

HER SPACE, HER STORY: FRANCOPHONE WOMEN'S WRITING IN LOUISIANA

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ABSTRACT

Mary Greenwood: Her Space, Her Story: Francophone Women's Writing in Louisiana
(Under the direction of Dominique Fisher)

My research explores the literary contributions of Francophone women in Louisiana. Though this corpus dates back to the 18th century and continues today, it has yet to receive serious critical attention. In my dissertation, I analyze the interplay between social, physical, and narrative spaces in the works of Louisiana Francophone women writers over the course of nearly three centuries. I begin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, showing how the published autobiographical works of Marie Hachard and Désirée Martin circumnavigate the patriarchal institutions of family and convent that typically circumscribed the discursive space available to women at the time. My subsequent analysis of the novels of Marie Augustin and Sidonie de La Houssaye illustrates how gendered and racial hierarchies intersect in these novels, thereby implicitly problematizing the virulent racism of post-Reconstruction Louisiana. Finally, I look at how the late twentieth-century multilingual poetic works of Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton renegotiate the complex linguistic hierarchy that has stifled the use of French in Louisiana since the early twentieth century. My focus on how these authors' gendered liminal discursive positions inform their approaches to gender, racial, and linguistic hierarchies shows that, despite their historic and generic diversity, they do constitute a specific and culturally relevant literary tradition. This dissertation thereby inserts this corpus into the larger framework of Francophone studies.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on the literary production of Louisiana Francophone women, analyzing a substantial cross-section of this corpus over the course of its nearly three-hundred-year history. Rather than attempt to provide an exhaustive inventory of women's Francophone writing in Louisiana, it proceeds through comparative and historically informed close readings of representative texts and ultimately illustrates the circuitous routes through which these works interface with the socioeconomic contexts of their production. I begin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, showing how the published autobiographical works of Marie Hachard and Désirée Martin circumnavigate the patriarchal institutions of family and convent that typically circumscribed the discursive space available to women at the time. My subsequent analysis of the novels of Marie Augustin and Sidonie de La Houssaye illustrates how gendered and racial hierarchies intersect in these novels, thereby implicitly problematizing the virulent racism of post-Reconstruction Louisiana. Finally, I look at how the late twentieth-century multilingual poetic works of Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton renegotiate the complex linguistic hierarchy that has stifled the use of French in Louisiana since 1915. My focus on how these authors' gendered liminal discursive positions inform their approaches to gender, racial, and linguistic hierarchies shows that, despite their historic and generic diversity, they do constitute a specific and culturally relevant literary tradition. This dissertation thereby inserts this corpus into the larger framework of Francophone studies.

Until recently, Louisiana Francophone literature has received little critical attention and the literary production of Louisiana Francophone women has remained doubly in shadow. No

study of this body of literature currently exists. Of the six authors under consideration in this study, only Sidonie de La Houssaye, Beverly Matherne, and Deborah Clifton have ever been the subject of serious critical analysis. Though historians such as Emily Clark and Shannon Lee Dawdy have drawn on Ursuline nun Marie Hachard's 1727 letters and travel narrative as a primary source, its literary significance as the first published text written by a denizen of Louisiana has yet to be explored.¹ The work of nineteenth-century writer Sidonie de La Houssaye has been the focus of dissertations by John Perret, Christine Elizabeth Koch Harris, and Christian Hommel; and of scholarly talks and articles by John Perret, Bénédicte Monicat, Alice Parker, Christian Hommel, and Jarrod Hayes. The focus of John Perret's work is largely biographical, providing valuable information on de La Houssaye's life and career. In his literary analysis of her œuvre however, he struggles to situate de La Houssaye's texts in relation to major European literary movements rather than considering her work within the complex American and Francophone context of its enunciation. More recent studies have focused on de La Houssaye's complex and often contradictory representations of gendered race relations in Louisiana. While

¹ It is worth noting that in overviews of early Louisiana literature such as the introduction to Edward Larocque Tinker's 1932 catalog, Mathieu Allain's 1982 article on the history of French literature in the region, and in Charles Edward O'Neill's scholarly work on eighteenth-century Louisiana writer Alexandre Viel, each includes a list of early texts produced in Louisiana. These include travel narratives by Louis Joliet and Jacques Marquette, Louis Hennepin, René Robert Cavalier de la Salle, and Henri Joutel. Allain even mentions "the sometimes gossip but always informative letters written by the Chevalier de Pradel and his family. This lively correspondence, which sketches from the 1720s to the 1770s, recreates vividly the daily life and preoccupations of the early settlers and their wives" (7). None of these scholars mentions the work of Marie Madeleine Hachard, despite the fact that the work was widely read enough to merit republication in 1872. Excerpts from Hachard's letters consistently appear in the work of historians such as Shannon Lee Dawdy and Emily Clark, suggesting their availability and viability as historical documents. Granted, this distinction does not guarantee the work's literary quality. However, the scholars responsible for the above list of travel narratives admit that "the literature created in Louisiana during the French period (1699-1763) conformed to utilitarian models: travel relations, historical accounts, or publicist's propaganda" (7). Given that Marie Madeleine Hachard's letters and travel narrative have been as or more widely available than the sources mentioned above, and that literary quality was not a criterion for inclusion from this list, why have her engaging and informative letters been excluded? Towards this end, Allain's reference to the "settlers and their wives" is revealing. The exploration, domination, and penetration of a vast territory is here cast as a masculine activity. Allain even justifies the quasi-illegibility of Pierre Lemoyne d'Iberville by noting that he "was more adept at navigation and military command than orthography" (5). Read this way, women have only an ancillary role to play as mates to these virile conquerors of the New World. A group of celibate women traveling of their own accord to work as missionaries and educators upsets this masculinist paradigm.

all of these texts engage with the imbrication of racial and gendered hierarchies in these novels, none examine how patriarchal power constructs and maintains racial categories as I argue in chapter three. Furthermore, even de La Houssaye's texts have yet to be considered as part of a larger corpus.

Work on more recent Louisiana women writers includes Pascale Mongeons' close textual analysis on Beverly Matherne's poetry, which only superficially engages with the social and linguistic context of the text's production and does not attempt to contextualize it in relation to the Cajun Renaissance. In her analysis of Deborah Clifton's work, Anna Malena is attentive to its context of Afrocreole literary production, placing it in dialogue with the English-language work of Sybil Kein. I propose to extend this contextualization, looking at how Clifton's work engages and contrasts with previous literary representations of Louisiana Creole and with contemporary French-language poetry. As the above summary indicates, this dissertation is the first study of Louisiana women's Francophone writing as a corpus dating from the eighteenth century to the present day. This diachronic focus illustrates the formal, thematic, and linguistic evolution of women's literature in Louisiana.

Thus far, the only scholarly works on Louisiana literary production to encompass such a broad time period are literary catalogs, providing brief biographical sketches of Francophone authors and synopses of their works. Even these massive undertakings do not approach Louisiana Francophone literary production as a distinct corpus. In *Les Écrits de langue française en Louisiane au XIX^e siècle* (1932) for example, Edward Larocque Tinker begins his catalog of Louisiana Francophone literature with an apology, describing his object of study as marginal, bizarre, and of secondary aesthetic value. In the ensuing summary of the history of Louisiana literary production, he attributes possibility for any such literature to conditions of cultural

dominance and close association with France, citing the prosperity of nineteenth-century (white) Creoles,² their tradition of sending sons overseas to finish their education, and the literary and educational contributions of French refugees following the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Read in this light, Louisiana literature can never be seen as anything more than an imitation of the French canon and a clumsy one at that. Such readings will inevitably measure Louisiana production against a metropolitan French standard, from which any deviation can only be considered a stylistic failure on the part of the author rather than a mark of originality or regional specificity. Furthermore, despite the exhaustiveness of his catalog of nineteenth-century French-language literature in Louisiana, including authors of both genders from varying social positions, his introduction describes the locus of Louisiana literary production as the dominant, male planter class of Antebellum society. This assumption is articulated through emphatic references to the stereotypical mansion on Esplanade inhabited by the wealthy white “*gentilshommes créoles qui avaient fait leur éducation au delà des mers*” (6, emphasis added). Associating literary production with the wealth and prestige accruing from the exploitative power relations of plantation slavery, Tinker traces the decline of French literature in Louisiana to that of the white Creoles’ fortunes after the Civil War. He declares the death of Louisiana Francophone literature at precisely the year 1900, stating unequivocally that no revival will ever come.

If the prerequisites for a viable literary tradition are cultural and economic dominance, then Tinker was certainly justified in his assertion that “l’usage d’écrire en langue française a réellement cessé en 1900 et que cet usage ne reviendra plus” and in his approach to his catalog of Louisiana literary production as an autopsy (8). However, the reclamation of Francophone culture and literary production of the Cajun Renaissance begun in the 1970s have already belied

² The term “Creole,” particularly when used as a demographic designation, has a complex and racially loaded history in Louisiana. The conditions of its use remain a contested subject to this day. I discuss my own use of the term in greater depth later in this chapter (26-30).

Tinker's prediction. Born long after the last death throes of the Louisiana plantation economy, this movement is the first written incarnation of Cajun and Creole French, promoting the survival of a marginalized language rather than confirming the power of a socioeconomic elite. This problematic schematization of the death of French forcibly issuing from the collapse of Louisiana's plantation economy is not unique to Tinker however. In his 1982 historical overview of Louisiana French literature, Mathé Allain jumps immediately from his reference to the disappearance of the state's last Francophone newspaper *L'Abeille* in 1923 with the following statement: "The children of distinguished Creole families attended American universities, entered American business firms, and kept only vague nostalgic ties with their French heritage. French, and with it a native French literature seemed doomed indeed" (14). This transition implies that the production of French-language literature is the sole province of "distinguished Creole" families, a description loaded with classist implications. Even after the first publications of the Cajun renaissance, which Allain describes with great enthusiasm, he still cites literary production as the province of the elite beneficiaries of an economy of mass exploitation.

More recent scholarship has challenged this view, in particular, Catharine Savage Brosman's *Louisiana Creole Literature: A Historical Study* (2013). This text is a valuable pedagogical tool describing the work of both Francophone and Anglophone Louisiana writers, including the vitally important work of nineteenth-century Creoles of color, in accessible language. Brosman notes the significance of these authors, attributing their literary value to their social liminality rather than to their centrality:

A distinctive feature of Louisiana writing is the remarkable body of nineteenth-century literary work in French by Free People of Color, who, with their racial mixture and their experience of difference, had unique viewpoints to offer. Writing expressed what their cultural marginality signified for them. (20)³

³ The literary accomplishments of free people of color were indeed remarkable, including the antebellum collection of poetry entitled *Les Cenelles* (1845). I refer to several of these works in this dissertation in Chapter Three, wherein

Brosman's highly justified emphasis on the accomplishments of free people of color in Antebellum Louisiana opens a different conceptualization of the conditions of possibility for literary production. Rather than defining this literature in terms of its distance from a metropolitan center, or of positing the dominant strata of antebellum society as its own center from which culture derives, Brosman establishes the possibility of a Louisiana literature emanating from the margins.

Despite the importance of Brosman's catalog, it does not seriously engage with any of the texts under consideration in this study. In fact, of the six authors I examine in my dissertation, Brosman only discusses Sidonie de La Houssaye's works, and there only superficially (107-112). Furthermore, Brosman's exclusion of Cajun authors from the study also posits a stark division between Cajuns and Creoles, obfuscating the significant overlap that actually exists between the two groups. Despite these significant differences in approach and in choice of primary texts, I do adopt Brosman's conceptualization of a literary tradition issuing from marginalized societal positions.

The rediscovery of Louisiana French and its new literary incarnations in the late twentieth century support this approach. These developments demand a reconsideration of how a literary history including works in International French, Louisiana French and Creole, periodic bursts of effusion, decades-long silences, and influences from France, Africa, the United States, and the Caribbean can constitute a tradition. This dissertation interrogates women's Francophone literature as just such a corpus, emerging from gendered and/or linguistic margins of literary culture and persistently engaging with hierarchies of gender, race, and language.

I discuss how nineteenth-century representations of women of color varied depending on the gendered and racialized position of the author. As such, it is highly unfortunate that no nineteenth-century Francophone texts by women of color are available for study. For more see Senter (276-294), Brosman (68-92), and Bell (89-144).

Tracing Marginal Sites of Enunciation

In approaching Louisiana women's Francophone literature as a tradition issuing from the margins of society, I rely on the Deleuzian concept of minor literature. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define minor literature as the product of linguistic minorities writing in a dominant language and thereby deterritorializing it (29). According to such strict criteria, the application of this term to Louisiana Francophone literature is problematic, given that French was a dominant language in the region from the colonial period until the Civil War. As such, Francophone authors who wrote before the Civil War, like Marie Hachard, wrote as members of the linguistic majority, while post-bellum writers like Désirée Martin wrote as a linguistic minority within their own language. However, Deleuze and Guattari insist that the most important characteristic of minor literature is its ability to deterritorialize dominant modes of discourse, to be "*dans sa propre langue comme un étranger*" (48). Such literature is by necessity political, owing to the exiguity of the discursive space from which it emerges (30). Deleuze and Guattari posit the political nature of such texts as potentially revolutionary, enabling the articulation of new collectivities.⁴ The work of Francophone women writers issues from the marginal societal positions and, as such, deterritorializes the intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, and language that have undergirded Louisiana society and propose alternative modes of criticism and collectivity.

Analyzing Louisiana women's Francophone writing as a minor literature demands close attention to the sociopolitical context of its enunciation. Rather than thinking of Francophone Louisiana as a backwater echo of metropolitan France, this work treats the region as a

⁴ "[...] c'est la littérature qui produit une solidarité active, malgré le scepticisme; et si l'écrivain est en marge ou à l'écart de sa communauté fragile, cette situation le met d'autant plus en mesure d'exprimer une autre communauté potentielle, de forger le moyen d'une autre conscience et d'une autre sensibilité" (31-2).

continuously evolving contact zone, a term used by Mary Louise Pratt “to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (34). Caught in the crosscurrents of European, North American, and Caribbean culture flows, Louisiana has developed as a profoundly heterogeneous and polyglot society. This diversity is particularly in evidence in the varying representations of racial hierarchies in Marie Augustin’s *Le Macandal* (1892) and Sidonie de La Houssaye’s *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1990s), and in the multilingual poetic renegotiations of linguistic hierarchies undertaken by Beverly Matherne in *Le Blues braillant* (1999) and by Deborah Clifton in *À cette heure, la louve* (1999). As such, the literature and culture of Louisiana are best understood, not in relation to an assumed monolithic tradition but as emerging from the interstices of cross-cultural encounters.

