connection between the physical Lincoln and his character, thus placing him comfortably within the distinguishing principles of physiognomy.

The inner conflicts described in both figures, whether they play out on their physical presences or hide beneath a cool surface, feed into the nineteenth-century biography consumer's appetite for a conflicted hero, or, in the case of Louverture, anti-hero. Placing these individuals at the center of major national conflicts, the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, makes the events much simpler to explain and process than concurrent pamphlets or histories. To accomplish their respective ends, the vilification of Toussaint Louverture and the

promotion of democracy, these texts use the genre of biography as determined by the public's appetite. The reader is encouraged to explore the events through a single individual, and, most importantly, to witness the events by contemplating the physical images of two men.

## CHAPTER 4

### EYEWITNESS TRAVEL NARRATIVES

The multiple writings of French musician and author Oscar Comettant that took America for their subject were all based primarily on his lone three-year trip to the United States a decade before the Civil War, and ultimately led to his reputation as an authority on Civil War America. His one account, this one experience of eyewitness proximity, was able to fuel the marketing of his text, in different genres and media, for ten years. Similar versions of the same expedition were published as: *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis: étude des mœurs et coutumes américaines* (1857), *Le nouveau monde: scènes de la vie américaine* (1861), *L'Amérique telle qu'elle est: Voyage anecdotique de Marcel Bonneau dans le nord et le sud des Etats-Unis* (1864), and *Voyage pittoresque et anecdotique dans le nord et le sud des Etats-Unis d'Amérique* (1866). Henri Herz's *Mes voyages en Amérique* was published in 1866, the same year as Comettant's last American text and one year after the end of the American Civil War. Eventually, Comettant's words even found their way into the work of his friend, travel companion, and musical protégé, the pianist Henri Herz, whose own account of American travel was published in 1866. The evolution of Comettant's work, along with that of Herz, demonstrates the ultimate tension between the French publishing machine meant to scratch the itch of Civil War curiosity and the

influence of censorship under the Second Empire.<sup>52</sup> In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Oscar Comettant and Henri Herz's roles as eyewitnesses to America resulted in the publishing and republishing of their travel narratives as legitimate sources of information on the American Civil War. While the marketing around the two authors' works focused on the fact that they were produced by men who had traveled extensively in the United States, the texts themselves present a different perspective.

Both Comettant and Herz were particularly fascinated with social and racial distinctions in the young American nation, and devote large sections of their narratives to exploring the ways in which these distinctions were visible and invisible. In their works, the lines between what can and what cannot be seen in a consideration of the plethora of social identities coexisting in the United States are the same tenuous lines that divide Civil War America. The America of Comettant and Herz, a veritable melting pot of perceptible and imperceptible social distinctions, is a land that exists in a never-ending struggle of self-definition. Though creating an atmosphere of turmoil, this constant struggle of identities also allows for personal redefinition, a theme that is prevalent in the works of Comettant and Herz, both of whom faced social struggles under the Second Empire. For both men; Comettant, a Republican who self-exiled after Napoleon III's coup, and Herz, whose Jewish identity impeded his success in the right French musical circles; the navigation of these invisible boundaries in

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<sup>52</sup> As Eileen S. DeMarco argues in *Reading and Riding: Hachette's Railroad Bookstore Network in Nineteenth-Century France*, "For the Second Empire, promoting commercial expansion was more important than enforcing the letter of the law on book trade regulations" (118).

America was a manner in which to come to terms with the shifting cultural and political currents in France.

Many scholars of the genre have written that travel narrative often adopts the style and convention of other genres, and must be analyzed with careful consideration of its full textual, social, and historical milieu.<sup>53</sup> As Jennifer Speake writes in the introduction to her *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopedia*, modern travel narrative is a direct descendant of epic poetry, and often cannot escape the fictional and literary qualities of its predecessor:

... travelers who write about actual journeys they have undertaken are often in some way influenced by that fictitious writing, and indeed the boundaries between fact and fiction in what we shall call the genre of travel writing are often hard to discern. Travelers write about what they see and their perceptions are shaped by the cultural context from which they come and by all that they have read and experienced in that culture. (Speake xi)

As Speake points out, the analysis of travel narrative is rewarding in that it can offer multiple interpretations, approached through any one of the many genres and cultural perspectives encompassed therein. However, travel narrative must be analyzed carefully, whether being mined primarily for its literary or historical content, because the mingling of “imagination and experience” (Youngs 2) are at the heart of the genre.

Likewise, Edward Said’s understanding and interpretation of the multiple levels of creation and analysis of writing about other cultures proves that the

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<sup>53</sup> In *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces*, Tim Youngs writes that travel narrative is “a literary form that draws on the conventions of other literary genres” (Youngs 3), describing the stylistic tendencies of varying travel narratives as a question of authorial intent, more likely to differ because of their intended audience than because of the experience of the author.

ways in which we imagine the other are equally multifaceted, whether the *other* is taking the form of a culture, a person, or a geography. Each piece of cultural understanding is built upon a broad and complicated network of representations formed by our own experiences, but on a collectivity of culturally constructed representations that preceded our own experiences. In the case of French literature on the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, these conceptions become even further complicated by the frameworks of popular publishing conventions and, moreover, by the requirements of propaganda and censorship set forth by two Napoleons during the First and Second Empires. Furthermore, the topical nature of the texts' subject matter places them specifically in an historical context from which they are eternally inextricable. These were works meant to appeal to a very specific public during very specific moments in French history, and thus can often be more closely aligned with popular fiction than with literary fiction.

### **Laujon and Tocqueville**

Two of the most widely circulated travel narratives to the Saint-Domingue and the United States in the periods surrounding the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War were A.P.M. Laujon's *Précis historique de la dernière expedition à Saint-Domingue*, and Tocqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique*. Despite the fact that the initial publications of these two texts are only separated by twenty-five years, the circumstances surrounding their publications could not be any more different. The first, Laujon's 1805 account of his earlier journey

throughout Haiti during wartime, is a Napoleonic piece of propaganda encouraging further intervention in Haitian affairs. Tocqueville's 1835 work, to the contrary, was published under the Second Republic, and benefitted from a lack of censorship. While Laujon was writing with the Emperor in mind, Tocqueville was writing with the French public in mind. The distinctions between these two works provide us with a wonderful point of comparison, and their relatively close dates of publication afford an understanding of how quickly French attitudes toward the Americas were changing as France itself moved from one regime to the next. Furthermore, the similarities between the two works highlight the popular insistence upon visualizing these American conflicts, and the status of the author as eyewitness.

*Précis historique de la dernière expédition à Saint-Domingue*, written during the Haitian Revolution but published in 1805, is addressed by A.P.M. Laujon to the Emperor Napoleon. Laujon starts his testimony by declaring that, while he has read and heard many accounts that were written in French journals about the war in Saint-Domingue, he feels that the nation would greatly benefit from the perspective of a "témoin oculaire" (Laujon xi) of these events that are so important to France. Laujon proceeds to launch, in great detail, into the landscapes, the battle style of the enemy, the climate "insupportable aux européens" (Laujon 17), all to the end of providing the Emperor with some hope of victory. After detailing what he has seen, thus giving his testimony, Laujon goes on to explicitly make his memory exemplary. He writes that most of the social and military actions that the French thought would be the most simple

turned out to be the most difficult, due to a lack of understanding of the island and its people. To this end, he painstakingly includes a glossary in his volume, outlining the terms necessary to survival and warfare during the rebellion. Though the rebels are violent and uncivilized, he writes, they will be easily defeated if the French strategically position three major ports and centers of commerce on the island, and slowly push military forces into the mountains, where the *marrons*<sup>54</sup> have their bases. In essence, he offers his eyewitness testimony to serve as a lesson for the future.