According to Homi K. Bhabha, the articulation of individual and group identities within the contested space of the contact zone is a complex process:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (2)

Such liminal spaces are essential to the articulation of non-hegemonic identities. This “interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4). This perspective forecloses any pretention of monolithic cultural identity, promoting instead an examination of the negotiation of cross-cultural encounters as central to the articulation of supposedly unitary social groups. Such in-between spaces feature prominently in the works of this study. In chapter two,

the liminal spaces between patriarchal institutions of church and family offer Marie Hachard and Désirée Martin discursive agency. In chapter three, the gendered racial liminality of de La Houssaye and Augustin's heroines allows their works to problematize the prevalent racist ideologies of their time.⁵ Finally, in chapter four the liminal space between English, French, and Creole created by Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton in their multilingual texts provide grounds for (re)negotiation of the hierarchy that usually obtains between these languages.

These interstices between social categories constitute specific positions within the ever-evolving social space of the contact zone. Bourdieu defines social space as the "lieu de la coexistence de positions sociales, de points mutuellement exclusifs, qui, pour leurs occupants, sont au principe de points de vue" (157). This framework points out how individual agents and social spaces are mutually (re)constitutive. The ways in which individuals interact with social space and their motivations for doing so derive from their position within that space. In a hybrid and hierarchal social space, like the ever-evolving contact zone that is Louisiana, positionality can fluctuate along several axes including gender, race, and language.

In this dissertation I focus on how the narrative spaces created by Francophone women writers interface with the social and discursive spaces conditioning their enunciation. In her examination of the interplay of social, historical, and fictional space, Minrose Gwin has noted:

Such spaces are historical and material, but they also enact specific imaginative interventions with the historical and material. In literary texts such as these, history, materiality, and imagination are not cast in opposition. Instead there is a pentimento effect, the layering of an image that has been painted over again and again and whose various mutations can be seen through the surface effect. (12-13)

⁵ The importance of liminality in *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* has been emphasized by Christine Elizabeth Koch Harris in her dissertation: "As figured by de la Houssaye, a *quarteronne* embodies this state of in-betweenness. She is neither black nor white, neither slave nor citizen, and has no national status. She is both hyper-feminine as an object of male desire and castrating as the empowered phallic female who destroys the men who desire her" (3). While Harris' analysis of the liminality of these texts provides important insights, it does not thoroughly examine the intersection of racial and gender hierarchies, which I maintain to be crucial to de La Houssaye's conceptualization of race.

This superposition of textual, historical, and social space allows Gwin to explore the nuances of women's writing and how "social relations are concretized and embedded in space" (15).

Examining these questions in the context of hitherto marginalized writers demands that I pay due attention to the dynamic relationship between space, power, and representation.

Such questions of space and power are crucial to Michel de Certeau's exploration of reappropriative tactics in everyday life. In *L'Invention du quotidien*, de Certeau describes the forms of agency available to individuals living in the panoptic landscapes constructed by the consumer society of late capitalism.⁶ Central to this examination is the distinction that de Certeau draws between strategies and tactics. Like Tinker's Creole gentlemen, the strategist occupies a space in which he or she can isolate herself from her environment.⁷ Strategies are the province of the city planners and technocrats (or in our case plantation owners) and hence denote considerable agency and influence. The practitioners of tactics, on the other hand, do not enjoy such agency and must insinuate themselves into the dominant order.⁸ To employ tactics is to work within existing power structures to achieve one's own ends. The use of tactics is particularly in evidence in the lives and works of Marie Hachard and Désirée Martin, who make use of liminal spaces between patriarchal institutions of church and family in their respective quests for discursive agency. Hachard and Martin do not occupy space as owners but as

⁶ "S'il est vrai que partout s'étend et se précise le quadrillage de la 'surveillance,' il est d'autant plus urgent de déceler comment une société entière ne s'y réduit pas; quelles procédures populaires (elles aussi "minuscules" et quotidiennes) jouent avec les mécanismes de la discipline et ne s'y conforment que pour les tourner; enfin quelles 'manières de faire' forment la contrepartie du côté des consommateurs (ou 'dominés?'), des procédés muets qui organisent la mise en ordre sociopolitique" (Certeau XXXIX-XL).

⁷ "...le calcul des rapports de forces qui devient possible à partir du moment où un sujet de vouloir et de pouvoir est isolable d'un 'environnement'. [La stratégie] postule un lieu susceptible d'être circonscrit comme un *propre* et donc de servir de base à une gestion de ses relations avec une extériorité distincte." (XLVI)

⁸ "...un calcul qui ne peut pas compter sur un propre, ni donc sur une frontière qui distingue l'autre comme une totalité visible. La tactique n'a pour lieu que celui de l'autre. Elle s'y insinue, fragmentairement, sans le saisir en son entier, sans pouvoir le tenir à distance." (Certeau XLVI)

subalterns who must negotiate boundaries that have been created by others. The authors in this study and the characters they create operate largely as tacticians: as women in a patriarchal society, as Creoles in a predominantly Anglo-saxon culture, or as French speakers in an overwhelmingly Anglophone nation. These women must adopt reappropriative tactics in order to make their voices heard.

Issuing from the gendered, racial, and/or linguistic margins of society, these authors have found voices as speaking and writing subjects. This dissertation approaches the act of writing as an occupation of discursive space. Given the socioeconomic contingencies and asymmetrical power relations that circumscribe these writers' access to that space, the need for de Certeau's tactics is particularly in evidence. Social, racial, and linguistic hierarchies inform many choices that these authors could make: to whom could they address their writing? What topics were considered suitable for them to discuss? What languages and modes of discourse were available to them? What tactics could these authors employ to circumvent such restrictions? These are questions that I will explore in depth during the course of this dissertation.

Organizing my project according to the hierarchies of gender, race, and language that have informed the evolution of Louisiana society, I trace the development of women's Francophone literature from the colonial era to the present. The long history of this corpus makes it a perfect case study of how traditions can emerge from the margins of social space. The following pages introduce this historical and linguistic context.

French in Louisiana

The history of French in Louisiana begins with the foundation of New Orleans in 1718. Punctuated as they were by disease, natural disasters such as hurricanes, social dissolution, and uneasy relations with indigenous tribes, the colony's beginnings were hardly propitious. As such, colonial conditions of exile, violent conflict, exploitation, and slavery conditioned the language's

earliest use. Far less profitable than its sister colony St-Domingue, eighteenth-century Louisiana, with no real mineral wealth or cash crops to provide the metropole, fell into a state of administrative neglect eventually earning the nickname "la délaissée." The ensuing lack of legitimate dealings with the outside world in conjunction with the asymmetrical power relations of colonial society allowed the colony to devolve into a kleptocratic state referred to by Shannon Lee Dawdy as "rogue colonialism" (11) and to become one of the most rapidly creolized cultures in history.⁹

It was during this period that Louisiana's Creole language came into being. According to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, a number of factors specific to colonial Louisiana contributed to the development of a unique Creole language and culture during the eighteenth century, including the relatively light traffic of slaving vessels, the fact that the new arrivals were overwhelmingly of Senegambian origins (allowing for retention of their original cultures and cultivation of networks of solidarity), and the prevalence of monogamous family formation among the first generation:

The cultural impact of the formative contingent of slaves brought to Louisiana was much more than a simple result of timing and numbers. French Louisiana was not a stable society controlled by a culturally and socially cohesive white elite ruling a dominated, immobilized, fractionalized, and culturally obliterated slave population. The chaotic conditions prevailing in the colony, the knowledge and skills of the African population, the size and importance of the Indian population throughout the eighteenth century, and the geography of lower Louisiana, which allowed for easy mobility along its waterways as well as escape and survival in the nearby, pervasive swamps, all contributed to an unusually cohesive and heavily Africanized culture in lower Louisiana: clearly, the most Africanized slave culture in the United States. (160-1)

⁹ In her history of colonial Louisiana *Building the Devil's Empire*, Dawdy defines rogue colonialism as "the influence of those individuals on the ground who pushed colonial frontiers in their own self-interest" (11). Her frequent use of the term indicates the extent to which Louisiana operated independently of French interests, even during the colonial period. For more on Louisiana's founding and its early reputation for disorder, see Dawdy (115-130) and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's seminal work *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* (1-28).

Hall states that it was this first generation that developed Creole language drawing primarily on French vocabulary and syntactical structures from their own Senegambian languages. This language remained in use by the descendants of these forced pioneers, by new arrivals brought in through migration or the slave trade, as well as by Louisianans from all strata of society until World War II.

The harsh conditions of colonial Louisiana were hardly conducive to literary production. In his catalog of French Louisiana literature, Tinker cites only three texts published in Louisiana before 1800: several poems, a highly dubious medical treatise, and a newspaper that did not enter circulation until 1794. He fails to point out that the first text ever published by a denizen of Louisiana was Marie Madeleine Hachard's *Relation du voyage des Dames religieuses ursulines de Rouen à la Nouvelle-Orléans* published in 1728, only a decade after the foundation of the colony's capital.¹⁰

French remained the primary language of the colony throughout the Spanish rule following the Treaty of Fontainebleau in 1762. Supported by the influx of Acadians, whose descendants became known as *Cadiens* or Cajuns, following their expulsion from Canada in 1755 and later by refugees of the Haitian revolution, French speakers retained numeric superiority throughout the late eighteenth century. Contrary to Jeffersonian representations of the newly acquired territory, literacy rates were relatively high among French speakers, especially among women thanks to the work of Ursuline nuns throughout the eighteenth century.¹¹

¹⁰ Hachard's text does differ from those listed by Tinker in that it was published in Rouen rather than in the colony itself. However, Tinker makes no such distinctions when deciding which nineteenth-century texts to include in his work: "[...] quelles limites donner au travail, qui inclure, qui exclure? Aucune difficulté pour les indigènes nés dans la Louisiane; mais il y avait aussi ceux qui bien que nés dans l'État, avaient émigré en France et avaient publié leurs ouvrages à l'étranger, et il y avait encore ceux qui avaient dit adieu sans retour à leur patrie. Je me suis décidé à les comprendre tous [...]" (9)

¹¹ Though the myth of Creole illiteracy has been cited as recently as 1992 by Joseph G. Tregle (142-4), Shannon Lee Dawdy (56-60) and Paul Lachance (101-130) have drawn on archival records to demonstrate high levels of literacy

The period between the Louisiana Purchase and the Civil War brought drastic changes to Louisiana, including the development of a successful plantation economy and a population explosion. It was during this time that French-speaking Louisianans developed a publishing culture as well as a thriving theatrical scene bolstered by the plays of Louis Placide Canonge. A number of serial publications including *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1827-1923) and *Le Meschacébé* (1853-1942) appeared during this era.¹² Tinker characterizes Antebellum Louisiana by its “production exubérante” (5). It was during this period that Armand Lanusse published *Les Cenelles* (1845), the first collection of poetry by Creoles of Color in the state.¹³ However, none of the texts under consideration in this study derive from this period.

While Creole prosperity reached its height during the antebellum period, Francophone women writers were more productive during the chaotic decades that followed the Civil War. In Louisiana, an ebulliently progressive Reconstruction-era régime eventually crumbled in the face of extreme violence by reactionary groups such as the White League. By the end of the nineteenth century, racial segregation had become the law of the land.¹⁴ This period also gave rise to the first serious attempts at Anglicization as the 1868 state constitution required legal business to be conducted in English. This decision inspired another, less violent backlash in the form of *Les Athenées Louisianais*, a literary society founded by doctor and writer Alfred Mercier in 1874. The group met frequently, hosted lectures, sponsored an annual literary contest, and

among the early nineteenth-century French population. On the influence of the Ursuline nuns on female literacy in colonial Louisiana, see Clark (*Masterless Mistresses* 113-121).

¹² *Le Meschacébé* appeared in French until 1914, after which it was published in English. De La Houssaye's *Quarteronnes* series was published serially in *Le Meschacébé* during the 1890s.

¹³ On Louisiana literary production during the antebellum period, see Brosman (17-27).

¹⁴ On Reconstruction and the white supremacist backlash that followed, see Bell (226-275).

published a regular *Comptes rendus*.¹⁵ It was also during this period that Désirée Martin, Marie Augustin, and Sidonie de La Houssaye published their works. As I will show in chapters two and three, these authors found more fertile ground for their works in the interstices opened by the turmoil following the war than in the patriarchal stability of Antebellum Louisiana.

If the late nineteenth century was particularly fruitful for Louisiana French writers, the early twentieth century proved disastrous. After the discovery of oil near Jennings in 1901, the state faced increasing economic pressure to Anglicize. In 1915, English-only education became mandatory in Louisiana. The harsh punishments children received for speaking French in school attached a profound stigma to the language. Furthermore, though many Louisianans continued to speak French, they no longer learned to read or write in the language. French-speakers henceforth found themselves in a state of diglossia, wherein English was the only acceptable medium for public communication and French could only be used in intimate settings. In many cases, the linguistic hierarchy was further complicated as Louisiana French and Creole command less prestige than Standard or International French. French-language literary production ground to a halt, such that Tinker's gloomy description of his catalog of Louisiana French literature as an "inventaire des 'Restes littéraires'" (8) in the 1930s seemed perfectly justified.

Inspired by the progress of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 60s however, Louisiana Francophones established the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (or CODOFIL) in 1968, marking the beginning of the Cajun Renaissance.¹⁶ Over the subsequent

¹⁵ On L'Athénée Louisianais see Brosman (25) and Tinker (7). One of the laureates of L'Athénée's annual literary competition was Sidonie de La Houssaye for her prose poem "L'Amour qui renferme en lui seul tous les amours" (circa 1889), though John Perret believes this work to be plagiarized as its style differs significantly from de La Houssaye's other works (Perret 60-4).

¹⁶ The term "Cajun Renaissance" is somewhat problematic in that it ignores the existence of Creole and Native American French-speaking communities. It remains in use, thanks in large part to the leadership and visibility of members of the Cajun Community such as James Domengeaux and Barry Ancelet. For more on this exclusion, see Clifton (*Are You In* 40-54).

decades, CODOFIL has promoted French education and Francophone cultural events, and has also offered scholarships for French study both in the state and abroad.¹⁷ Renewed Francophone literary production has also ensued, beginning with a collection of Cajun and Creole poetry entitled *Cris sur le bayou* in 1980. The final two works under consideration in this study, Beverly Matherne's *Le Blues brillant* and Deborah Clifton's *À Cette Heure, la louve*, both date from 1999. As both Matherne and Clifton began writing in French during the 1980s, these are not early works for either poet. Both demonstrate linguistic and poetic techniques developed over the course of years of writing in an intricate sociolinguistic context. In my comparison of these techniques, I argue that they point the way to the creation of a literature issuing from gendered, social and linguistic margins of society, which can be the only way forward for Francophone writing in Louisiana.

Race and Racism

Race and racism have sparked some of the most divisive, painful, and defining conflicts in the history and actuality of Louisiana. As such, questions of race and racism feature prominently in much of Louisiana literature. The works under consideration in this study are no exception. In both the history of the region and in its literary manifestations, the question of race is more complex than in other areas of the United States due to the prevalence of interracial relationships and subsequent development of a robust class of free people of color. As such, careful definitions of the term race, both as it is meant in this study and as it would have been used over the course of Louisiana history, are necessary.

In discussing race, racism, and racial identity, I rely primarily on Alexander Weheliye's definition, namely:

¹⁷ See CODOFIL's official website at the following link: <http://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/about/index>

[...] ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west. (3)

According to this definition, race is an articulation of political relations, enacted through a variety of forms of cultural expression, including literary representation. Racializing political relations posit an ideal Subject of “universal” human rights, from which it follows that divergence from this (typically white and male) norm constitutes a failure to be entirely human. The dehumanizing impact of racialization thus derives from asymmetrical power relations rather than vice versa.

Relying on this constructionist concept of race, it is important to bear historical evolutions of the term in mind. In her seminal 1972 work *L'Idéologie raciste: Genèse et langage actuel*, Collette Guillaumin defines racism as “une biologisation de la pensée sociale, qui tente par ce biais de poser en absolu toute différence constatée ou supposée” (4). Historically, racist ideology has drawn support from biological pseudo-scientific discourse. Guillaumin refutes the idea that such biological categorizations of difference have any basis in empirical reality, noting that definitions of racial categories are mutable and often inconsistent. She goes on to define race as a pure signifier, meaning that its existence and meaning result from the social context from which it emerges and not the other way around:

Les caractères choisis comme blasons de la désignation raciale ne sont qu'une infime partie des discriminations de ce type possibles. Une différence physique réelle n'existe que pour autant qu'elle est ainsi désignée, en tant que signifiant, par une culture quelconque. Ces signifiants varient d'une culture à l'autre. Cette différence se manifeste donc comme pur signifiant, porteur des catégorisations et des valeurs d'une société. Dans le racisme, dans les conduites de contact entre groupes, la caractéristique physique est une valeur sémantique, c'est en retour qu'elle se donne pour causale. (67)

According to this definition, it is racialism and racist practices that constitute “race” as a social category not some pre-existing biological difference between racial groups that gives way to such social distinctions.

In this refutation of “race” as an empirically verifiable biological difference, Guillaumin is far from alone. In *Color Conscious* (1996), Kwame Appiah distinguishes between racism and racialism, defining the latter as the belief:

... that we could divide human beings into a small number of groups, called “races,” in such a way that the members of these groups shared certain fundamental, heritable, physical, moral, intellectual, and cultural characteristics with one another that they did not share with members of any other race. (54)

Racialism thus serves as the scientific and philosophical basis for racism, namely the differential (and often oppressive) treatment of people because of their race. Appiah then points out the extent to which biological determinism influences racialist thinking, not only with regard to physiological features such as skin color, but also psychological and moral characteristics of racialized people:

For a racialist, then, to say someone is “Negro” is not just to say that she has inherited a black skin or curly hair: it is to say that her skin color goes along with other important inherited characteristics—including moral and literary endowments. By the end of the nineteenth century, most Western scientists (indeed, most educated Westerners) believed that racialism was correct, and theorists sought to explain many characteristics—including, as we see here, the character of literatures—by supposing that they were inherited along with (or were in fact part of) a person’s racial essence. (56)

The temporal framing of this characterization is important. The works in which I will explore the question of race and racism in the greatest depth both date from the late nineteenth century, when racial tensions in post-bellum Louisiana were roiling and disastrous Jim Crow policies were coming into effect. As Guillaumin’s definition of racism implies, the contemporaneity of widespread acceptance of racialist thought and acute social tensions is by no means a coincidence.

In both Guillaumin and Appiah's work, a biological difference is invented to justify an existing social reality. Like Guillaumin, Appiah utterly refutes the existence of race as a viable biological category. As he points out:

Indeed, it turns out that, in humans, however you define the major races, the biological variability within them is almost as great as the biological variation within the species as a whole: put another way, while there are some characteristics that we are very good at recognizing—skin color, hair, skull shape—that are very unevenly geographically distributed, the groups produced by these assignments do not cluster much for other characteristics. (68)

Contrary to the racist belief that racially distinct physiological traits are predictive of moral or psychological attributes, Appiah insists that these latter differences are arbitrary and not traceable to any essential biological difference.

Despite its scientific refutability, Appiah asserts that racialized thinking can and does influence construction of individual and social identities. He points out that racist thinking involves the ascription of certain traits and identities to the objects of its gaze. It is this process, rather than some originary essence, that generates racial identities. As Appiah points out:

Once the racial label is applied to people, ideas about what it refers to, ideas that may be much less consensual than the application of the label, come to have their social effects. But they have not only social effects but psychological ones as well; and they shape the ways people conceive of themselves and their projects. In particular, the labels can operate to shape what I want to call "identification": the process through which an individual intentionally shapes her projects—including her plans for her own life and her conception of the good—by reference to available labels, available identities. (78)

In this way, the racial identities ascribed to us can shape our behavior, how we think of ourselves, and how we interact with others. This influence helps explain how racism and racial identities have outlived the scientific credibility of racist thought.

Other scholars have pointed out that purely biological definitions of race are inadequate and that the socio-political impact of racism extends far beyond that of its long-obliterated pseudo-scientific support. Pierre Taguieff in particular juxtaposes traditional biological

formulations of racism with newer culturally based ones, pointing out that scientific antiracist arguments are ill-equipped to counter these subtler forms of discrimination. He is particularly critical of the “right to difference” school of thought, arguing “for there is no difference that, in the cultural context of any human society, is not interpreted as a difference of value and therefore as a hierarchy, explicit (in traditional societies) or implicit (in modern societies, living under a sky of individualist and egalitarian values)” (6). While his implicit assertion that cultural chauvinism is inevitable and endemic to all human societies might seem overly pessimistic to some, Taguieff’s work insightfully illustrates the capacity of racist discourse to insinuate itself into seemingly benign “post-racial” ideology. To fully appreciate and critique the devastating impact of racism, scholars must go beyond its pseudo-scientific underpinnings to consider its multiform social and cultural manifestations.

Another difficulty with mainstream antiracist discourse is its failure “to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw 1245). Black feminist scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw have argued that many liberationist discourses such as feminism and antiracism only partially reject hierarchal models of thought predicated on a platonic ideal of a (usually white and male) Universal Subject. Consequently, American feminism often focuses on the interests of white women while the Civil Rights Movement often focuses on the advancement of black men. This one-dimensional framework is clearly inadequate to account for gendered racism in any context, much less in a Creolized society such as Louisiana’s. As Crenshaw points out, “Because of their intersectional identity both as women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both” (1244). Given the centrality of gender to this

study, I will adopt an intersectional approach to my analysis of how hierarchies of gender, race, and language inform and are represented in my primary sources.

Racism, Colonialism, and Slavery

Thus Western racism does not derive from essential biological difference but from a profoundly hierarchal sociopolitical context, namely the mass oppression and exploitation of non-Europeans through colonialism and slavery. Though these phenomena date from the seventeenth century, they achieved their paroxysm in nineteenth-century European empires and in the Antebellum United States. While acceptance of this periodization is widespread, it runs against the grain of popular conceptualizations of this era, most frequently characterized by the democratization of Western societies according to Enlightenment ideals. Scholarly attempts to reconcile the brutal oppression of slaves and colonial subjects with generalized acceptance of Enlightenment ideals of liberty and equality vary. Guillaumin asserts that the dehumanization of Others implicit in racist thought negates any claim that such people might have made to the supposedly universal rights of man. Such a rhetorical strategy was necessary as the economic realities of the nineteenth century entailed exploitation of human resources and labor on an unprecedented scale:

Cette idéologie permet alors de résoudre l'antinomie entre les valeurs humanitaires dont l'impact a été si élevé à la suite de la révolution, et le déroulement concret de l'histoire économique de l'Europe dont le moins qu'on puisse dire est qu'elle n'est pas précisément la mise en œuvre de la morale de l'égalité et du bonheur. Car comment résoudre le problème moral que pose à une société "libérale et éclairée" la réalité indéniable de l'exploitation et de l'aliénation? Comment résoudre la question que pose l'aliénation du moi dans les "morceaux" de l'humanité qui sont aliénés par le mécanisme social? Comment la résoudre, sinon en projetant l'aliénation hors de moi-même? (42)

The ideology to which Guillaumin refers here is clearly a racist one, consigning the victims of slavery and colonialism to a sort of inhumanity. This state of affairs allows the white,

bourgeois, industrialized “moi” to engage in exploitative and oppressive economic practices without suffering any serious pangs of conscience.

The psychological pragmatism implied in this explanation correlates with the material determinism espoused by many critical race theorists. This theory asserts that the interests of dominant groups are primarily responsible for the content of prevailing ideologies:

For materialists, understanding the ebb and flow of racial progress and retrenchment requires a careful look at conditions prevailing at different times in history. Circumstances change so that one group finds it possible to seize advantage or to exploit another. They do so and then form appropriate collective attitudes to rationalize what was done. Moreover, what is true for subordination of minorities is also true for its relief: civil rights gains for communities of color coincide with the dictates of white self-interest. Little happens out of altruism alone. (Delgado and Stefancic 22)

According to this theory, the socioeconomic benefits accrued to the white European and American bourgeoisie from colonialism and slavery are sufficient to explain the prevalence of racist ideology in those regions during the nineteenth century.

Some critics go further, arguing that racism is not a lapse from Enlightenment ideals, but rather an integral component of their articulation. Paul Gilroy, for example, has asserted that racial violence and the political structures of modernity are mutually constitutive:

...enlightenment pretensions of universality were punctured from the moment of their conception in the womb of colonial space. Their very foundations were destabilized by their initial exclusionary configuration: by the consistent endorsement of “race” as a central political and historical concept and by the grave violence done to the central image of man by the exigencies of colonial power... (*Against Race* 65)

The abstract, universal subject of modernity with his liberty and his inalienable rights could only come into being in a securely racialized world, where large swathes of the global population existed as inhumanity and could never lay claim to such rights and privileges. Working in the context of United States literature, Toni Morrison has come to a similar conclusion, pointing out that American notions of freedom and equality could only be articulated in contradistinction to

an enslaved and objectified Other: “The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom—if it did not in fact create it—like slavery” (38).

If these scholars teach us anything, it is the mutually constitutive power of context and ideas. The vast influence of exploitative economic systems combined with the prevalence of biological determinism in nineteenth-century thought to generate one of the most insidious and dangerous ideologies of the modern era: namely that some people are biologically, morally, psychologically, and intellectually more human than others. The texts in which the question of race is most central to my analysis date from the late nineteenth-century Louisiana, a context in which questions of race and space acutely impacted nearly every aspect of both public and private life. As Toni Morrison points out:

How could one speak of profit, economy, labor, progress, suffragism, Christianity, the frontier, the formation of new states, the acquisition of new lands, education, transportation (freight and passengers), neighborhoods, the military—of almost anything a country concerns itself with—without having as a referent, at the heart of the discourse, at the heart of definition, the presence of Africans and their descendants? (50)

Race and racializing thought could not help but mark these texts, given the context of their enunciation. As such, representations of race and space will be crucial to my examination of these works.

Literary representations of race

The development of racializing thought is inextricably linked to questions of how and in what context racialized Others appear in cultural production. With regards to the production of literary texts, do they occupy the role of speaking subjects or passive objects? Within the fictional worlds they inhabit, do they possess any individuality or agency? Are they portrayed as intrinsically different from other characters? If so, do these differences seem biologically or socially determined? How might the context of enunciation of a text inform our understanding of

these questions? All of these questions are crucial to any mindful examination of literary representations of race.

Given the complete lack of nineteenth-century Francophone texts written by women of color, it is hardly surprising that Marie Augustin and Sidonie de La Houssaye, the authors of the texts under consideration that deal most directly with such questions, were both white women.¹⁸ This context of enunciation is complicated in that it implies multiple layers of uneven power relations: white women, while enjoying greater social capital than women of color, often found themselves marginalized from dominant discourse. Such a position requires us to examine the sociopolitical implications, both of how white people use racialized others as objects of their own discourse and how women's unequal participation in such discourse might complicate that objectification.