Likewise, the most popular nineteenth-century French text on the United States, Alexis de Tocqueville's *De la Démocratie en Amérique*, published as two volumes in 1835 and 1840, presents itself as a text of exemplary witnessing. Having traveled extensively in the Americas, Tocqueville presents himself as capable in the prediction as he is in the description of the state of affairs. Many of the travel writers who went to America during the Civil War, including Oscar Comettant and Henri Herz, did so in an attempt to understand why Tocqueville's prediction against American Civil War had failed, and to set the record straight in an understanding of the once-again reforming Americas. Pertaining to Haitian Revolution, he writes, "In the West Indies, it is the white race that seems destined to succumb; on the continent, the black race" (343). In contrast to the narrative of Laujon, his witnessing presents itself as exemplary for the purposes of modeling, and not of conquest. Tocqueville painstakingly outlines the branches of American

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<sup>54</sup> *Marrons* were slaves who escaped and formed functioning communities in remote mountain regions, widely feared by plantation owners and imperial forces for their highly developed combative skills.



government, describing American cultural practices, as well as the institution of slavery in the South. The creation, reception, and success of the writings of both Laujon and Tocqueville are thus centered on their authors' positions as eyewitnesses. Though the authors use this status to different ends, the texts' emphases are similarly constructed around the transmission of factual information, by literary means, from eyewitness to reader.

### **The American Races**

In the works of Comettant and Herz, the spectacular dimension of the act of witnessing in America, and relayed to the public in France, was the arbitrary division of social lines. For both authors, the social stakes behind such social divisions were only thinly veiled by the physical appearances of the individual. However, each author presents a unique perspective on the issue of race. For Comettant, social lines in America are clear enough to divide the country geographically into three separate regions defined by the races that constitute them: North, South, and West. For Herz, the concept of American social standing is so fluid that the possibility of redefining oneself, of transgressing any of the arbitrary racial lines, looms ever-present.

The works of both authors show a particular focus on the significance of social and racial identity in the general construction of American identity, not only in the discussion of slavery and abolition, but in distinguishing racial differences between regional and cultural groups. In this sense, race in the works of Comettant and Herz functions in the broad terms set forth by Etienne Balibar and

Immanuel Maurice Wallerstein. In *Race, Nation, Class*, Balibar and Wallerstein explore the evolution of racism(s) as mutable lines responding in multiple ways to a given set of intellectual and political circumstances. In their analyses, Balibar and Wallerstein present the interconnectedness of the concepts of race, nation and class, particularly as they were defined in the context of the nineteenth century. As Balibar and Wallerstein demonstrate, the nineteenth century was a crucial and deciding moment in the history of the conception of race, particularly in Europe, where scientific discovery drove not only the discovery of new peoples and cultures, but the perceived and desired ability to scientifically and categorically classify the new. According to Balibar, racism and nationalism are particularly linked, as “the organization of nationalism into individual political movements inevitably has racism underlying it” (Balibar 37). Likewise, the construction of national identity in the nineteenth century was often inextricably linked to the construction of racial identity. As nations were built and challenged in the French Atlantic world, the races that peopled them were defined and redefined.

As the preeminent scholar of race in the Atlantic, John Garrigus, writes in *Assumed Identities*, as much as one attempts to stake a claim on a succinct definition of race, one still contends with its plural connotations and implications, both past and present. In Garrigus’ edited volume, Franklin W. Knight points out that the *New Columbia Encyclopedia* proposes a rather comprehensive definition of race, including the idea that race is essentially, “One of the group of populations constituting humanity,” and that it is “inappropriate when applied to

national, religious, geographic, linguistic, or ethnic groups, nor can the physical appearances associated with race be equated with mental characteristics, such as intelligence, personality, or character” (Cited in Garrigus 4). However, in much of the nineteenth century and most certainly in the works of Oscar Comettant, “race” as much refers to nationality or social caste as it does to skin color, in the large nineteenth-century sense of the word.

### **Oscar Comettant**

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Oscar Comettant had established himself as a well-known composer, critic and author. He was well traveled, and spent a good deal of time in South America when he was young, eventually settling in Paris as the music critic for the newspaper, *Le Siècle*, a position that he held for most of his life.<sup>55</sup> *Le Siècle*, a daily paper launched in 1836 in support of the reigning constitutional monarchy of Louis-Philippe, changed course with the Revolution of 1848, declaring itself Republican under the start of the Second Republic. The Republicanism of the *Siècle* was not as fickle as its monarchism, as the paper weathered the coup of 1851 as France entered into the Second Empire. A staunch Republican, Comettant set sail for America only a few months after Napoleon III dissolved the Republic and stayed in the States until 1855. While his mission may have been a convenient way for a Republican to escape Empire, the act of going to explore America with the intention of publishing one’s

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<sup>55</sup> Most of the available biographical information on Oscar Comettant can be found in “Oscar Comettant raconté par son fils Lucien,” on the Comettant family genealogy website, *Comettant.com*.

opinions was still in fashion from the earlier publications of successful works from authors such as Tocqueville and Beaumont.<sup>56</sup>

In 1857, two years after Comettant's return to France, he published a collection of musings on American life, *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*, with the large corporate publishing house Pagnerre, a reputable publisher of republican pamphlets and almanacs, particularly concerning the United States and the Americas (Haynes 93).<sup>57</sup> Comettant, while writing music reviews for the *Siècle*, had also published stories in the form of serially published feuilletons. A popular writing career already established, Comettant's name was large enough, and his work popular enough, to be issued in a second edition of *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis* the next year, in 1858, though the volume remained largely unchanged, with hardly any noticeable revisions or corrections.

*Trois ans aux Etats-Unis* is divided thematically, with chapter headings indicating topics such as, "Business in America," "The Fine Arts in America," and "Religion in America," though they often stray from their proposed subject and into more general observation. Over the course of the thematically divided segments, the reader is able to follow the trajectory of Comettant's real-life journey from North to South (New York- Baltimore-DC-Charleston-New Orleans).

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<sup>56</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, the increasing tension between North and South also called for a reevaluation of American culture in the minds of many Europeans, particularly those who, like Comettant, were devoted to the ideas and principles of democracy.

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed book history of the nineteenth century in France, see Christine Haynes' *Lost Illusions: the Politics of Publishing in Nineteenth Century France*. Haynes presents the reputations and histories of several major French publishing houses of the nineteenth century.

In the final chapter, entitled, “General Appearance of the Southern States,” Comettant describes a culture different enough from its neighbors to warrant a separate analysis, thus presenting a divided America, and proceeding to explain these differences, manifested in cultural practices and geographical choices, in terms of race:

On peut diviser en trois races parfaitement caractérisées les hommes qui peuplent aujourd’hui le vaste territoire de la république américaine. Ces trois races sont: le *Westman* (l’homme de l’Ouest), le Yankee proprement dit, et le Virginien, ou l’homme du Sud. Chacune de ces trois races a son esprit particulier, sa manière d’être que tendent à conserver les lois propres à régir chaque Etat, entièrement indépendant, comme on sait, du gouvernement général de l’Union. (Comettant 315)

Comettant’s division of the diverse people of the vast territory of the United States into categorical racially defined groups demonstrates the common principles of racism in nineteenth-century France as outlined by Balibar and Wallerstein. In creating these distinctions, Comettant indicates, however jokingly, a desire to determine the Americans’ race in order to understand their behaviors.<sup>58</sup> As we will note in the descriptions that follow, racial identity for Comettant is based more upon observed behaviors than heredity, and he follows

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<sup>58</sup> As Balibar and Wallerstein demonstrate, the nineteenth century was a crucial and deciding moment in the history of the conception of race, particularly in Europe, where scientific discovery drove not only the discovery of new peoples and cultures, but the perceived and desired ability to scientifically and categorically classify the new. According to Balibar, racism and nationalism are particularly linked, as “the organization of nationalism into individual political movements inevitably has racism underlying it” (Balibar 37). Likewise, the construction of national identity in the nineteenth century was often inextricably linked to the construction of racial identity. As nations were built and challenged in the French Atlantic world, the races that peopled them were defined and redefined.

each racial characterization with a personally observed anecdote, emphasizing his position as eyewitness to the distinctions between the three.

The Westman, according to Comettant, is the most unruly of the three American races, “rude, indépendant quelquefois jusqu’à l’incivilité” (Comettant 315), and his determination as “Westman” has more to do with his geographic location than any other factor. The shared heritage of the Westman is due to “les déshérités de toute la terre qui sont venus demander à l’Amérique le pain et la liberté” (Comettant 316), a veritable melting pot of any and all disenfranchised immigrants. It for this reason that the Westman is entirely lacking in manners, and his culture is, in essence, based on a lack of culture. These “veritables enfants de la nature” have nothing to guide them “que des lois innees de la conscience et les raisons de l’interet” (Comettant 317). The Westman is thus depicted in animalistic terms, and most of Comettant’s descriptions of him are based on comparisons of this wild man, “moitié cheval, moitié crocodile,” (Comettant 317) to beasts. Though Comettant is not making a claim as to the direct heritage of the Westman, it is clear that his environment and experience have shaped him more profoundly than his lineage. The Westman came to America either to escape a bad political situation or to build upon the promise of American liberty, and his racial identity, as determined by Comettant, is thus one that has broken from its past in order to revert to a sort of natural state, a reversion that deepens the further West he goes.