In *Playing in the Dark* (1993), Toni Morrison explores how white Americans constructed their own identities in contrast to what she refers to as “an Africanist presence” (5). She defines Africanism as “a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (6-7). According to Morrison, Africanism plays an important role in American cultural production, providing white Americans with an Other against whom they can define themselves:

Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desireable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny. (52)

This concept of Africanism is germane to my exploration of Louisiana women's writing for several reasons. First, it underscores the distinction between African people and their

¹⁸ This focus on the work of white women is not intentional. Rather, as I discuss in chapter three, it results from the lack of French-language texts produced by women of color during the nineteenth century.

descendents and the diverse cultures that they have generated on American soil, and the discursive construction of Africanism that has been so crucial to the development of American literature. Secondly, Morrison explores American literature as a discourse engaged in a process of becoming and self-definition, highlighting the role that Africanism plays in that process. A similar process is clearly at work in the works of Louisiana Francophone writers, who grapple with questions of gender, national, and linguistic identity within a racially segregated society. Here, however, is where the limits of Morrison's framework begin to emerge. Morrison refers to Africanism as one pole of a Manichean binary, allowing white authors to draw clear demarcations between such broad concepts as slavery and freedom, ugliness and beauty, helplessness and power, or damnation and innocence. The implied American self of this previous quote is not only white, but Anglo-Saxon and male. How might references to Africanist Others operate when the speaking subject fails to meet these latter criteria? My critical approach to these works must allow for a greater diversity of speaking subjects and for more complicated discursive contexts.

Towards this end Reina Lewis' *Gendering Orientalism* (1996) proves helpful as it points out that production of Orientalist discourse was not the sole province of white men. Women also participated in Orientalism and in colonialism, and their social positions as gendered and classed subjects informed their contributions. As Lewis argues:

... in a period marked by heightened imperial activity and increasing female participation in the cultural sphere, the interaction of the identificatory relational terms of race and gender could produce positions from which to enunciate alternative representations of racial difference. Exploring the gender-specific discursive pressures on the production and reception of women's representation of the Orient will allow us to undercut the mastery that usually accrued to the Western viewer's position and use the tensions in women's colonial utterances to highlight the tensions in imperial subjectivity as a whole, thereby allowing a reconceptualization of the workings of power and knowledge in the domain of gender. (15)

Lewis thus contends that women did participate in Orientalist cultural production and that the female Western gaze operated differently than that of the white men with whom we generally associate Orientalist art. For example, we often interpret nineteenth-century paintings of odalisques and harems as a simultaneous feminization of the Orient and its subordination to white (male) mastery. In women's cultural production however, the gendering of power relations is often less straightforward, and the intersection of racial and gendered roles demands closer analysis.¹⁹

A similar intersection occurs in Louisiana women's literature: Marie Augustin and Sidonie de La Houssaye work from a discursive position informed both by racial dominance and gender discrimination. They operate in the same discursive field as their male counterparts, drawing on the same tropes, stereotypes and commonplaces. However, the difference of their position within that discursive field leads them to reappropriate these elements of discourse, assigning them different significance and reinterpreting them according to their own interests and perspectives. This unique position makes study of the representation of women of color particularly interesting in this context.²⁰ Representations of such women feature prominently in these texts, often prompting authors to draw on common racial stereotypes of physical beauty and uncontrollable sexuality in their descriptions. However, rather than uncritically perpetuating these stereotypes, the authors in question reappropriate and subvert them, thus complicating racial hierarchies.

¹⁹ As an example of women's Orientalist cultural production, Lewis cites a passage in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* in which the British heroine, upon viewing a painting of an odalisque, does not react to the voluptuousness of the subject, but rather critiques her idleness and nudity. Lewis argues that this passage "is a judgment encoded in the terms of a feminine positionality that is structurally dependent on, at the same time as it is productive of, a concept of femininity that is white and Western" (37).

²⁰ I am here using the nineteenth-century Louisiana acceptance of the term, namely someone of mixed African and European (and possibly Native American) descent. The same definition applies to the term's French equivalent *gens de couleur*.

Authors' use of stereotypes is thus a significant component of literary representations of race. By stereotypes, I refer to what Patricia Hill Collins calls controlling images, namely symbols operating in a discursive field, "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (69). Such tropes simplify the representation of the Other, reducing their objects to two-dimensional representatives of their ascriptive identities, devoid of individuality or agency. While political correctness in Western society urges us to avoid stereotyped language wherever possible, its presence continues to transfuse popular discourse. Mireille Rosello has addressed this issue, pointing out the intimidating staying power of stereotypes:

Stereotypes are wonderfully successful bits and pieces of language; they are memorable. They may be compared, studied in parallel with rhyming poetry, advertisements, nursery rhymes, and so on. Their memorability is directly linked to their timelessness; a vicious circle develops whereby memorability leads to timelessness, which in turn, because human cultures hoard the past, increases memorability. (35)

Stereotypes can become terrifyingly endemic to popular discourse, informing how we perceive and think about other people. As Rosello points out, reasoned argument has very little effect on this phenomenon. As mentioned previously with regard to the capacity of racializing thought to outlive its pseudo-scientific underpinnings, the negative associations that derive from racist representations of groups of people often survive long after those representations have been disproven. Because of this resistance to outright refutation, Rosello suggests that the most effective way of dealing with stereotypes is not to denounce them directly, but to destabilize them through reappropriative tactics à la Certeau: "On the one hand, it is impossible not to be traversed by the flow of stereotypes that the dominant culture teaches us (in school, for example); on the other hand, the knowledge of how such stereotypes work is the precondition of reappropriative activities" (64). My aim in identifying the stereotypes employed by Louisiana

francophone authors is not to label these authors as racist or anti-racist, but to explore how such authors reappropriate and thereby destabilize these tropes.

Of Creoles and Creolization

It is important, at this point, to address my use of the term ‘Creole,’ as its meaning has been the point of some contention, especially in Louisiana. Simply searching the word in Webster’s Third New International Dictionary unleashes three headings and a total of eleven definitions. The term has been alternately used to refer to people, languages, cultures, food, crops, and, more recently, the Creolist poetics and politics of such scholars as Édouard Glissant. Among the definitions for “Creole,” when used as a noun, one finds both “a white person descended from early French or sometimes Spanish settlers of the southern U.S. esp. in the Gulf states and preserving a characteristic form of French speech and culture” and “a person of mixed French and Negro or Spanish and Negro descent speaking a dialect of French or Spanish.” Much of the controversy surrounding the term in the context of Louisiana society stems from the extent to which it has been racialized over the centuries. In her study of Louisiana social and racial classifications, Virginia Domínguez traces the use of the term back to the early eighteenth century, originally used to refer to the children of European settlers and later to children of mixed African and European descent. With the purchase of Louisiana by the United States and the subsequent influx of American, German, and Irish immigrants, the label “Creole” became politicized as it identified the *ancienne population* in contradistinction to the newcomers who soon overshadowed them numerically and economically. Domínguez notes that, “Classification as Creole or American soon became, for sociopolitical purposes, more significant than classification by economic status. *Gens de couleur* were not excluded from the Creole

category—nor were descendants of the Acadian settlers in southern and southwestern Louisiana” (125-6).²¹

Though the term had become politicized, it did not yet carry the heavy racial connotations that were to burden it after the Civil War. With the establishment of a rigid binary racial hierarchy during the Jim Crow Era that followed Reconstruction, the racial ambivalence of the term “Creole” became a point of social anxiety. Berndt Ostendorf has remarked that the term had, by that time, become associated with miscegenation: “This made the white Creole population defensive... They could either drop the term like a hot potato... or try to limit its semantic range to pure white European heritage” (112). This anxiety led to what Joseph Tregle has referred to as the “creole myth” (180), according to which “to be creole was to be white” (173). A common means of circumventing conflict between this definition and the broader versions that preceded it has been to stress the more general meaning of the adjective Creole as opposed to the noun: “Anything imported to and raised in the New World may be called Creole, including Creole sugarcane or Creole horses... The noun was reserved for whites and denoted essence, whereas the adjective could be attached to any person, animal or plant that had been nurtured in situ” (Ostendorf, 106). This definition came into full force with historian Charles Gayarré’s address at Tulane entitled “The Creoles of History and the Creoles of Romance” (1885), in which he referred to Creole identity as “a title of honor—a title which could only be the birthright of the superior white race” (294).

Despite this new exclusion, Creoles of color continued to refer to themselves as Creoles. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall points out that ascriptive racial identity was a point of importance for this group as well:

²¹ It is worth noting that Désirée Martin, the only Cajun writer from this period under consideration in this study, uses the words ‘Acadian’ and ‘Creole’ almost interchangeably: “Loin de rougir de sa descendance, le créole devrait y reconnaître un titre plein de traditions qui l’oblige et de souvenirs qui lui font exemple” (54).

By the nineteenth century, the mixed-blood Creoles of Louisiana who acknowledged their African descent emphasized and took greatest pride in their French ancestry. They defined Creole to mean racially mixed, enforced endogamous marriage among their own group, and distinguished themselves from and looked down upon blacks and Anglo-Afroamericans, though their disdain stemmed from cultural as well as racial distinctions. A recent study indicates that in New Orleans during the 1970s, the designations "black" and "creole" were irreconcilable. These young Afro-New Orleanians embraced a definition of creole that is racially rather than culturally defined, as well as being a-historical. (158)

As the aforementioned plethora of often-contradictory dictionary definitions would suggest, no universally accepted use of the term "Creole" has since been established.

In addition to the frequently contested demographic definition of the term, "Creole" is often used as a linguistic term. *Webster's* offers the following definition for a Creole language:

a language resulting from the acquisition by a subordinate group of the language of a dominant group, with phonological changes, simplification of grammar, and an admixture of the subordinate group's vocabulary, and serving as the mother tongue of its speakers, not solely for communication between people of different languages

This definition leads us to yet another controversy, as many Louisianians who thought of themselves as Creole (both white and non-white) prided themselves in their use of continental French. A Creole, very similar to that spoken in Haiti, did exist in Louisiana. Though its presence has widely been attributed to "the slaves of refugees from St. Domingue who came to Louisiana at the beginning of the nineteenth century" (Domínguez 210), Hall asserts that the language derives from the first generation of Africans brought to Louisiana by the Atlantic slave trade in the first half of the eighteenth century. Both Domínguez and Hall state that this Creole was, in fact, widely understood and spoken by Louisianians of all ethnic backgrounds, though Domínguez notes that its use in the public sphere was limited, due to negative connotations ascribed to it: "To both [white and colored Creoles], it was a source of amusement, garbled French, though to colored Creoles it was also a source of embarrassment. Most strove publicly

always to speak ‘perfect French’ so as not to be confused with the rural, uneducated blacks who spoke Creole” (211). Within Louisiana’s complex literary hierarchy, Creole commands the least social prestige. Examining nineteenth-century authors’ use of Creole or their attribution of it to certain characters provides insights into the social landscape that these writers established in their works and will occupy our attention at several points during this study. More recently, Deborah Clifton’s creation of original poetry entirely in Creole defies this linguistic hierarchy, as I will show in chapter four.

Use of the term in the context of Francophone studies is further complicated by the emergence of Creolist poetics and politics over the past several decades. This movement, established by late twentieth-century Caribbean writers and thinkers, celebrates the dynamic cultures that have originated from the intense and often violent interactions between different groups in that region. Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant have defined *créolité* as “l’agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel, des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques et levantins, que le joug de l’Histoire a réunis sur le même sol” (26). This definition does not specify a particular set of cultural traits or practices, but rather points out a process or a series of interactions. Similarly, Édouard Glissant defines *créolité* as “une rencontre d’éléments culturels venus d’horizons absolument divers et... qui réellement s’imbriquent et se confondent l’un dans l’autre pour donner quelque chose d’absolument imprévisible” (*Introduction* 15). According to Glissant, the Caribbean basin (which in Glissant’s work includes the Gulf coast of the United States, especially New Orleans) is geographically conducive to such productive intercultural encounters, but these transformative processes can and do occur anywhere: “le monde se créolise” (15). The analytical advantages of studying creolization as a process have been pointed out in many branches of area studies, including those

regarding New Orleans and Louisiana. As Ostendorf points out, “In the context of Louisiana studies creolization refers to the fusion of fragmented traditions into a new and ongoing cultural pluralism, whereas the term ‘Creole’ instantly evokes the strange genealogical career of the Creoles of New Orleans” (121). While underscoring the tricky division between “Creole” as a demographic label and “Creolization” as a cultural process, Ostendorf advocates the study of this latter phenomenon as a means of understanding the complex “cultural give-and-take over a long period of time” (122) that has structured Louisiana’s history and continues to influence the totality of its society.

Given this multiplicity of possible meanings of “Creole” or “creolization,” what will these terms be understood to mean in the context of this dissertation? Given that the term Creole in the eighteenth and through much of the nineteenth centuries included people of both European and African heritage, I do intend to use this broader, non-racialized sense of the term. The noun Creole will refer to any inhabitant of Louisiana of French, Spanish, and/or African descent, in contradistinction to the American, German, and Irish immigrants who settled in the region during the nineteenth century. In situations where an individual’s perceived racial identity is pertinent to our understanding of these authors or their works, additional markers (such as “white” or “of color”) will be added. When I refer to the Creole language as used within the texts in question, the subtleties of its usage, namely that many people who considered themselves Creole rarely used the language, must be born in mind.

Project Overview

I organize this project both chronologically and thematically. As mentioned previously, the main social hierarchies with which these authors engage are those of gender, race, and language. While these hierarchies certainly intersect, each chapter includes a particular emphasis on one of the three. I begin with Marie Madeleine Hachard, one of the Ursuline nuns who

traveled to Louisiana as missionaries in 1727, and Désirée Martin, a defrocked nun who returned to her home in Grande Pointe, Louisiana after leaving a convent in 1874. A year after Hachard's arrival in the New World, her father published her letters and narrative of her journey under the title *Relation du Voyages des dames religieuses ursulines de Rouen à la Nouvelle Orléans*. Martin also ostensibly addressed her work *Veillées d'une sœur ou le destin d'un brin de mousse* (1877) to a limited readership within her family, namely her brother's children. As Martin did not have the necessary funds to publish the project herself, members of her community contributed to the effort and the work did not appear in print until after her death. These authors faced both social and geographic obstacles to the publication of their work given the patriarchal power structures at play and the early colonial and/or rural contexts in which they worked. I examine how these women navigate between the controlling institutions of the family and the convent to give voice to their social concerns.

I then examine the series of novels *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans* by Sidonie de la Houssaye and *Le Macandal* by Marie Augustin. Both works draw on problematic gendered racial stereotypes in the construction of their central characters, placing the alleged voluptuousness of the mixed-heritage woman at the heart of their narratives. However, through their adherence to eighteenth- rather than nineteenth-century racial norms, the extent to which gender and racial hierarchies intersect in their novels, and their critique of the patriarchal power undergirding racial hierarchies, both authors diverge significantly from the violent racism of the post-Reconstruction era. I argue that the profound ambivalence of these authors' recourse to gendered racial stereotypes problematizes the patriarchal and racist ideology that dominated post-Reconstruction Louisiana.

Finally, I examine *Le Blues braillant* by Beverly Clifton and *À Cette Heure, la louve* by Deborah Clifton, both published in 1999. These texts appeared in the aftermath of the Cajun Renaissance, wherein Louisianans began to resist the social, political, and economic suppression of French, which had silenced Francophone literary production in the state through most of the twentieth century. Matherne and Clifton distinguish themselves through the persistent multilingualism of their texts. Through their use of English, French, and (in Clifton's case) Creole in a single textual space, these authors simultaneously engage with and contest the multi-tiered linguistic hierarchy that has structured Louisiana since the beginning of the twentieth century. Rather than critiquing this hierarchy directly or seeking to return to a pre-Anglicized *bon vieux temps*, I show that Matherne and Clifton draw on extensive code-switching and humor, thereby enacting a Glissantian *détour*. These tactics enable them, not only to challenge the linguistic hierarchy that would completely remove Louisiana French from the public sphere, but also to demonstrate how asymmetrical power relations of gender and race undergird this diglossia.

Whether undermining patriarchal norms, racial hierarchies, or linguistic hegemonies, I argue that these authors, marginalized as they are from the literary canon, engage critically with the central questions of both Francophone and American literature.

CHAPTER TWO : THE CLOISTERED TRAJECTORIES OF MARIE HACHARD AND DESIREE MARTIN

In 1727, Ursuline novice Marie Hachard wrote the following words to her father: “Vous m’avez témoigné, mon cher père, souhaiter d’avoir une relation de notre voyage. C’est un effet de votre bon cœur de prendre intérêt à ce qui nous regarde, s’en est un de ma reconnaissance de vous contenter tout ce que je pourrai” (41). These words travelled across the Atlantic, from the New Orleans convent in which Hachard wrote them to her father, a city official in Rouen, who published them under the title *Relation du voyage des dames religieuses ursulines de Rouen à la Nouvelle-Orléans* in 1728. The message implies an ambiguous triangular relationship between father, daughter, and convent. Over one hundred years later, Désirée Martin, a defrocked nun in rural Louisiana, included these words in the preface to a work dedicated to her brother and his children: “Eh! Quoi! Parce qu’il m’est défendu d’être ingrate, faut-il pour cela m’imposer le silence absolu sur les grâces du ciel et les bienfaits de mes semblables? Non, mille fois non, je ne fléchirai certainement pas devant une telle procuration, car en aucune manière personne n’a reçu le droit de paralyser une plume qui ne parle que pour bénir son Dieu, sa famille, et son destin” (35). The defiant tone suggests that Martin’s motives for writing extend well beyond the bounds of her family. Her friends published this work, entitled *Veillées d’une sœur: ou le Destin d’un brin de mousse* in 1877, after Martin’s death (Tinker 343). Both Marie Hachard’s letters and Désirée Martin’s *veillées* consist of first person narratives, ostensibly intended for members of their immediate family. However, both works eventually made their way to a much broader audience, allowing these women to express their

concerns regarding the secular communities in which they lived. These intricate contexts of enunciation illustrate the restrictions of women's writing in both colonial New Orleans and rural nineteenth-century Louisiana, and the circuitous routes by which women managed to circumvent them. Subject as they were to the control of the patriarchal family order, the cloister, and society writ large, Hachard and Martin used their liminal position with regards to all three institutions to navigate between them and participate in public debates usually off-limits to women of their respective classes.

Seeking a Site of Enunciation

In this chapter, I examine Marie Hachard and Désiré Martin's indirect routes to publications as trajectories through discursive space, to be considered alongside these women's journeys through physical space. I contend that these authors' access to both discursive and geometric space is conditioned by their gendered position in society. The question of how women occupy physical space has come under scrutiny in recent scholarship. Marion Young, for example, takes as her starting point, differences typically observed between the physiological comportment of girls and boys in sports activities. She notes that gestures associated with "throwing like a girl" involve taking up less space than that occupied by a boy performing the same action:

[The space] that is *physically* available to the feminine body is frequently of greater radius than the space that she uses and inhabits. Feminine existence appears to posit an existential enclosure between herself and the space surrounding her, in such a way that the space that belongs to her and is available to her grasp and manipulation is constricted and the space beyond is not available to her movement. (40)

Young attributes these differences to the ambiguous situation of women in a patriarchal society; wherein they are simultaneously subjects (capable of asserting their will upon their environment) and objects (subject to being acted on by others). This implicit threat of invasion leads the

feminine subject to delimit space as her own, thereby “projecting some small area in which she can exist as a free subject” (45). They thus limit their own motility and confine themselves to smaller spaces than those of their male counterparts.

I argue that this limitation of women’s motility occurs in discursive as well as in geometric space. This discursive space is grounded in what Bourdieu would refer to as social space, namely the “*lieu de la coexistence de positions sociales, de points mutuellement exclusifs, qui, pour leurs occupants, sont au principe de points de vue*” (157). This definition holds that the social space in which an individual evolves is inscribed into their physical awareness of and responses to the world around them (or *habitus*), such that individual dispositions and social space are mutually constitutive. Viewed in terms of Young’s analysis, female agents’ motility and relation to the space around them is a form of gendered *habitus*. I contend that this enclosure of feminine space operates in discursive fields as well.

We can thus assert that the patriarchal spaces of eighteenth-century France and nineteenth-century rural Louisiana constituted Hachard and Martin as social agents and therefore both informed and constricted their possibilities for action within that field. In terms of discursive agency, the parameters of this social space would condition how, to whom, and on what subject they could address their works. Such restrictions would not necessarily be enacted through statist intervention but through social norms and expectations. Complicity to such expectations conditions an individual’s access to discursive space, such that directly flouting them is impractical if not unthinkable.

Hachard and Martins’ respective positions within the social spaces they occupied were highly precarious. Neither could fully claim membership in any major social institution, such as the church or the family or the government. Hachard is merely a novice, not having yet taken her

vows within the Ursuline Convent. Furthermore, the Convent itself, though officially endorsed by the church and colonial officials, maintained ambiguous or even fraught relationships with both institutions. The founding members of the New Orleans convent, having abandoned the convents in which they took their vows, also abandoned the financial endowments provided by their families, which served as one of the primary means of support for most European religious communities. This loss put the new convent in an extremely precarious situation, making them highly dependent on the often insufficient funds provided by the colony and thus vulnerable to exploitation by its officials. As Emily Clark explains:

Female religious customarily owned and managed property in France, but the ultimate source of that property lay embedded in the matrix of patriarchy. The financial foundations of French convents rested on dowries provided by the nuns' fathers. The rules of their order forced the Louisiana missionaries to forfeit their dowries to their French convents upon departing for America. The absence of dowry capital coupled with an unreliable tuition revenue stream in the sparsely populated colony turned the nuns into aggressive entrepreneurs during the early decades of the New Orleans convent. (*Masterless Mistresses* 196-7)

Unable to rely on ties with patriarchal society or the Catholic Church the colonial administration, the New Orleans Ursulines were driven to find new tactics in order to remain self-sufficient.

Martin's case is even more severe. In nineteenth-century America, monastic life did not enjoy significant popular support. In most of the predominantly protestant United States, female celibacy went against the more common ideals of domesticity and Republican motherhood.

Popular representations of Catholic nuns were hardly complimentary:

Communities of women religious often took the brunt of anti-Catholic prejudice. ... Alternatively seen either as captive, docile minions and concubines for male clergy or as uptight "abnormal" women, rejected by males as unfit for marriage and motherhood and allowed to run amuck as "independent" women with masculine tendencies, American sisters had to cope with gender, religious and ethnic bigotry in a patriarchal society that limited the power and aspirations of many people according to their sex, race, church affiliation, and native birthright. (Coburn and Smith 42-3)

Such suspicions and stereotypes derived from the prejudices of a patriarchal and protestant society that offered no proper place for women outside the bounds of heterosexual marriage. Such ideology suggested that women were incapable of self-sufficiency. As Emily Clark points out, female religious communities proved otherwise “drawing aside the ideological veil of domesticity to reveal the capacity and ambition of American women” (*Masterless Mistresses* 6). Even in predominantly Catholic Southern Louisiana, anti-clerical sentiment and accompanying suspicions of monastic life were common. Martin thus committed two major affronts to public opinion. Having already defied patriarchal conventions by opting out of the institution of marriage, she went on to leave the convent and thus no longer enjoyed the protection of the Order of the Sacred Heart. Furthermore, at the age of forty-three she had no hope of marrying, leaving her a female free agent in a male-dominated society. According to May Waggoner, Martin insisted upon maintaining her independence:

Farouchement indépendante, Désirée refusa d’être à la charge de son frère, qui avait déjà douze bouches à nourrir. Elle tenait surtout à se servir de son éducation pour se rendre utile à sa communauté. Dans ce but, [son frère] Michel lui fit bâtir une petite maison divisée en deux parties: elle habita dans l’une et donna des cours dans l’autre. (10)

With neither worldly possessions, nor social status, nor institutional membership to rely on, Martin’s existence was precarious, requiring considerable hard work and ingenuity to maintain.

Such tenuous positions as that of a novice in a struggling new convent in a struggling new colony or that of a former nun in a patriarchal rural town did not offer copious publication opportunities. Even if a New Orleans newspaper had existed in 1727, it would hardly be the place of a cloistered nun to submit an editorial about the difficulties facing her congregation. While late nineteenth-century Louisiana boasted several French-language newspapers such as *L’Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans* and *Le Mesaschébé*, Martin, with her limited financial means and social connections, was hardly a primary candidate for publication.

These exigencies raise the question of how individuals occupying such highly circumscribed social spaces as Hachard and Martin could achieve authorship. The definition and validity of the very notion of authorship have undergone tremendous upheaval over the past century. Following on the heels of Barthe's declaration of the death of the author, Foucault posited that the author serves as a function through which texts might be categorized. However, some feminist scholars have found this approach problematic, as it fails to address "the asymmetrical demands generated by different writing identities, male and female, or, perhaps more usefully, canonical or hegemonic and noncanonical or marginal" (Miller 105). As Foucault himself has acknowledged, "il y a dans une civilisation comme la nôtre un certain nombre de discours qui sont pourvus de la fonction 'auteur', tandis que d'autres en sont dépourvus" ("Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" 798). Here, Foucault refers to various modes of discourse, differentiating between literary production on the one hand and personal correspondence and legal documents on the other. The difficulty with this distinction is that it ignores differential access to privileged, "authorial" modes of discourse, implicitly confirming rather than desacralizing a literary canon, what Nancy Miller refers to as "the (new) monolith of anonymous textuality" (104).

As Cheryl Walker has pointed out, neither the traditional definition of the author as a transcendent creator of literary texts nor the decontextualized approach to texts as free-floating fields of discourse is adequate to the study of hitherto marginalized literary production:

In fact, what we need, instead of a theory of the death of the author, is a new concept of authorship that does not naively assert that the writer is an originating genius, creating aesthetic objects outside of history, but does not diminish the importance of difference and agency in the responses of women writers to historical formations. (560)

This approach to authorship recognizes the individual as occupying a position within a specific social and discursive field and examines how this positionality informs literary production. I place such emphasis on the historical context of enunciation because these exigencies both limited and informed Martin and Hachard's writing.

Hachard and Martin's texts did not follow straight, official, or well-worn routes to publication. Rather, their meandering travels circumnavigate obstacles erected by class and gender hierarchies. These indirect trajectories towards a viable site of enunciation enact a *geste cheminatoire* as defined by Certeau. Heedless of the panoptic perspective of someone standing atop of a skyscraper in the city, Certeau's pedestrian navigates the city streets designed by others and constructs her own meaning and story over the course of her interactions and peregrinations:

La geste cheminatoire joue avec les organisations spatiales, si panoptiques soient-elles: elle ne leur est ni étrangère (elle ne se passe pas ailleurs) ni conforme (elle n'en reçoit pas son identité). Elle y crée de l'ombre et de l'équivoque. Elle y insinue la multitude de ses références et citations (modèles sociaux, usages culturels, coefficients personnels). Elle y est elle-même l'effet de rencontres et d'occasions successives qui ne cessent de l'altérer et d'en faire le blason de l'autre, c'est-à-dire le colporteur de ce qui surprend, traverse ou séduit ses parcours. Ces divers aspects instaurent une rhétorique. Ils la définissent même. (152)

Certeau delineates between the technocratic *lieu* as might be perceived on a map or from a skyscraper and the *espace* navigated by the pedestrian. This experience of place reconstitutes it as space as the pedestrian attributes her own meanings to it, eschewing technocratic organization and creating her own trajectory. Understood in terms of discursive practice, the pedestrian creates her own narrative, sometimes subverting dominant norms in order to achieve her own ends, but always acting within the parameters of discursive space.

Like de Certeau's pedestrian, Hachard and Martin thus take up the challenge of assuming discursive agency within the patriarchal frameworks of church, family, and community that structured their respective lives. Both authors make use of modest, first person genres, creating

documents that do not ostensibly exceed cultural bounds of female comportment. However, even the most superficial reading of these letters of a dutiful daughter to her concerned father or the “evening visit” morality tales written by an aunt for the education of her nieces and nephews shows that these texts had broader concerns and a wider audience in mind. Hachard argues passionately for the work of her Order in the New World, while Martin vehemently defends her life decisions against the aspersions of local gossips. This chapter traces this quest for a site of enunciation, showing how women work within and between socially accepted frameworks to claim their own space in the world.