To the contrary, the Yankee's behaviors and appearances are based entirely on his Puritan heritage. Upon beginning his description of the Yankee, Comettant launches into a brief recounting of Puritan history:

Le *Yankee* forme avec le *Westman* un contraste frappant. Il a conservé de ses ascendants un certain vernis d'aristocratie et la rigidité des mœurs puritaines. Chassés de la Grande-Bretagne par les persécutions de Jacques Ier, les puritains abandonnèrent leur patrie pour venir en Amérique jouir de la liberté de conscience. (Comettant 318-319)

Comettant goes on to describe the Yankee as intolerably severe, obsessed with work and money to the detriment of himself and others, and the total enemy of all of the fine arts. The Yankee is thus explained and qualified by his relationship to his previous British identity, and by his desire to retain certain aspects of this history. The Yankee, arriving in New England, built a new society to his pleasing that was, in the words of Comettant, nothing more than a "monastère intolérable" (318). Unlike the Westman, he did not continue pushing the American frontier in search of something new. The Yankee was content to build his culture as an offshoot of a rejected British sect. In Comettant's description, the Yankee differs most drastically from the Westman in that his identity is more firmly based upon his past than upon his future.

The identity of the Virginian, in contrast to that of the Westman and to that of the Yankee, is based firmly in his present. Comettant's favorite American, the Virginian lives a life of rich culture and pleasure:

Il a toutes les qualités extérieures et beaucoup des qualités foncières qui manquent au Yankee. Dans bien des cases il est l'antipode de ce dernier. Ainsi le Yankee est actif jusqu'à l'excès, le Virginien se complait dans le doux *far niente*. Le Yankee est sobre de ses paroles et avare de ses écus; le Virginien est causeur et dépensier jusqu'à la prodigalité... Le Yankee se

montre l'ennemi de tous les plaisirs... le Virginien ne vit que pour les fêtes, le spectacle, le jeu et la galanterie. (Comettant 320)

The Virginian is thus divorced from any sense of origin or destination. While the Westman and Yankee are defined largely by the reasons for which they came to America, whether for what they were seeking to find or what they were seeking to escape, the Virginian has firm roots in his own locale. Living primarily for food and entertainment, the Virginian represents the ultimate in American liberties for Comettant: he has all of the inclinations toward art and culture of a Frenchman, but without the restrictive reigning Empire. It's no wonder that Comettant, himself a musician and having spent much of a previous chapter decrying America for its bland boiled vegetables and lack of support for the fine arts, seems to have found his cultural comfort zone in the South.<sup>59</sup>

Comettant, however, finds one major problem in the South: the issue of slavery, explicitly condemning the institution, writing, "Cela est monstrueux; cela répugne à tous les sentiments avouables; cela est contraire à la justice, à la raison, à la religion" (Comettant 323). Though acknowledging the difficulties of abolishing slavery in a society that is utterly dependent on slave labor, he

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<sup>59</sup> As described in Chapter 1, the declaration of alliance with the South was not groundbreaking in the grand scheme of French opinions of Civil War-era America. Other writers had already described cultural similarities between France and the South, often, like Comettant, holding New Orleans as the last bastion of culture and society in the States. In 1862, for example, Alfred Mercier's *Du Panlatinisme*, a pamphlet designed to encourage an alliance between France and the Confederacy, proposed a "scientific" argument in which people inhabiting the southern United States were, like the French, descendants of a Latin race; while those from the northern United States were, like the British, primarily of Anglo-Saxon descent.



declares that the complete and total abolition of slavery in the United States is the only reasonable solution in the South, and that the South is even aware of its unsustainable system in the global currents of liberty and democracy. He even describes the practice of racial segregation in the North as a flagrant disregard of the American principle of equality:

Les nègres prétendus libres ont leurs rues à eux, et quelles rues! Ils ont leurs maisons, ou plutôt leurs chenils; ils ont leurs hôpitaux, ils ont leurs églises, quoiqu'il n'y ait qu'un seul Dieu pour tous; ils ont leurs *cars* de chemin de fer, sur lesquels est écrit en grosses lettres: *for colored people*, enfin, ils ont leurs cimetières, comme si les os jaunâtres des blancs dédaignent, par un orgueil posthume, de se mêler aux os beaucoup plus blancs des nègres après leur mort. (Comettant 67)

Comettant paints the institution of segregation with such contempt that one would think that he might find the institution of slavery with an equal amount of indignation. However, as he travels into the more culturally comfortable South, his attitude toward race relations in the States seems to change. By the time he reaches Charleston, Comettant writes that the actual state of the institution of slavery in the South has been greatly exaggerated by well-meaning abolitionists:

Les noirs, dans tout le sud des Etats-Unis, jouissent d'un certain confortable relatif. Ils sont bien nourris, suffisamment vêtus, suivant la saison, et ils travaillent certainement moins que la grande majorité des ouvriers, des commis, des employés de toutes sortes, des artistes et des écrivains qui demandent l'existence à leur labeur. (Comettant 326)

Comettant goes on to describe the life of the Southern slave as one of considerable cultural richness, describing dances, banjos and singing. Thus, Comettant presents a binary picture of the American South: the South itself barbarous in slavery but not really so barbarous, while the slave is enslaved but really not so unhappy. His shift from being utterly appalled at segregationist

practices in the North to being rather forgiving of the institution may be due more to the tight reins of Imperial censorship under Napoleon III than to a change of heart. Though war had not yet begun in the States, the Emperor's commercial and political interests in the South would certainly have precluded any author's desire to write a condemnation of the foundation of Southern society.

The book ends abruptly after this description of slavery in the South, with a conclusion that opens many questions about the role of Imperial, editorial, or self-imposed censorship in the creation and publication of *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*. Comettant closes his narrative with the following addendum:

Nous aurions pourtant encore bien des sujets à traiter que nous n'avons fait qu'effleurer en passant. Mais il faut savoir ne pas tout dire. La coquetterie de l'écrivain, comme celle de la femme, est de laisser deviner. Reste à savoir, en ce qui nous concerne, si nous n'aurions pas dû nous taire plus tôt. (Comettant 361)

Here, Comettant seems to be offering a mischievous wink at the Emperor and his censors, knowing that his explicit acknowledgment of not having said everything that there was to say would tip his reader off to the fact that certain parts of his work were either censored or self-censored. These words, written by a known Republican and immediately following a pardoning of the South, would certainly have been well understood by his readership at the time.

By 1861, Civil War had officially begun, and the cause of American abolition was fervently preached by all of the most famous French Republicans, including the self-exiled Victor Hugo.<sup>60</sup> French newspapers, including Comettant's *Siècle*, faithfully reported any war news that arrived from across the

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<sup>60</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Victor Hugo wrote an impassioned letter to the London press in 1859 calling for the pardon of abolitionist John Brown.

Atlantic, and anything purporting to provide the “latest” about America was flying off the shelves. In this first official year of the American Civil War, 1861, Oscar Comettant’s second book on America was published. *Le nouveau monde: scènes de la vie américaine* appeared from Pagnerre, the same publishing house as *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*, and, like Comettant’s previous text, is a series of vignettes on American life. However, *Le nouveau monde*’s approach is expressly fictional, as described by its preface, and is largely collected of stories that Comettant had already published in the form of *roman-feuilletons*. However fictional, the text was packaged with a promise to elucidate the American conflict, and certainly profited, at least superficially, from the wave of interest in American current events that the text itself does not describe.