From the Family to the Convent

Marie Hachard and Désirée Martin grew up in remarkably different settings. According to Hachard’s obituary letter, her bourgeois parents “neglected nothing to provide the most Christian education” (116). This middle class upbringing most likely included a convent education. Martin, however, as the daughter of a struggling widow in rural Louisiana, received only what education her mother could provide at home whenever time permitted:

[...] notre mère, restée veuve et pauvre à vingt-cinq ans, ne pouvait songer pour nous à une éducation de college et de couvent. [...] Quant à moi, dès que les premières lueurs de la raison se firent jour, ma mère voulut elle-même me consacrer, chaque matin, quelques heures de leçons. (99-100)

It is not clear whether Martin enjoyed any formal education whatsoever before joining the Convent of the Sacred Heart as an orphan at the age of sixteen.²²

These class differences had other implications for the two women. Hachard’s obituary letter indicates that her family had at one point arranged an advantageous marriage for her, but the eighteen-year-old girl had refused, declaring her desire to become a nun. The chronicler notes that it was only after being rejected by the Sisters of St. Francis and with “many tears” that

²² Lacunae in Martin’s education do occasionally surface in *Veillées d’une sœur*, such as when she dates the expulsion of the Acadians from Nova Scotia to the year 1754 rather than 1755.

Hachard managed to acquire her family's permission to join the Ursuline mission to Louisiana at the age of twenty-one. Indeed, at one point in Hachard's letters, she thanks her father effusively for: "l'heureux consentement que vous avez donné à mon départ, contre l'avis de tant de personnes qui s'opposaient aux desseins de Dieu" (26). One of these alleged opponents of God's will appears to have been Hachard's brother. Hachard bemoans the lack of news from "mon frère le religieux" on several occasions, at one point bluntly asking her father why he has failed to write:

Seroit-il fâché contre moi ou me croît-il fâchée contre lui? Il est vrai que pour me détourner mon dessein, il me dit avant mon départ bien des choses qui ne devoient pas me faire plaisir, mais j'ai regardé tout cela comme une épreuve et même comme une marque de son amitié. (28)

These sentiments indicate some residual tension within the family that Hachard attempted to resolve from across the Atlantic.

Martin faced an entirely different struggle during her teenage years. Her mother, having grown increasingly religious since the death of Désirée's sister Elise, became insistent in her desire for the young woman to join a convent. Martin, for her part, did not feel called to religious life. Her anguished deliberations over whether to please her mother or to follow her own inclinations form the subject of two *veillées* entitled "Les Combats du Dévouement" and "Seigneur, que voulez-vous que je fasse?":

D'une part, je me reprochais de troubler les belles espérances que donnait à ma mère le printemps de ma vie; je n'aurais pas voulu voir se former, par ma faute, un seul pli sur son front, et je craignais de trahir, par une opposition prononcée, les sentiments chrétiens qu'elle m'avait inspirés; d'autre part, je ne me croyais pas appelée à la vocation religieuse. Cependant, par la force des choses, il n'y avait pas de milieu; il me fallait faire un choix entre les deux partis. (151)

Martin does not elaborate as to why her mother was so intent on this life course for her, but May Waggoner has suggested that the reason may have been economic as well as spiritual. Pointing out Martin's repeated references to the reduced financial circumstances of the family and to her

own headstrong nature (earning herself the childhood nickname of “Mademoiselle de Trop” 91), Waggoner surmises that it would have been exceedingly difficult for her to find an advantageous marriage. Religious life would at least offer the young woman an education and protect her from the extreme financial vulnerability her mother had experienced (Waggoner 18). Whatever the reason, after several *veillées* including a three-league pilgrimage to the local hermitage, Martin bowed to her mother’s wishes. She entered the Convent of the Sacred Heart as an orphan (as her father was already deceased) allowing her to study before taking her vows. Thus, whether characterized by defiance or by grudging submission, both Hachard’s and Martin’s respective relationships to the religious orders in which they would spend most of their adult lives were informed by contentious familial relationships.

From the Cloister to the Family

Neither Hachard nor Martin left these relationships at the door upon their entry to religious life. Hachard corresponded with her father as regularly as was possible throughout her novitiate, providing information about the colony and its development in addition to keeping him up to date on her own health and experiences. This communication was only possible until Hachard formally took her vows, requiring her to submit more completely to the intense regulations of the cloister and cut ties with her earthly family. Martin went further, choosing to leave the convent altogether at the age of forty-three, long after the death of her mother, and returning to live near her brother and his family in Grande Pointe. Again, Martin’s ability to communicate with her family was contingent on her ability to leave religious life. She could not be a sister to her brother and a Sister of the Sacred Heart simultaneously.

This prescribed severance of family ties was a normal part of conventual living as set forth by the definition of *clausura* imposed by the Council of Trent until the twentieth-century second Vatican council. Post-reformation Catholicism stressed that the life of a religious woman

was to be one of solitude and reflection. She was to be dead to her family and separated from the community. In her *Social History of the Cloister* (2001), Elizabeth Rapley describes in detail the extent to which the principle of *clausura* constricted the lives of religious women:

Clausura was to be enforced by the church authorities on pain of excommunication. This meant that the walls of women's monasteries were to be high enough to close off any view, either from within or without. The entrances were to be locked and double-locked, their keys remaining in the possession of senior officers of the monastery. Spaces where the nuns came close to the outside world—the parlour, the church—were to be protected by narrow-meshed grilles. No men, not even priests, might enter the enclosure except for the most pressing reasons. Where female pensionnaires were allowed, strict limitations were imposed: only girls from five to eighteen years of age were eligible, and they were to leave the convent rarely and then under the most rigorous supervision. Mature women had no place within the cloisters, since their worldliness constituted an unacceptable temptation for the nuns. In other words, religious women were to be shielded from all disturbing influences. Trent left a lasting image of nuns as frail, susceptible beings whose virtue required heroic protection. (113)

The carceral space of the convent was therefore designed to control religious women's movement and eliminate, insofar as possible, any contact whatsoever with men and isolate them from "the World." The lengths to which many religious communities would go to protect *clausura*, the violation of which would result in excommunication, indicate either a great fear of contamination on the part of the nuns, a fear of feminine disorder on the part of the broader Catholic community, or a mixture of both fears.²³

²³ At first glance, my references to the circumscription of women's geometric and discursive space within the Catholic church might seem to run counter to Foucault's description of how the church's practices of confession led to a proliferation of discourse in the early modern period; hence his famous claim, "L'homme, en Occident, est devenu une bête d'aveu" (*Histoire de la sexualité* 80). The model for this generation of discourse is confession, a highly structured ritual overseen by a male priest. This ritual is circumscribed both geometrically (within the confines of the confessional booth) and discursively (incited and controlled by exclusively male clergy). While all members of the church are subject to and subjectivated by this mode of discourse, its production and diffusion remain under the control of male-dominated ecclesiastic powers. Here, I would argue that Foucault's use of the universal "homme" is significant, as this generation of discourse was effectuated through gendered power structures. As such, though modern power operates through processes of subjectivation, women's access to particular modes of discourse remains tightly circumscribed.

This ethic of confinement resonates strongly with Marion Young's scholarship on how feminine subjects occupy space. Barbara Woshinsky has analyzed the discursive implications of the practice of *clausura* noting that the rhetoric of confinement overlaps significantly with Western concept of what it means to be feminine. As such, the cloister is an ambiguous space, ostensibly limiting the physical and social range afforded its occupants while simultaneously providing them with a space in which they could exert some degree of autonomy:

The fundamental ambiguity of the female space is revealed through this dialectic of containment and privacy. Women only briefly and partially control their own space; and the history of the convent, like other aspects of women's material history, reveals a constant movement from space to space as these dialectics of control shift. (27)

In maintaining this assertion, Woshinsky examines the architectural semiotics of conventual spaces. She notes the succession of barriers to spaces reserved solely for the inmates of religious institutions, creating an emphasis on their interiority and privacy. As Woshinsky points out, "the concentricity characteristic of convent architecture (enclosed spaces within enclosed spaces), while not originally created by or for women, simulates and reinforces feminine gendering" (30). The walled convent thus epitomizes associations of interiority and enclosed spaces with femininity. Cloistered space thus exemplifies, rather than poses an exception to, normative delimitations of feminine space. Both the physical and discursive trajectories of Marie Hachard and Désirée Martin run counter to this feminine/religious ideal, encompassing vast distances and engaging actively with broader communities. This chapter examines how these women utilize the gendered spaces available to them to participate both in the centripetal energy of convent and family and in the centrifugal energies of empire and public discourse.

Admittedly, even in the normal operations of female religious orders, the stipulations of *clausura* proved difficult to maintain and were unequivocally at odds with the primary mission

of many congregations. The Ursulines, for example, having been founded as a teaching order, could not live in isolation from the broader communities in which they worked as missionaries and educators. Though, as Rapley has pointed out, “Physical enclosure could be maintained by a complicated system of locking and unlocking doors, [...] exposure to outside influences could not be avoided as long as children went in and out of the monastery school” (113-4).

Furthermore, the Sisters’ collective livelihood as self-sustaining communities depended on their ability to invest income and manage finances, requiring worldly skills beyond the reach of many non-religious women at the time.

Whatever constraints may have informed the relationship between these women and their families, both writers used works ostensibly addressed to their immediate family to express broader concerns and reach wider audiences. This tactic involved recourse to condensed, intimate genres not likely to make their way into the literary canon. Hachard’s letters to her father vary in length depending on how busy she was and on how much time had elapsed since a France-bound vessel had afforded her an opportunity to send anything. She concludes one letter by admitting that she had written it earlier but, with no outgoing ship at hand, was unable to send it. Her briefest letter, dated January 1728, begins with a hurried assurance that “Je viens d’apprendre que le Vaisseau nommé les deux Frères va partir pour aller en France” (83), offering her an opportunity to wish her family a happy New Year. She devotes the remainder of the missive to a rapid-fire description of recent events in the colony and an enumeration of the convent’s many responsibilities there. Most of her letters include updates on her well-being, inquiries as to the health of her family, and even jokes and teasing remarks about her brother’s deficiencies as a correspondent:

Je suis cependant un peu fâchée contre mon frère de ce qu’il ne m’a point écrit, si c’est une plume qui lui manque qu’il me le dise confidamment [*sic*] et je lui en

envoyerais [*sic*] une, ou si c'est qu'il ait oublié à écrire c'est une autre affaire et je lui prie de raprendre [*sic*], et de me donner par la première occasion de ses nouvelles. (28)

In this sense, Hachard's letters fulfilled the very real and simple function of allowing a young woman far away from home to communicate with her family. To one letter however, as her father had requested, she attached a detailed narrative of her journey from France to the New World, describing all the islands where they stopped for supplies, the mishaps and dangers they encountered at sea, and worst of all, according to Hachard, the horrible language of the sailors. The tone of this narrative, while not entirely devoid of Hachard's usual jocularity, is less personal.²⁴ She does not dwell on references to her family in this document, indicating that she shared her father's desire to have it published. Given the delicate position of the Ursuline convent within colonial New Orleans, Hachard had good reason to share her story and promote her order's Louisiana mission with a wider audience.

Martin on the other hand lived in close proximity to her family when she wrote, eliminating any need for written correspondence. Instead, she refers to the form of her work as *veillées*. In Louisiana French, a *veillée* refers to an evening visit, usually an intimate affair with friends and family,²⁵ and often an occasion for story telling. Like Hachard, Martin offers her writing at the invitation of a patriarch:

Puisque votre père a désiré qu'en forme de veillées, je vous fasse un cours qui vous enseigne quelque chose, vous porte à de bons sentiments et réveille en vous d'heureux instincts qui puissent avoir une salutaire influence sur tous les événements de votre vie, je veux y attacher tout l'intérêt d'une tante dévouée. (44)

²⁴ Examples of this playfulness include Hachard's reference to the nuns' bouts of seasickness as paying their "tribut à la mer" (44) and later her description to their first encounters with Louisiana mosquitoes as their meeting with "Monsieurs les Maringouins" (55).

²⁵ In *Dictionary of Louisiana French*, Kevin Rottet and Albert Valdman offer the following expressions as meaning "to make an evening visit": "aller à la veille, faire la veillée, faire une veillée" (881).

Martin's work thus assumes the form of short stories, mostly only two to three pages long. Each *veillée* narrates an event from Martin's personal history, beginning well before her birth with her ancestors' expulsion from Canada in 1755 and continuing in chronological order to her return to Grande Pointe after leaving the convent.²⁶ Martin diligently appends a moral to each story, such as the value of hard work or of honoring one's parents. Such a text would neatly conform to nineteenth-century models of femininity and domesticity: Martin is providing moral education to children within her own family in the intimate and innocuous context of a *veillée*. As I will point out later however, even a cursory perusal of the content of the work suggests a broader audience and more public purpose for this text.

Tension with the Secular Community

Hachard and Martin both addressed their work to their families as a stepping-stone from which to share their ideas with a broader reading community. In Hachard's case, this tactic was largely motivated by the tenuous circumstances in which she and her sisters found themselves. The relationship between the Ursuline convent and the city of New Orleans was never an easy one. Four years before their arrival, Colonial Commissioner Jacques Delachaise wrote to the Company of the Indies to complain of the conditions in the New Orleans hospital, which, given the prevalence of yellow fever among the soldiers was crucial to the success of the colony.²⁷ The commissioner's solution was to send nuns: "If you could Gentlemen, induce four good gray sisters to come and settle here and take care of the sick, it would be much better" (Delachaise 40). The gray sisters he had in mind were hospitalier nuns, an uncloistered congregation established by Saint Vincent de Paul whose primary work was caring for the sick and the needy.

²⁶ The mass-deportation of French colonists from Nova Scotia by the British is remembered as one of the foundational events in the construction of *Cadien*/Cajun identity. This event and the significance of its inclusion in Martin's text will be discussed in more detail further on. On this see Daigle 110-117 and Farragher 335-392.

²⁷ Hachard mentions the poor conditions of the hospital in her letters as well: "C'est la plus grande pitié du monde de voir le mauvais arrangement qu'il y a, que la plus grande partie des malades meurent faute de secours" (84).

Plagued by disease and unstable relationships with the neighboring American Indian tribes, colonial administrators were far more interested in acquiring basic health care services than in the spiritual welfare of their neighbors or the education of their young women. The Ursulines, on the other hand, were a teaching order, hoping to follow in the footsteps of female missionaries to Canada like Marie de l'Incarnation.²⁸ When no Gray Sisters expressed any interest in coming to Louisiana, aspiring Ursuline missionary Marie Tranchepain and her Jesuit ally Ignace de Beaubois seized their opportunity to establish a convent in the New World. Eventually, the colonists and the Ursulines struck an uneasy bargain requiring the Sisters to operate the New Orleans hospital and allowing them to teach provided this work did not distract them from their medical responsibilities. This compromise offered numerous opportunities for misunderstandings and manipulations, such that the history of the Ursulines in colonial New Orleans was often one of prevarication, distrust, and exploitation. It is small wonder that upon Marie de Tranchepain's death, her obituary writer mentioned "the worry that was caused her by the frequent commerce that she was obliged to have with secular persons, which would have been unbearable to her if she had not been able to obtain profit for the health of the community" (Clark, *Voices from an Early American Convent* 109).

Marie Hachard wrote of such worldly difficulties to her father, often using the "nous" form to explain the Ursulines' point of view in such matters. She described in detail the price gouging perpetrated by colonial officials who enjoyed complete control of supplies sent from the

²⁸ Marie Guyart, also known as Marie de l'Incarnation, was a widowed Ursuline who established a convent in New France. It was from this convent that she wrote letters to her son, which he eventually published. According to Clark, "Marie Guyart's missives stubbornly proclaimed the continuing value of the [Ursuline] order's work, even when it went unrecognized in the world. They conveyed the heroic nature of working to convert the nonbelievers in the New World but pointed out the equally meaningful task of preserving virtue and implanting Catholicism firmly in the hearts and minds of French colonial girls. When the letters were published late in the seventeenth century, they gave new life and purpose to Marie Guyart's order and filled new generations of Ursulines with a desire to undertake the hybrid mission that she had pioneered. But the two small convents of Quebec had as many nuns as they needed." (*Masterless Mistresses* 51)

metropole, driving the Ursulines and many other colonists to live off the land. She proudly emphasized the importance of maintaining clausura in her community:

Nous gardons ici la Clôture avec autant de régularité que les couvents en France; si nous avions le malheur que le Reverend Père de Beaubois fut malade, et qu'il ne pût pas venir nous dire la Messe, nous la perdrons le jour de Pâques, et même pendant six mois plutôt que de sortir de notre Couvent pour l'aller chercher à la Paroisse. (36)

This strict adherence to clausura protected the Ursulines' reputation and also served as the their primary justification for not beginning work in the hospital right away. The makeshift cloister initially provided for the nuns was on the opposite side of town from the hospital; as the nuns refused to leave the cloister, they would not assume medical duties until a permanent cloister adjoining the hospital was built for them. Despite Hachard's assurances that the construction of this cloister was well underway, the nuns would not take residence in it until seven years later. Hachard pointed out other instances in which colonial officials demanded more services of the Ursulines than the congregation was willing or able to provide. One such case was the issue of New Orleans' often-unruly female secular population. Less than a decade after France's attempt to populate Louisiana through the mass deportation of both male and female undesirables (mostly petty criminals), colonial officials struggled to maintain any semblance of social control. Hachard herself lamented the libertine character of Louisiana women, noting that there were enough women of loose morals "pour remplir un refuge" (97). When colonial officials decided that the best solution would be for the Ursulines to operate such a *refuge* in their cloister however, Hachard made no secret of the Sisters' disapproval:

L'intention de Monsieur le commandant et des principaux habitants de cette ville est que nous prenions aussi les filles et les femmes de mauvaise conduite. Cela n'est point encore déterminé de notre côté, mais l'on nous fait entendre que ce serait un grand bien pour la colonie. (84-5)

Such an undertaking as an asylum, for which the Ursulines were unlikely to receive monetary compensation from the Colony, would have strained the already overworked and underfunded nuns to the breaking point. As Hachard points out, “Nous allons suivre tout à la fois les fonctions de quatre différentes communautés, celle des Ursulines, notre premier et principal ordre, celle des Hospitalières, celle de Saint-Joseph et celle du Refuge” (86). Here, Hachard refers to the four main responsibilities her convent undertook in Louisiana: education (Ursulines), caring for the sick (Hospitalières), looking after orphans (St-Joseph) and correcting wayward women (Refuge). In writing to her father about these concerns, Hachard thus managed to circumvent the normal restrictions of *clausura*, which limited the community’s interactions to those with often-unsympathetic colonial officials and clergy members. Taking advantage of her liminal position as a novice, Hachard was able to share the concerns of the fledgling convent with her father and by extension with a broader and hopefully more kindly disposed audience.

In addition to exposing the abuses of the colonial administration, Hachard used her letters to promote her mission and inspire others to join. Given the need to encourage the natural increase of the colony’s population, officials had been careful to stipulate that no Creole woman (here, I mean Creole in the sense of having been born in the colony) could join the Ursuline convent. Hachard noted the Jesuits’ displeasure at the desire of her pupils to join religious life:

Nous avons la consolation de trouver en [nos élèves] beaucoup de docilité et de grandes ardeurs à être instruites et toutes voudraient être religieuses, ce qui n’est pas du goût du Révérend Père de Beaubois, notre très digne supérieur. Il trouve plus à propos qu’elles deviennent des mères chrétiennes afin d’établir dans le pays la religion par leurs bons exemples. (99)

As such, the nuns could not recruit among their students as was common practice in Europe and needed to look abroad for potential new members. In such conditions, the nuns struggled to maintain their numbers while still holding on to hopes of expanding operations by establishing a second convent. Furthermore, the Convent was established at a precarious time for the entire

French colonial venture in Louisiana. John Law's Mississippi bubble had long since burst, attempts to accrue wealth through plantation farming or mineral extraction had been largely unsuccessful, venal officials tended to treat the entire enterprise as a profiteering opportunity, and efforts to bolster the population through the mass exportation of vagrants and criminals had hardly improved the colony's reputation. Clearly, new blood, both secular and clerical, would be needed if the colony were to succeed. Hachard took up the cause with passion, writing enthusiastically of the mild climate, of the incredible fertility of the land, and of the need for skilled laborers to work it. She argues even more fervently of the good the Ursulines were bringing to the community, of how her students clearly thirsted for the moral instruction they brought, and how much she enjoyed her life of missionary service. The concluding paragraph of her *Relation de voyage*, the portion of Hachard's correspondence most clearly intended for publication includes this impassioned call:

Si l'on savait combien il est doux de souffrir pour Jésus-Christ dans l'espérance de lui gagner des âmes qu'il a rachetées au prix de son sang, je ne doute nullement qu'un grand nombre de saintes filles religieuses ne suivent notre exemple et ne s'offrent à l'établissement du couvent de notre ordre [...] Au moins, je ne doute pas qu'elles ne viennent volontiers nous joindre si par la suite, nous avons encore besoin de quelques religieuses pour nous aider à instruire et convertir ces pauvres sauvages. (81)

Drawing inspiration from her spiritual vocation, Hachard used her liminal position as a novice within the structure of the marginalized convent and her relationship with her father to become a public advocate for her sisters and their mission in the New World.

If Hachard wrote to promote the work and interests of her convent, Martin wrote for a more individual purpose. When Martin returned to the village of Grande Pointe in 1874, she faced a barrage of rumors. The question of why Martin had left the convent provided fertile ground for the local gossips, leading to the circulation of increasingly fanciful rumors:

Les premiers visiteurs qui constatèrent le triste état de ma santé pensèrent que j'étais venue pour me rétablir ou pour mourir parmi les miens. Quelques juges de plus loin dirent que j'avais perdu l'esprit. Leurs voisins, sans les contredire, ajoutèrent que j'avais été expulsée pour cause de *tête exaltée*. D'autres, se disant mieux informés et paraissant au courant de mes affaires comme s'ils venaient directement de chez le notaire, plaignaient ma sottise d'avoir refusé un don de \$4,000 offert par la supérieure. Enfin, il fallait bien remplir les colonnes destinées au feuilleton! (263)

Martin counters these rumors both through direct confrontation and through more subtle processes of self-fashioning. If the message of her *veillées* is more individualist than Hachard's, it is hardly less intricate.

The question of how rumors circulate and gain traction has been dealt with from a sociological perspective by Edgar Morin in *La Rumeur d'Orléans* (1969). This work analyzes the spread and eventual suppression of rumors in the titular city, erroneously accusing a local Jewish retailer of drugging women in his changing rooms in order to sell them to the sex trade. As Morin points out, the initial impetus for the generation of these rumors lay in its exhumation of taboo subject material (sex and drugs) rather than in anti-Semitism. However, as the rumor spread and met with resistance, old stereotypes of Jewish perfidy surfaced to give the myth staying power:

Il fallait les conditions que nous avons énumérées—et tenté de relier—pour qu'une poussée fantasmagorique juvénile féminine puisse se répandre dans une ville entière, suscitant une faible défense de la société adulte-masculine—et s'approfondir en angoisse généralisée, pour qu'un besoin archaïque-obscur d'un coupable remonte à la surface, avec le spectre médiéval du juif tentateur habillé en bourgeois et offrant la mini-jupe. (107)

The spread of the rumor thus depended upon both sensationalized notions of feminine sexuality and upon the reiteration of old cultural stereotypes. In Martin's case, the prospect of a woman existing outside the control of marriage or the church would have scandalized patriarchal sensibilities and played on anti-clerical stereotypes.

As the diversity of the rumors listed above implies, Martin was facing gossip from multiple ideological corners. If the Cajun population of Louisiana has always been predominantly Catholic, its reverence for the clergy, including nuns, has never been universal. For example, Barry Ancelet draws on the following colloquialism for the title of his article on anticlerical humor in Acadian culture: “Ôte voir ta sacrée soutane et je vais montrer quel sorte d’homme que t’es!” According to Ancelet, this expression (which he translates as “Take off that damn cassock and I’ll show you what kind of man you are!” 125), serves as a rebuff during an argument, rejecting the cassock, and by extension clerical authority, as “an improper cover in man-to-man dealings” (127). Ancelet supports this assertion with a litany of common expressions and profane stories portraying priests as venal, libidinous, and dishonest. He also includes several stories about nuns, one involving a hot dog and the other a banana. He insists that the wealth of this oral tradition implies a profound mistrust of the Catholic clergy:

The abundance of the anti-clerical humor in Cajun culture would seem to debunk the pastoral image of the Acadians as the tame and devoted flock of local cure popularized by Longfellow’s “Evangeline.” The independence expressed in the Cajuns’ anti-clerical oral literature is based on the notion that priests and nuns are unnecessary mediators in the direct relationship they enjoy with their Deity. (131)

Without forsaking the concept of God, popular Cajun culture evinces decided leeriness towards religious authorities. Désirée Martin thus returned to a small community that was both staunchly Catholic and profoundly anti-clerical. The rumors of her clandestine escape and of the church’s offer of money echo with Ancelet’s tales of Ecclesiastical venality and moral incontinence. As such, both her initial decision to enter a convent and her later decision to leave it provided considerable fodder for gossip. As Martin herself noted, “J’en vois qui pleurent ma sortie comme une damnation; d’autres qui la bénissent comme un bienfait” (262). Given this ambivalent reaction, Martin found herself defending the life she lived and the work she did among the Sisters of the Sacred Heart as well as her decision to return to Louisiana. She takes up this first

cause before addressing her personal reasons for leaving the convent, arguing passionately against any who would disparage the work of religious women: “Parents et amis, il n’y a qu’un être sans conscience qui oserait promener une plume sacrilège ou une langue calomnieuse sur ces asiles de la vertu et de la science; et malgré ma sortie, vous ne vous attendez pas, je le sais, à la honte de m’entendre dénigrer la vie religieuse” (171).

Finally, over the course of several *veillées* she clearly explains that her purpose for leaving the convent was her inability to maintain her health in the cold climate of New York where she had been sent, having suffered and nearly died from asthma during the winter months. She then clearly refutes each of the above rumors one by one, taking time to explain the difference between *vœux simples* and *vœux solennels*, noting she had only made the former, implying a commitment to live according to rules of her community while she was there, but not necessarily to remain there forever: “J’ai fait des vœux et les ai observés vingt-sept ans; mais, puisque les supérieures ne m’ont jamais admise au vœu de stabilité, je n’ai pas fait de vœux irrévocables, et, en revenant parmi vous, je ne me sens pas coupable de parjure” (189). The tone of these *veillées* is hardly that of a morality tale.

Martin’s explicit justification of her life decisions does not come until the last thirty pages of her work. While the preceding pages address other events and make little mention of scandal, Martin’s defense actually begins on the title page. The full title of her work is *Les Veillées d’une sœur ou Le Destin d’un brin de mousse*, identifying its author both as a sister and as a spray of spanish moss. The multivalence of the term “sister” is significant here, referring both to Martin’s former status as a nun and to her relationship with her brother, to whom the work is dedicated. Martin’s presence was troubling to the small, patriarchal society of rural Louisiana partly because of her inability to conform to nineteenth-century ideals of feminine

identity. Unmarried, she could hardly pose as an angel of domesticity. Outside of the convent, she was a free female agent, and therefore without a place in the community. Désirée's ambiguous title invokes blood ties with the only patriarch left in her family, her older brother. Having abandoned the protection of the convent, she drew on family ties to claim her place in the community. Martin thus initiates the process of her own subjectivation, establishing the terms by which she can be interpellated and assume discursive agency within the social space of her community.

Her self-identification as a *brin de mousse* is also significant and recurs frequently throughout the work. At the outset, she claims to have been inspired to write the work by the sight of a beautiful blossom on a moribund magnolia tree, suggesting that people too might have works of beauty to offer in their old age. Not willing to compare herself to anything so grand as a magnolia however, she settles on a clump of Spanish moss, a much humbler plant. When she does finally come around to refuting rumors against her, the Spanish moss allusion resurfaces:

Voilà donc quantité de personnes, très affairées d'ailleurs, qui se détournent et s'arrêtent pour s'occuper de quoi? ...