Of the stories in the collection, most of which take place in South America and not the American South, the one that deals most particularly with the United States is entitled, “Entre deux rendez-vous.” “Entre deux rendez-vous” is the story of a young and disaffected Frenchman, Jules, who is invited to accompany his merchant friend to America in order to capitalize on the sale of French wines in New York. Jules has no interest in the journey, or in America itself, until he catches sight of a beautiful young woman boarding the same ship as his friend. Jules hops aboard in a fit of romance, spends two weeks trapped in his cabin with a terrible case of seasickness, and ultimately loses sight of his mystery woman as soon as they arrive in New York. Brokenhearted, he begins to wander the United States, heading first upwards to Niagara Falls, and then down through the South, where he finally finds his mystery woman in Charleston, South

Carolina. She is the daughter of a Colonel, and is more than eager to marry Jules and accompany him back to Paris with her approving father, who has always had the kindest adoration for France.

This story makes no reference at all to the conflict between the states, nor to the problem of slavery in the South, though it does perpetuate the idea presented by Comettant in *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*, that there is some sort of cultural alliance to be found between France and the South, and that this alliance may be suggestive of a fundamental, racial similarity. The theme of this story, the only one in the book that speaks directly to the difference between North and South, is particularly interesting in light of the preface that precedes the collection, which paints the entire collection as very pertinent to the conflict of the American Civil War, particularly due to Comettant's eyewitness proximity to the action. Written by Louis Jourdain, the editor in chief of *Le Siècle* at the time, the preface proclaims the timely publication of these collected stories as distinctly related to the Civil War, and particularly to the institution of slavery:

L'Amérique sollicite très vivement, à l'heure où nous sommes, l'attention de l'Europe. La forte race qui a constitué les Etats-Unis subit le châtement de la faute qu'elle commit le jour où elle fonda le magnifique édifice de sa démocratie en laissant subsister l'esclavage à la base du monument. L'Union américaine craque par son côté faible. Rien de ce qui est établi sur l'iniquité ne peut durer. L'esclavage doit disparaître du nouveau monde comme il a disparu du monde ancien. (Jourdain x)

According to Jourdain, these stories will offer the reader a more nuanced understanding of the conflict between the States and of the complicated American people as a whole, as well as affirm that slavery is an unsustainable and corrosive aspect of American life. While Jourdain speaks to the literary merit

of the stories in the collection, the real attraction seems to be that their author is an eyewitness to Civil War America:

Toutes les études, tous les travaux qui ont pour objet de nous peindre la situation morale, les habitudes, les traditions, les mœurs, les institutions de ce vaste continent ont donc une importance que nul ne peut méconnaître. Des relations de famille, l'attrait de l'inconnu entraînèrent de bonne heure Oscar Comettant en Amérique. Il y vécut de la vie honorable et laborieuse de l'artiste. Ses occupations le mirent en contact avec toutes les classes de la population, il parcourut ces immenses contrées du nord et du sud, de l'est à l'ouest, observant toutes choses en artiste et en philosophe. (Jourdain x)

In Jourdain's preface and thus in the presentation of *Le nouveau monde*, even six years after his return from the States, Comettant's work is still benefitting, at least in marketing, from its eyewitness proximity to the action on American soil. As far as the difference between the two works that Oscar Comettant has so far published on the subject of America, Jourdain declares:

Le volume que j'ai l'honneur de présenter aujourd'hui au public est, comme [*Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*], une peinture des mœurs américaines, mais cette fois ce n'est plus une série d'esquisses, de silhouettes dessinées sur un album de voyage, de traits originaux saisis d'après nature; ce sont des tableaux plus étudiés, composés avec soin et destinés à mettre en relief les caractères généraux des fractions très diverses qui forment la société américaine, c'est-à-dire l'être collectif le plus multiple, le plus complexe qui ait jamais existé. En un mot ce ne sont plus des scènes détachées et recueillies, groupées au hasard; ce sont des comédies, des drames où se meuvent toutes les passions, tous les intérêts, tous les travers, tous les ridicules, tous les vices et toutes les vertus de ces populations étranges que l'esclavage a plus ou moins gangrénées. (Jourdain x-xi)

The stories in the collection, which involve, for the most part, fictional events based on impressions that Comettant gathered from *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*, were thus marketed as the key to understanding the American conflict. According to their editor, these works mark the leap between Comettant's original non-

fiction travel narrative and a newly formed hybrid with stylistic characteristics of literary fiction, despite having maintained all of the culturally analytical integrity of their previous apparition.<sup>61</sup> The preface, declaring that this collection of stories will demonstrate to the reader the ways in which the Southern model of slavery is destroying the great nation of the United States, seems disconnected from the light tales of American travels and traditions that follow, which barely mention the institution of slavery in the South.

Eyewitness accounts of the Civil War continued to be in high demand in France, with a curiosity that waned as the war drug on for several years. However, French fascination with the Civil War resurfaced immediately upon the sinking of the *CSS Alabama* right off the coast of France itself. In June of 1864, the Confederate warship *CSS Alabama*, having successfully run the Union blockades meant to restrain international Confederate trade, was about to dock at the French port of Cherbourg to receive supplies and repairs when it was interrupted by the *USS Kearsarge*. Hundreds of French spectators gathered on the shore to watch as the two American ships engaged in warfare, an American Civil War battle fought in French waters. The event was an absolute sensation in the French press, and Edouard Manet even painted a scene from the battle.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Jourdain's description of this work is reminiscent of the modern-day creative nonfiction literary movement, as noted in Chapter 1. As Philip Gerard describes creative nonfiction, it is factual prose "infused with the stylistic devices, tropes, and rhetorical flourishes of the best fiction and the most lyrical of poetry" (Gerard, *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, 1).

<sup>62</sup> Manet, one of the first nineteenth-century artists to depict modern-life subjects, painted *The Battle of the Kearsarge and the Alabama* in 1864. His choice of this particular modern-life subject solidifies the prevalence of discourse on and representations of the American Civil War in France.

With French interest in the years-long war renewed by such a close encounter, a flourish of texts on the Civil War appeared, including another new work by Oscar Comettant.<sup>63</sup>

Comettant's *L'Amérique telle qu'elle est: Voyage anecdotique de Marcel Bonneau dans le Nord et le Sud des Etats-Unis* was published in 1864 by Achille Faure, a house well-known for publishing literary texts. Distinctly from *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*, by all initial appearances, *l'Amérique* is a work of fiction, the anecdotal journey of a non-existent man, the struggling painter Marcel Bonneau. In the story, James Clinton, a wealthy and suicidal Englishman living in Paris, commissions Bonneau to paint his final portrait while he awaits the finished construction of the tower from which he plans to leap. Bonneau attempts to change Clinton's mind by proclaiming that throwing himself off of the top of Niagara Falls in America would be a more suitably poetic demise. Inspired, Clinton offers Bonneau a hefty sum of money and a journey to America to help him accomplish his suicide mission, and Bonneau agrees, still hoping to change his suicidal friend's mind. After an arduous journey across the Atlantic, the two men catch sight of the coast of America, at which point Clinton is instantly cured of his death wish. Exuberant, the men plan a tour of America, traveling up to Niagara Falls, down through Baltimore and Washington, DC, and finally all the way down to the Deep South. In the South, as in Comettant's previous narratives, his protagonist finds a place of cultural comfort that doesn't exist

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<sup>63</sup> In *The American Enemy*, Philippe Roger analyzes the French response to the Battle of the Kearsarge and the Alabama, writing that the French press and public commented on the battle as though it were a popular sporting match (Roger 67-68).

elsewhere in America, again solidifying a cultural alliance between France and the American South.

The narrative and thematic similarities between *L'Amérique telle qu'elle est* and Comettant's previous texts continue to deepen, as Comettant combines the exact trajectory and general storyline of two men travelling across America (as seen in 1861's *Le nouveau monde*) with his own social observations from 1857's *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*. Furthermore, in *L'Amérique telle qu'elle est*, Comettant has taken all of this action and these observations and contextualized them in the timeframe of the Civil War. This time, his narrator is privy to several Civil War events, including the famous battle between the *USS Monitor* and the *CSS Merrimac*. Though these events do not figure prominently into the action of the story, and are merely mentioned in passing, they serve to contextualize the narrative, and certainly would have been of great interest to a French public that had just witnessed its first American naval battle of the Civil War. Despite the rapidly changing political climate evidenced by these wartime events, Comettant's original observations concerning race in the America's still stand, as his protagonist finds the same racial distinction between the Northerner and the Southerner that Comettant himself did in *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*:

Autant le Yankee pur-sang est froid, réservé, rapace, autant le Virginien est communicative, enthousiaste et généreux. Le Yankee pousse l'esprit de puritanisme jusqu'à se faire l'ennemi de tous les plaisirs, même les plus innocents; le Virginien, au contraire, les recherche tous, et sa vie, s'il le pouvait, ne serait qu'un long jour de fête...C'est dire assez que l'un est concentré, égoïste, l'autre ouvert et hospitalier. (Comettant 230)

Like Comettant himself, Bonneau can only reproach the Virginian for clinging to the institution of slavery, "une institution tellement en désaccord avec les qualités



naturelles de leur esprit et de leur cœur” (Comettant 230). However, he does come to the same conclusions as Comettant did eight years before, writing that the cruelty of Southern slavery has been exaggerated:

Le principe de l’esclavage est odieux, mais il ne faut pas refuser aux propriétaires d’esclaves tout sentiment humain. On a certainement beaucoup exagéré, nous ne saurions trop le répéter, la cruauté des maîtres envers les esclaves. De plus, on a prêté à ceux-ci des sentiments élevés qu’ils n’ont guère pour la plupart. Les écrits des négrophiles sont assurément fort louables dans leur but; mais il y a toujours un tort à exagérer les droits d’une bonne cause. (Commentant 288).

Comettant concedes to the respectable goal of abolitionist writers, whom he calls the “négrophiles,” yet declares that they have exaggerated their arguments pertaining to the general character of Southern slavery. Despite his ultimate condemnation of slavery, Comettant’s narrator ensures the reader that all of the South is not to be blamed for barbarianism, which is the exception instead of the rule.

In 1866, the year following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the publication of *L’Amérique telle qu’elle est*, the tale of Marcel Bonneau was redistributed in an updated version. The text’s new appearance was entitled, quite simply, *Voyage pittoresque et anecdotique dans le Nord et le Sud des Etats-Unis d’Amérique*. Published by Antoine Laplace, who had recently taken over the old Morizot publishing house, it was advertised principally among nonfiction books about travel. This new edition of the story of Marcel Bonneau includes only minor changes, most of which are indicated by the editor’s preface. In the preface, Laplace concedes that the work in question is not new, that it had

appeared in part the year before, lauding the original text for its style and, of course, its author's firsthand experience of his subject matter:

Le voyage pittoresque et anecdotique que nous présentons au Public n'est point un ouvrage entièrement nouveau; il avait déjà paru en partie en 1864 sous le même titre; et les descriptions vives et animées, le style plein d'humour, l'exactitude des détails que l'auteur avait étudiés *de visu* et qu'il avait, pour ainsi dire, photographiés, avaient fait accueillir cette publication avec la plus grande faveur. La presse fut unanime dans les éloges qu'elle décerna à l'écrivain dont la réputation littéraire était, au reste, déjà établie. (Laplace i)

Once again, as we saw in Jourdain's preface to *Le nouveau monde*, one of the most important factors in determining the worth of Comettant's text is that the author saw firsthand the details of his story, despite the fact that it had been ten years since Comettant had last set foot in America, and that he had not seen America once during the Civil War, nor did he purport to have witnessed firsthand any major event pertaining to the war. To Laplace, the new and revised edition of the *Voyage pittoresque* is necessary due to the end of the war, calling for a "remaniement complet" of the original work. Laplace writes that:

Mais de graves évènements survenus depuis cette époque; une scission violente s'était produite entre le Nord et le Sud des Etats-Unis; à la suite de batailles de géants dans lesquelles la victoire avait tour à tour favorisé les Fédéraux et les Confédérés, la paix avait enfin signée: il fallait donc pour une nouvelle édition d'un ouvrage sur ce pays un remaniement complet. M. Comettant s'est mis à l'œuvre; il a modifié toutes les parties relatives aux faits politiques; il a puisé dans ces souvenirs ou fait jaillir de sa brillante imagination plusieurs épisodes racontés avec cette gaieté et cette verve intarissable qui sont les principales qualités de son style; il a supprimé tout ce qui pouvait blesser, à quelque titre que ce fut, les susceptibilités les plus ombrageuses; il a enfin, pour ainsi dire, créé une œuvre entièrement nouvelle. (Laplace i-ii)

Laplace promises that Comettant "paye un juste tribut d'éloges au président Lincoln" (Laplace ii), a claim that certainly would have attracted some readers during the height of Lincoln mania. However, from *L'Amérique telle qu'elle est* to

the *Voyage pittoresque*, only a brief paragraph on the subject of Abraham Lincoln have been modified to include his assassination, and the only other mention to Lincoln in the entirety of the *Voyage pittoresque*, is in the post-scriptum chart of U.S. Presidents, which lists the death of Lincoln and the Presidency of his successor.

Apart from these small differences, and the addition of two extra chapters on the journey of Bonneau, the major transformation between the first and second appearance of the *Voyage* is the *pittoresque* part, the inclusion of printed images with the text. Laplace writes that the volume, to his opinion, “méritait les honneurs de l’illustration” (Laplace iii), a sign of the privilege associated with the act of including such additions at the time, and also indicating the sheer popularity of the initial publication of the book. The illustrations added to the book include several engravings of city scenes from the various places visited by Bonneau and Clinton in the narrative. The most noteworthy illustration included in the text is a scene of Lincoln meeting with delegates from the Comanche tribe, based on a brief anecdote in the narrative. In their article, “The European Image of Abraham Lincoln,” Gabor S. Boritt, Mark E. Neely and Harold Holzer specifically mention this illustration, both to point out its inaccuracy and to say that the lack of binding impressions, thread holes and traces of glue on most of the surviving copies suggest that the illustration may also have been distributed as a separate sheet for home display.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “The European Image of Abraham Lincoln,” in *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 21, No. 2/3, Summer-Autumn.

After the publication of 1865's *Voyage pittoresque*, Oscar Comettant's three-year journey to the United States finally came to an end, eleven years after his initial return to France. For the rest of his career, he would focus on writing about music and musicians, producing several works about different composers and musical styles from around the world. In looking at the traces of discourse that pervade Comettant's texts, from one to the next, and the ways in which these texts were being marketed to and consumed by the French public, one gets a sense of how the perpetuation of ideas about the Civil War, and about race and slavery in the United States, was a complicated process that hinged on the privileged status of the nineteenth-century eyewitness. Not having left a trace as to whether he had strong feelings either way regarding the continual remarketing and repackaging of his work, Comettant's texts on Civil War-era America leave behind a story that leads us through most of the major stages of French fascination with the Civil War, from the initial germs of Confederate dissent to the assassination of President Lincoln. As Comettant himself wrote at the end of 1857's *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis*, "Reste à savoir, en ce qui nous concerne, si nous n'aurions pas dû nous taire plus tôt" (Comettant 361).

### **Henri Herz**

In the same year as Comettant's last work on the United States, his friend, the celebrated pianist, Henri Herz, published the story of his own travels across America. Herz's 1866 *Mes Voyages en Amérique* is a text so similar in narrative and theme to the works of Oscar Comettant that Herz even cedes his narrative

voice to Comettant for several pages, directly citing Comettant's *Musique et Musiciens* in recounting an anecdote about one of his American performances. The circumstances of Herz's American journey are rather similar to those of Comettant, though Herz was performing his way down the East Coast, unlike Comettant, who did not perform publicly in the States. Much of Herz's commentary centers on the arts and conventions of musical performance in the States, though his description of America relies increasingly on his perceptions of race as he travels South.

Herz, Austrian by birth but Parisian by domicile, had, like Comettant, been developing his musical career in France throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. As a Jewish pianist, he was considered unsuitable for high-society performances, and settled for focusing his musical ambitions on the popular classes as a teacher and performer. Herz was often mocked in the musical press for his Jewish heritage; for instance, one newspaper article that joked that Herz, "swears by the staff of Moses and King Solomon's Ring that his concert will indisputably be the finest of all possible concerts."<sup>65</sup> Comettant, however, in his capacity as music critic for *Le Siècle*, only had the highest of praise for Herz's composition and performance.<sup>66</sup> It is possible, considering the dates of the two men's trips to the United States, that they may have traveled together for at least

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<sup>65</sup> As quoted by Benjamin Ivry in "Curly Locks and Pocket Watches of Henri Herz," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, November 14, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Oscar Comettant wrote a glowing review of a concert that Henri Herz gave in Paris, included in the 1857 *Revue de Gazette Musicale*, praising Herz's talent in composition, execution, and performance.

part of their American journeys, though neither is present in the other's narrative, aside from the aforementioned citation.

In his writing, Herz is generally unimpressed with Americans, citing their lack of culture, appreciation for the arts, terrible food, and aversion to wine. As was the case for Comettant, however, he finds the South to be an entirely different culture from that of the rest of the United States. Even before Herz crosses into Virginia, he anticipates a great contrast to his northern experience, and bases this contrast principally around the presence of the institution of slavery: "J'allais me trouver là dans un pays à esclaves, et une civilisation toute nouvelle allait s'offrir à mes yeux" (Herz 225). Compared to those of Comettant, Herz's interactions with slavery in the South are much more developed in the narrative, including several anecdotes that portray, like Comettant, the injustice of slavery with a rather lighthearted bent. All while writing that slavery is antiquated and that he sees no ground for such racial inequality in the South, throughout *Mes Voyages en Amérique*, Herz provides an interesting foil to his analysis of slavery through his own condescension toward his white working-class servant, Francois.

In several anecdotes, Herz describes Francois as a poseur, a man of lowly French origins continually trying to rise above his rightful status, writing that: "François avait de sa profession de domestique une haute idée... On le prenait pour un général étranger, et le drôle ne pensa jamais à désabuser personne à ce sujet." (Herz 231) Francois often takes the American misunderstanding of his social status to extremes while pretending to be Herz

while staying at a lowly boarding house, an exchange that is particularly embarrassing to Herz, who would never deign to stay in such quarters.

In a scene described comically by Herz, Francois masquerades as a French general while promising to take a young female slave back to France with him, declaring, “nous voguerons tous les deux vers la terre promise, où vous serez libre et où seul je resterai votre esclave” (Herz 232). Francois’ play at the slave presents a total reversal of the image of America as a land of equality and new ideas portrayed by Herz at the beginning of the text. While attempting to seduce the young woman, Francois paints an image of America as a backwards land of injustice, while Europe exists as the beacon of reason, the “terre promise.” However, Francois’ own ambitions of social ascent suggest a different version of the relationship between Europe and America, as he attempts to shed his lowly Old World status and adopt a loftier persona. Eventually, Francois decides to leave Herz’s service and begin his life anew in New Orleans. In this circumstance, America’s relative newness and lack of the established French social standards affords Francois the opportunity to attain his own sense of liberty.

As the humble poseur Francois feels most comfortable beginning his new life in the American South, Herz’s narrative suggests that the South is culturally similar to France, though without the reigning social strata. Like in Comettant’s works, the primary and most stark difference between the two cultures is the South’s upholding of the institution of slavery. In this, Herz writes, the South transgresses both nature and the fundamental American principle of equality:

Je n'ai jamais vu d'esclaves avant d'arriver à Charleston, et la vue de ces malheureux produisit en moi la plus pénible impression. Ce n'est pas qu'ils eussent l'air affligé et qu'ils fussent généralement maltraités ; leur physionomie, au contraire, indiquait plutôt la gaieté ou tout au moins l'indifférence, et matériellement on pouvait les considérer comme plus heureux que bon nombre d'Européens ; mais c'étaient des esclaves, et cette pensée, malgré moi, assombrissait tous les tableaux. L'homme placé en dehors de l'humanité, et possédé par l'homme au même titre que du vil bétail, me parut le comble de la monstruosité, surtout dans le pays de toutes les libertés. (Herz 238-239)

Herz, like Comettant, thus laments the principle of slavery more than its practice, finding the South to be a land of cultural richness, a wealth that spreads even to its slaves. Also like Comettant, the comfort that Herz feels in the South only increases as he moves downwards to Louisiana. Upon finally arriving in New Orleans, Herz has been away from France for so long that he almost believes himself at home for the sheer joy of discovering the similarities between the two:

Il faut avoir voyagé dans les contrées lointaines pour comprendre la douce et vive émotion qu'on éprouve devant tout ce qui rappelle le pays natal ou celui dans lequel on a laissé ses affections et que l'on considère comme sien. Je me croyais presque en France dans le quartier français de la Nouvelle-Orléans; et de fait ce quartier est comme une partie de la France que n'a pu engloutir le torrent, pourtant si envahissant, de la civilisation américaine. (Herz 276)

New Orleans, again portrayed as the threatened beacon of French civilization in America, is Herz's natural American home, and he prolongs his stay there to enjoy the finest of food and society that the Americas have to offer. Furthermore, New Orleans' own division, between French and English quarters, "deux villes dans une" (Herz 276), presents a microcosmic version of the manner in which Herz portrays America as a whole, and echoes much of the sentiment conveyed by Comettant about the cultural differences between North and South: "Le quartier français se distingue... par un certain laisser-aller dans les mœurs qui



n'a rien de commun avec les habitudes rigides et le sérieux des *business men* du quartier opposé" (Herz 277).

However welcoming he finds New Orleans, Herz is still confronted with racial inequality that stretches beyond the institution of slavery and into the realm of racial segregation. A group of freedmen comes to visit Herz at his New Orleans hotel, requesting a performance especially for them, as their color prevents them from attending any of the concerts at his standard venues. Herz listens patiently and with interest to their proposal and their flattery, responding that he will talk it over with his manager and provide them with a response by the next day. Upon asking his business-minded manager whether he might be able to honor their request, his manager balks at the idea:

Si vous commettiez, me dit-il, la faute inexcusable de jouer pour les nègres, soyez assure que vous n'auriez jamais un auditeur blanc à la Nouvelle-Orléans. Or un blanc vaut deux nègres comme une blanche vaut deux noires. (Herz 292)

Despite his respect for the freedmen and his proclaimed intolerance for racial injustice, Herz follows his manager's advice:

J'eus donc le regret de faire savoir à la députation des pauvres Ethiopiens que je ne pouvais accepter leur offre. Il m'en couta, je l'avoue, de leur refuser, mais Ulmann avait raison; j'étais perdu dans l'esprit de tous les blancs si j'avais eu la faiblesse de jouer une seule fois pour des noirs. (Herz 292)

Herz drops the subject after this concession, and his reader is left to wonder whether this anecdote was included as a demonstration of the extent of racial inequality in the South or as a sort of apology for not having played for a black audience in the States despite his proclaimed abolitionist stance.

In another instance that describes the general injustice of the racial climate in the States, Herz, like Comettant, tells the story of a young woman who is forbidden from entering social events due to her rumored mixed heritage. Furthermore, she is, like the freedmen, forbidden from attending Herz's concerts, despite being his most prodigious student. Herz is outraged by this injustice:

Cet ostracisme me parut odieux, et je fus révolté quand j'appris qu'aucune des femmes dites de couleur, les plus blanches souvent que des blanches, ne sont jamais admises dans les familles des créoles de la Louisiane. Point de mariage légal entre elles et les blancs. L'abolition de l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis a dû nécessairement modifier les lois d'Etat à cet égard; mais combien de temps encore le préjugé pèsera sur la race déshéritée des gens de couleur! (Herz 308)

With this anecdote, Herz not only acknowledges the perceived injustice of the social ostracism of blacks in the United States, but also makes an important reference to his belief in the possibly changed affairs in America since the end of the Civil War. His journey, like Comettant's, took place well before the war itself, and a concession that his eyewitness version of the States may not be the most current indicates the immense popularity of texts on America immediately after the war. Herz, who had traveled the States well before the start of the war, was compelled to finally write and publish his own *Voyages en Amérique* in the months after Lincoln's assassination. Capitalizing, like Comettant, on the popularity of any and everything about the American Civil War, despite not having seen any of the action firsthand.

Herz, unlike Comettant does claim a moment of actual eyewitnessing that would be pertinent to the action of American Civil War, although it was not direct and did not take place in America. He briefly recounts a story of having seen the

father of John Wilkes Booth, President Lincoln's assassin, performing Shakespeare in London, exclaiming, "Qui aurait pu prévoir que le fils de Booth deviendrait l'assassin exécuté du président Lincoln?" (Herz 158). This marks the only mention of Lincoln in Herz's narrative, despite its apparition the year after Lincoln's death. Again, one might imagine that, as was the case with Comettant's work, a book with a title such as *Mes voyages en Amérique* would have been quite popular among French Lincoln and American enthusiasts. The fact that the text was published by Achille Faure further indicates that Herz's account of his own American journey was, like that of Comettant, part of a push to capitalize on the fascination with Civil War America. Though Herz did not live a life as declaredly republican as Comettant, their friendship may indicate Herz's own sympathy towards the Republic. Furthermore, his Jewish status in a time of rampant French anti-Semitism, and his desire to pursue a musical career in the United States, point toward Herz's discomfort with the reigning French Emperor. It's possible that Herz was so willing to temporarily move his music career to America in an effort to avoid the racial injustices of his own adopted homeland.<sup>67</sup> As Lisa Moses Leff points out in "Self-definition and self-defense: Jewish racial identity in nineteenth-century France," (*Jewish History* (2005) 19: 7-28) the word "race" was already being used to describe people of Jewish heritage; and while Herz himself makes no allusion to Judaism or to his own Jewish identity in his

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<sup>67</sup> As Philip G. Nord writes in the chapter, "Jewish Republicanism," in his book, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France*, "The growth and embourgeoisement of the Paris community prompted members to self-reflection and debate, to a new understanding of what it meant to be Jewish and of the Jews' place in French life" (64).

text, it is important to consider his own journey and narrative in light of the dramatic changes in Jewish culture in nineteenth-century France.

Though Herz himself returned to France at the end of his short journey, the text indicates that his ambitious servant, François, escapes the lowly status bestowed upon him by his homeland by starting anew in America:

Toujours est-il qu'en arrivant à la Nouvelle-Orléans, il me quitta, voulant, me dit-il, ouvrir un établissement dans cette ville. En retournant une dernière fois à la Nouvelle-Orléans je ne fus pas peu surpris de lire sur une enseigne que M. François *de la maison Henri Herz* s'était établi fabricant de pianos. Le nom de François était écrit sur l'enseigne en petits caractères presque illisibles; celui de Henri Herz ressortait au contraire en lettres gigantesques et magnifiquement dessinées; si bien que pour tous les passants le facteur de pianos c'était moi et non point lui. (Herz 236)

François, under Herz's name, has ultimately capitalized on the same opportunities of equality, capitalism, and celebrity from which Herz himself may have hoped to profit. America, the land of liberty, has given the humble and enterprising servant his chance to ascend the ranks. The fact that he chooses to establish his new life in New Orleans is, of course, not coincidental.

In both Herz's and Comettant's texts, New Orleans represents a strong French presence in America. New Orleans, while the last bastion of culture in the United States, exists also as a new chance at the Old World, a place to rebuild what has been lost and to fix what has been broken. Though neither Herz nor Comettant decide to stay permanently in Louisiana, François' choice to do so speaks to several prevailing French discourses at the time. François' ability to go so quickly from the bottom-rung to the middle indicates not only that America is a land of opportunity for those willing to seize it, but that the status of American society is at least a few rungs below that of the French. If the lower class

becomes middle class in America, then the American upper class would seem to be, at best, on the same level as the French middle class. America thus represents the opportunity to start over, so to speak, as long as one is willing to sacrifice status.

In this leveling of the social playing field, and the proclamation that the life of the slaves in the South is not really so terrible, Herz and Comettant paint the backside to the reigning equality portrayed by Tocqueville, an equality in which one can no longer rely on the strength of heritage, for better or for worse. Comettant's attempt to stake out the three major American "races," the Westman, the Yankee, and the Virginian, demonstrates the urgency of classifying this land of the unclassifiable, to figure out who Americans were not only in the midst of Civil War turmoil, but also in the midst of the nineteenth century's insistence upon national and racial identity and heritage. As both men find America to be a blank slate painted here and there with qualities that can be traced back to formerly European identities, past or present, the question of American identity is as ever-changing as its answer is permanent.

## CONCLUSION

### SUGAR TO COTTON, FICTION TO HISTORY

Broadly speaking, recent French and Francophone literary scholarship has paid much attention to literature produced by the profound and lasting effect of the colonial experience, stretching from travel narratives to negritude and post-negritude movements. In *Mémoires des esclavages*, Edouard Glissant writes that the fact of colonial slavery is, out of cultural necessity, faced with a collective and conscious worldwide forgetfulness. With the publications of critical works such as Christopher L. Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (2008), which proposes a wide-reaching consideration of the cultural production surrounding France's role in the Atlantic slave trade, the burgeoning field of French Atlantic studies has further opened the door to broad considerations of the literatures born of the complex networks stretching across the ocean, and particularly of those affected by the institutions of colony and slavery. The Haitian Revolution, in particular, has been attracting much academic inquiry, with scholars such as Laurent Dubois, Deborah Jenson, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot exploring the history and enduring effects of the birth of the world's first Black Republic. Concurrently, works such as Jacques Portes' *Fascination and Misgivings: the United States in French Opinion 1870-1914* and

Philippe Roger's *The American Enemy: the History of French Anti-Americanism* have newly highlighted the historically complicated relationship between France and the United States. In the specific study of French-American relations during the Civil War, Henry Blumenthal has masterfully outlined the diplomatic history of French involvement in the conflict between the states, and Philippe Roger's chapter, "The Divided States of America," charts France's divided journalistic response to the war.<sup>68</sup> However, an inquiry into France's literary response to the American Civil War adds a new and important dimension to the consideration of the profound and lasting histories of race and nationhood in the French Atlantic. It is through this inquiry that two formerly diverse fields of scholarship, concerning France's colonial history and French-American relations, merge as one.

From the Haitian Revolution to the American Civil War, and from the conception of history to the writing of fiction, biography, and travel narrative, we have seen how the intersections between alternately disparate elements are intertwined, and even identical, in the French Atlantic nineteenth-century context. Each of the texts that we have explored in this analysis encompasses elements of travel narrative, history, and fiction toward a common goal: the attempt to define the Americas. The narrative privilege afforded to the eyewitness are manifested not only in the marketing and paratextual accompaniments in the form of illustrations in the works in question, but also in the insistence upon metaphorical unveilings throughout the texts themselves, from the ever-shifting

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<sup>68</sup> For more critics who have analyzed France's "American perspective" through military history, newspaper accounts, and travel narratives, see Peter P. Hill's *Napoleon's Troublesome Americans: Franco-American Relations, 1804-1815* and René Rémond's *Les États-Unis Devant l'Opinion Française 1815-1852*.

narrative eye of historical fiction to biography and travel narrative. The Haitian Revolution, just as the French Revolution, was a history that needed to be assimilated or rejected in order for French society to redefine itself and move forward. The United States Civil War, looming on the horizon just as France became an Empire once again, called any such processes into question.

The texts' relationships to the regimes under which they were produced are, of course, tantamount to this consideration. Both Napoleon and Napoleon III took great care to preserve their public images, and both Emperors were gravely aware of the dangers of images and the printed word, attempting to harness the power of both through propaganda and to restrict its damaging influence through censorship. As French theaters and publishing houses shut down under the First Empire and were heavily restricted under the Second Empire, the French public grew increasingly aware of a burdensome sense of Imperial silence. From beneath these regimes of government-controlled press and arts, the power of what the public was reading and seeing was often eclipsed by what the public was not reading or seeing.

Under the regime of Napoleon in the First Empire, before the major boom in technology and literacy that would sweep across France years later, print censorship was relatively easy. With a select number of Imperial printers and publishers, Napoleon was able to successfully keep a tight rein on what was and was not printed in France, and especially what was and was not printed on the subject of the current affairs of his own regime. It is precisely for this reason that most texts of note published in France on the topic of the Haitian Revolution



during and immediately after the Revolution itself paint a nasty picture of colonial destruction, with France as the victim of overt treason. To the contrary, by the time Napoleon III attempted to pull in the reins of censorship over his Second Empire, France itself, as much of the world, had undergone major changes in the way in which it consumed the printed word. Increased literacy, along with advances in publishing technology, revolutionized print culture by making it more accessible. The Pandora's Box of the publishing industry having been long opened, and a good deal of French industry reliant upon print culture, Napoleon III was not able to control the press and publishers with the same rigor as his uncle. Despite his best efforts, the publishing and marketing machine would manage to prevail in the evasion of censorship. Because of these evasions, the legacy of Second Empire-era French texts on the subject of the American Civil War is more difficult to decipher than that left by the Haitian Revolution.

While French texts that prevailed from the First Empire on the Haitian Revolution depict a clear conflict with a line between the hero, Napoleon, and the villain, Louverture, the French texts that prevailed from the Second Empire on the American Civil War do not present as clear a distinction. From the support of the South in validating the right to secession but disapproval of the South in upholding the institution of slavery to the support of the Union for abolishing slavery and condemnation of the Union for failing democracy in not allowing a lawful secession, it is an understatement to say that France had a complicated reaction to the American Civil War. The astounding growth and relatively moderate control of the press and the print industry under the Second Empire

and the American Civil War allowed for something that was impossible under the First Empire and the Haitian Revolution: the opportunity to distinguish between the perspective of the French government and the perspective of the French people, thus allowing for a complicated flood of perspectives that was nonetheless affected and sometimes altered by the threat of Imperial censorship.

In the case of popular fictions of both wars, including Rene Périn's *L'Incendie du cap* (1802), Gustave de Beaumont's *Marie, ou l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis* (1835) and Louise de Bellaigue's 1881 *Nos Américains*, each work promises a degree of proximity to the action of the narrative in order to place the reader in a position of privilege, through the portrayal of a succession of detailed scenes that emphasize the revelation of a more authentically emotional history. The texts of Périn, Beaumont, and Bellaigue all privilege theatrical experiences of the historical narrative, while reminding the reader of the clear distinction between "us" and "them," the viewer and the viewed. While each of these texts approaches this distinction differently, their approaches become increasingly reliant upon one another. The personal horror of the Haitian Revolution depicted in *L'Incendie du Cap*, in which France itself is a part of the portrait of terrors, allows the "us" to figure prominently in the bloody action. Every transgression against France committed by Toussaint Louverture is presented to the reader as an affront to this collectivity, as a graphic description is placed beneath the eyes of the proclaimed victim. The immediacy of Perin's text is palpable, and is a clear call for retribution. *Marie, ou l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis* and *Nos Américains*, *épisodes de la Guerre de Sécession*, to the contrary, use similar literary

techniques to establish a distance between France and its colonial past. Each proclamation against the horrors of slavery is a solid affirmation of the fact that, to the French reader, it is the Americans and not the French who are committing the crime. Placing such tableaux beneath the eyes of their readers, Beaumont and Bellaigue place a more comfortable separation between France and its own slave history in the Atlantic.

Correspondingly, the biographies of Toussaint Louverture and Abraham Lincoln analyzed in Chapter 3 present their subjects as emphatically physical beings whose appearances indicate the honesty, or dishonesty, of their characters. The 1802 biographies of Toussaint Louverture, Louis Dubroca's *Vie de Toussaint Louverture* and Cousin d'Avallon's *Histoire de Toussaint-Louverture*, repeatedly state that their subject's physical appearance is deceptively simple. Behind the simplicity of Louverture's relatively calm demeanor lurks the treachery of his authentic character. To the contrary, the three biographies of Abraham Lincoln that we analyzed, Félix Bungener's 1865 *Lincoln: sa vie, son œuvre, sa mort*, Achille Arnaud's *Abraham Lincoln: sa naissance, sa vie, sa mort* and Alphone Jouault's 1865 *Abraham Lincoln: sa jeunesse et sa vie politique, histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage aux Etats-Unis* highlight the links between their subject's character and his physical appearance.

Through their emphases on uncovering the authentic natures of their subjects by analyzing their physical appearances, each group of biographies indicates that these appearances hold a privileged position in deciphering between fiction and reality. The written word's ability to replicate these physical

manifestations through “verbal portraits” of Louverture and Lincoln compounds the ability of biography to ultimately determine the true character of the man. Once again, in the case of these biographical texts, the writers under Napoleon’s First Empire harness the power of portraits and descriptions of physicality to present the “official” version of the truth, hinting that any other accounts cannot be trusted, and associating them with the faulty and deceptive appearance of Toussaint Louverture. The writers under Napoleon III’s Second Empire, however, harness the power of such forms of depiction to present Abraham Lincoln as the ultimate figure of openness and honesty, and therefore the ultimate contrast to the obfuscation of Napoleon III’s regime.

In the works of Oscar Comettant and Henri Herz, this obfuscation intermingles with the rising French curiosity about the American Civil War driven by the power of marketing the eyewitness in nineteenth-century French publishing culture. Comettant’s *Trois ans aux Etats-Unis: étude des mœurs et coutumes américaines* (1857), *Le nouveau monde: scènes de la vie américaine* (1861), *L’Amérique telle qu’elle est: Voyage anecdotique de Marcel Bonneau dans le nord et le sud des Etats-Unis* (1864), and *Voyage pittoresque et anecdotique dans le nord et le sud des Etats-Unis d’Amérique* (1866), along with Herz’s *Mes voyages en Amérique* (1866), all reflect major moments of French interest in the Civil War as well as instances of potential interference by Imperial censors.

As both eyewitness authors focus on the question of the different manifestations and categorizations of social groups in America, they attempt to

define the quickly reconfiguring American landscape, despite the fact that neither author visited America during or after the Civil War. In the marketing of these works, the insistence upon the authors' eyewitness status highlights their proximity to the subject of their texts. The texts themselves profit from the eyewitness status of Comettant and Herz as the writers demonstrate the visible and invisible lines of social stratification in America. Comettant describes the three American races, categories that he bases primarily upon geographies that essentially become visible in the individual's character and appearance, while Herz highlights the randomness of American categorizations of race as divorced from the question of color. In drawing these distinctions and urgently seeking the visual proof of their racial determinations, Comettant and Herz attempt to forge new definitions of the divided Americas.

In considering the historical and literary validity of these largely forgotten hybrid-genre texts, this dissertation has aimed to broaden the understanding of French historical memory as it pertains to the Americas, and as it pertains to works of popular fiction, biography, and travel narrative in face of the transfer of memory from the privileged position of the witness to the receptive position of the public. As we have seen, this transfer was not a simple process in the transmission of information and opinions about the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War, as each era held its own distinct challenges, especially in the attempt to publish and distribute texts that were counter to both Napoleonic regimes. The writers who sought to evade the Napoleonic perspective under the Second Empire employed many of the same narrative techniques as the

propagandists who sought to reinforce the Napoleonic perspective under the First Empire.

If we consider, as Homi Bhabha and Michel de Certeau have argued, that the writing of another nation is an act of self-projection, these hybrid-genre works give us the opportunity to study the implications of projecting a self onto a divided nation, as France struggled to come to terms with its nineteenth-century shifts into and out of Empire and Republic. The Americas, the New World that once stood as the quintessential symbol of power, escaped France not once, but twice in this period, as Napoleon lost his sugar colony, and his slice of America, to the Haitian Revolution, and as Napoleon III ultimately failed to regain any American foothold of note in the expanse of his Empire. Napoleonic supporters had seen the New World as the frontier of the French Empire that was to sweep across the Atlantic, while devotees to the Republic saw the New World as a powerful experiment in democracy, a terrain upon which to level the playing field of deeply steeped aristocracy inescapable to France under both its Empire and its Republic. As wars waged in the Americas, France was able to look across the Atlantic and perceive different permutations of its own identity, whether real or imagined, engaged in debates that were impossible from within its borders.

The ultimate insistence upon what could be seen through literature on the Haitian Revolution and on the American Civil War was thus, more than anything, an insistence upon France, in its many factions, seeing itself in conflict with its own past, present, and future. In a cracked national mirror, the choices of which fragmented piece, or pieces, upon which to project are multifaceted. While it is

impossible to definitively argue who was seeing what in each element of the two American wars and for what reason, it is clear that the stakes were high in attempting to understand, characterize, and ultimately classify the New World. After the successful declaration of Haitian independence, Haiti had been lost to France. The powerful island nation having declared its independence expressly against France made this loss even more palpable. As the hasty sale of the Louisiana Territory followed shortly thereafter, French culture was surely to slip out of the continental United. As the United States began to slide toward its own Civil War of independence and abolition, it was only natural for France to wonder whether it still held a cultural alliance with its former territory, and to look to the traces of its own culture that may have been left behind in the States. The French view of the American Civil War was thus composed of a fragmentary memory of colonial loss, as multifaceted in its expression as in its political agenda. From the Haitian Revolution to the American Civil War, nineteenth-century French literature of all genres and intentions provided a medium through which the fragments of a shattered cultural identity could be collected and displayed.

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