—*D'un brin de mousse transplanté! ... D'un tout petit atome déplacé par le souffle de la Providence! ...* (262)

Again, this form of self-identification is purposefully ambiguous. Spanish Moss is transient, susceptible to being carried by the wind from one place to another, just as Martin has travelled to Saint Louis, Cuba, and New York. However, it is also endemic to southern Louisiana. Martin does not identify herself with a plant she could only have encountered on her travels, but with a species that would have been entirely familiar and unremarkable to her readers. Martin goes on to describe her travels as a form of exile. Like the spanish moss blown on the wind, she longed to return to her native Louisiana and homesickness is a recurring motif. At one point, after enumerating the places she has visited, she insists that, “en saluant chaque pays, je lui disais: ‘Oh

patrie, je t'admire, mais tu n'es pas ma Louisiane!... Aucune contrée n'est belle comme celle qui m'a vue naître! Entre toutes les mères, pour ses enfants, une mère n'est-elle pas toujours la plus belle?" (239)? Her constant longing to return to her family and the place of her birth confirms her belonging in that space and justifies her presence. Thus, from the outset, Martin acknowledges her unorthodox trajectory while firmly claiming her place in both family and community.

Désirée Martin stretches this self-identification further, dating it back to the time of her ancestors and the *grand dérangement* of 1755. Before writing a word of her own biography, she declares her obligation to inform her nieces and nephews of "l'origine de notre famille et leur propre descendance" (47). Having established herself as belonging under the patriarchal umbrella of her brother's kinship, she then traces her family's origins to the eighteenth-century Acadian settlement of Louisiana. These tragic events constitute the founding myth of Louisiana *Cadien*/Cajun identity, recurring in oral histories and songs. In Martin's own lifetime, Louisianans responded enthusiastically to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's romantic retelling of the event, even going so far to name Evangeline Parish after its title character and erect a monument to her in St-Martinville. Louisiana writers Sidonie de La Houssaye and Félix Voorhies also took up the theme. The former wrote a novella entitled *Pouponne et Balthazar* (1888) in which the eponymous separated lovers find each other in Louisiana, successfully assimilate into elite Creole society, and live happily ever after. In *Acadian Reminiscences, with the True Story of Evangeline* (1907), Voorhies allows the title character to find Gabriel under an oak tree in St-Martinville, Louisiana. When she discovers he is married to someone else she goes mad and dies. To this day, such stories of exile and separation echo throughout Louisiana discourse, appearing in songs like Zachary Richard's "Ballade de Beausoleil" (1977) and Bruce Daigrepoint's "Acadie à la Louisiane" (2001). In 1990, when Lafayette lawyer Warren Perrin

issued a petition to Margaret Thatcher and Queen Elizabeth II, asking the British to officially apologize for the mass deportation, he referred to it as “the defining event in our history” (Lawlor). Given the monumental importance of *le grand dérangement* in Louisiana discourse and identity, Martin’s choice to begin her narrative with these events is strategic. In citing the origin story of Acadian immigration as the beginning of her own story, she claims the heritage of Louisiana as her own birthright.

Though Martin makes several references to “les Acadiens, nos pères” (50), she only mentions one survivor of the *grand dérangement* by name. This individual was not a man, but her ancestress Osite Bourgeois. Martin does not revel in the exploits of rebels like Alexandre Broussard dit Beausoleil or wallow in the tragic romance of separated lovers like Evangeline and Gabriel. Rather, she tells the simple story of Osite, who was widowed during the forced voyage to Virginia from whence she and her children made their way to Louisiana.²⁹ Martin holds Osite up as an example to her nieces and nephews citing her courage, thrift, and hard work as the virtues that allowed the family to survive their ordeal:

Elle devançait chaque jour le lever du soleil avec l’énergie au cœur et la prière sur ses lèvres, et, suivie de son fils et ses filles, elle s’en allait labourer et ensemer son champ, puis, suivant les saisons, faucher la gerbe ou cueillir le grabot. L’espoir de beurrer la galette et d’amollir l’oreiller après la moisson lui faisait manœuvrer la pioche, la pelle, la charrue, et la herse avec presque autant d’aisance que le pianiste dans l’exécution de ses gammes. (58)

Osite hardly conforms to nineteenth-century bourgeois norms of domesticity. Rather than being able to boast any “accomplishments” that would render a middle-class woman desirable, such as knowing how to play the piano, she is an independent woman with the work ethic and skills

²⁹ Broussard dit Beausoleil was an Acadian leader famous for his resistance: “During the autumn of 1755 several hundred Acadians were able to escape the British troops temporarily by fleeing to Ile Royale, New France, or Ile Saint-Jean... Among them were Joseph Beausoleil Broussard who, along with other resisters, launched a number of raids against the British troops in the Beaubassin region” (Daigle 113). When Broussard finally emigrated to Louisiana via St-Domingue, he was greeted as a national hero by the acting governor (Farragher 429).

necessary to keep her family together in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Martin does not situate her heritage in the romantic pining of Evangeline for Gabriel, but in the industry and self-sufficiency of an exiled widow.

Osite is not the only widow to feature prominently in Martin's narrative. The author lost her own father at a young age, leaving her mother Élise with nothing but "sa petite cabane, trois orphelins, l'affection de sa famille, le cœur de ses amis et sa propre énergie" (83). As she did with Osite, Martin offers the story of her mother's struggle to raise her family despite the emotional, social, and financial hardships of widowhood as an example of moral rectitude. This paean culminates in a description of a mother's obligation to her family:

Que ne puis-je, hélas! Insinuer dans vos âmes, ô mères de famille, tout ce qui pénètre la mienne au souvenir de ce pauvre mais paisible ménage d'une mère qui le gouverne en l'aimant; qui fait et surveille tout par elle-même; qui prévient tout, adoucit et charme tout; qui se ménage l'innocent plaisir de préparer de ses mains le repas de sa famille; qui ne voit dans ses enfants que des êtres à *régulariser*, à perfectionner, à aimer et à rendre heureux; qui fait de sa maison un gracieux domaine où elle règne en souveraine. (85)

Though this description in some ways complies with nineteenth-century mores of domesticity, citing household management and the education of children as a woman's primary duties, the theme of female self-sufficiency is still present. Martin's mother did not rely on servants provided by a wealthy husband to cook her meals or care for her children; she proved capable of completing these tasks on her own (the Martin family's enslaved house servant Arsène does not feature in this description). Furthermore, the verbs Martin uses to describe the relationship of her mother to the household (*gouverner*, *surveiller*, *régulariser*, *régner*) suggest a position of dominance rather than subservience. Without the presence of a husband, Élise Martin's assumption of his authority is portrayed as the fulfillment rather than a perversion of her feminine duties to her family. The history of independent women in Martin's family thus spans multiple generations.

Martin's references to her mother and great-great-grandmother establish an alternate model of feminine virtue. Though these women did perform such stereotypically feminine tasks as child rearing and housekeeping, they did not depend on the financial support and guidance of a male head of household to keep their families afloat. Rather than delicate and submissive angels of domesticity, Martin descends from strong women who lived by their own labor. Her ability to trace this heritage of female independence normalizes it and thereby raises an implicit challenge to the stigma that Martin herself faced upon her return to Louisiana after leaving the convent. If Osite Bourgeois and Élise Martin could successfully care for their families without a male head of household, why could their descendant not care for herself after leaving religious life?

Conclusion

Marie Madeleine Hachard and Désirée Martin both wrote with important claims to make of the broader communities in which they lived. Hachard took up her quill as an advocate for the Ursuline mission in New Orleans. Désirée Martin wrote to defend herself and her family from slanderous aspersions cast upon her character. These were not timid women. However, the intricate constraints of the patriarchal societies in which they lived did not permit them to express their opinions openly and directly. Each woman wrote from the margins of the patriarchal and ecclesiastic institutions that structured the discursive space in which they acted. Drawing on the interpellation of a patriarchal authority figure however, both Hachard and Martin were able to write between and beyond the circumscribed spaces typically allotted for feminine discourse. They thus embarked on circuitous routes, navigating between the controlling spaces of the church, the family, and the broader community to find a site of enunciation from which to voice their opinions. Just as the physical journeys undertaken by Hachard and Martin testify to

their courage, their written works testify to their ingenuity and their determination not to be silenced.

CHAPTER THREE: BLURRING THE COLOR LINE IN THE WORKS OF MARIE AUGUSTIN AND SIDONIE DE LA HOUSSAYE

This chapter explores the superposition of racial and sexual barriers in the work of post-bellum writers Marie Augustin and Sidonie de La Houssaye. Both published in the 1890's, Augustin's novel *Le Macandal* (1892) and de La Houssaye's tetralogy *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (1890s) feature strong mixed-heritage female characters navigating their way through intricate and often unforgiving racial hierarchies. Both works establish these hierarchies through the imposition of physical boundaries and rigidly segregated gendered spaces. As the novels unfold, these boundaries are repeatedly transgressed, obfuscated, or shattered. These violations hinge on the body of the mixed-heritage woman as she conforms to or rebels against the stereotypes that informed popular discourse at the time. The subsequent disappearance of these characters, either through self-sacrifice or assimilation, situates them paradoxically both as challengers of the status quo and as agents of their own destruction. This ambivalence is especially important given the social upheaval into which Augustin and de La Houssaye introduced their texts. My analysis of these works will therefore bear in mind the violently racist context of their enunciation. I argue that, despite their recourse to racial stereotypes, these novels contravene segregationist ideology in two important ways. First, their insistence on the social liminality of mixed-heritage characters undermines the racial binary that informed late nineteenth-century racism. Secondly, their complex and often contradictory representations of gendered racial hierarchies underscore the extent to which such divisions derive from patriarchal

domination. As such, these proto-feminist works implicitly criticize the racial violence of their time.

Introduction

Marie Augustin and Sidonie de La Houssaye created their works under remarkably similar circumstances. Augustin was born to a plantation-owning family in antebellum Louisiana in 1851. After the financial ruin of her family, she spent much of her adult life supporting herself. Augustin worked solely as an educator and never wrote professionally. She chose to publish her only novel *Le Macandal* at her own expense and, according to Edward Larocque Tinker's study *Les Écrits de langue française en Louisiane au XIXe siècle* (1932), later burned all her copies of the book. ““Que voulez-vous?” dit-elle avec un bon sourire, ‘ils ne se vendaient pas et je ne pouvais pas les prendre avec moi dans cette unique chambre, alors je les ai brûlés. Nous tous Augustin, nous écrivons pour écrire; peu nous importe la vente’” (20). Fortunately, though her novel never achieved wide circulation, some copies did survive the fire. *Le Macandal* is a romanticized retelling of an insurrection in St-Domingue that took place only a few years before the Haitian revolution that would send Augustin's own family fleeing to Louisiana. Augustin's narrative combines the Macandal uprising with a 1791 slave revolt, inventing a character named Dominique, son of the original Macandal, and casting him as the instigator of this later rebellion. Augustin claims that her novel was inspired by her grandfather's stories of this insurrection.

Sidonie de La Houssaye lived most of her life in Franklin, Louisiana, nearly a hundred miles southwest of New Orleans. Born Hélène Perret to a family of plantation owners in 1820, she married after only a few months of formal education at the age of thirteen. By the end of the Civil War, she found herself widowed, the sole caretaker of her eight orphaned grandchildren, and, like Augustin, financially ruined. After a career that spanned the gamut from schoolteacher

to postmistress, de La Houssaye turned to writing as a means of financial support. After *Pouponne et Balthazar* (1888), a retelling of the Evangeline story in which the star-crossed Acadian lovers find each other and live happily after, de La Houssaye's best-known work is *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans*. This four-part series of novels narrates the often-salacious exploits of mixed-heritage courtesans in antebellum New Orleans. The subject matter raised eyebrows at the time. As Tinker remarked, "Il est curieux de voir cette femme âgée, très respectable, mère de quatorze enfants, maîtresse d'école pendant la plus grande partie de sa vie, écrire de pareilles choses" (111).³⁰ De La Houssaye never witnessed the reaction to her work; she died shortly after the publication of *Octavia*, the first novel of the tetralogy, in 1894. The following three volumes were published in serial form, and parts of the final novel *Dahlia* have only recently been published.³¹

Apart from Edouard Laroque Tinker's catalogue of francophone Louisiana literature, virtually nothing has been written about Marie Augustin's life or work. While Sidonie de La Houssaye's colorful life and prolific works have been the subject of several graduate theses and dissertations and some scholarly articles, her work does merit further study.³² By studying both

³⁰ Even as recently as 1982, Allain Mathé, in referring to de La Houssaye's use of the pseudonym Louise Raymond, commented, "One can see why a respectable grandmother hesitated to affix her name to such lurid tales of premeditated vengeance and sexual depravity" (13)

³¹ As archives of *Le Meschacébé*, the newspaper in which *Les Quarteronnes* appeared, are incomplete we do not know how much of *Dahlia* was published in the 1890s. The recent editions of all four novels, including *Dahlia*, by the *Tintamarre* editions in Shreveport was possible through the use of de La Houssaye's original manuscripts in the Louisiana State University Library.

³² Though Alice Walker's study on *Les Quarteronnes* appeared in the critical anthology *Louisiana Women Writers: New Essays and a Comprehensive Bibliography* (Ed. Dorothy H. Brown and Barbara C. Ewell), no book solely devoted to the work of de La Houssaye or any Francophone woman writer from Louisiana has yet been published. Apart from the excellent scholarship contributed by Bénédicte Monicat, Jarrod Hayes, and Christian Hommel, which I discuss in the following paragraph, the bulk of research on de La Houssaye has consisted of graduate theses dissertations. In addition to the work described subsequently, I should also mention John Perret's dissertation *A Critical Study of the Life and Works of Sidonie de la Houssaye with Special Emphasis on the Unpublished Works* (1966) to which all subsequent scholars are indebted for its thorough research of Sidonie de La Houssaye's biography. Its literary analysis of her works however is quite shallow, dismissing their sociopolitical relevance on the grounds of their sentimentalism. This conclusion implies that only strictly realist literature can function as social

of these authors together, this dissertation aims to shed light on the cultural complexities of the era in which they lived and to facilitate further exploration of this somewhat neglected period of United States and Francophone history.

As previously mentioned, de La Houssaye's work, especially her *Quarteronnes* series, has enjoyed some scholarly attention, and this dissertation will supplement this existing literature. On the one hand, Alice Parker's article "Evangeline's Darker Daughters," emphasizes the extent to which black women are sexualized in the *Quarteronnes* tetralogy, suggesting that de La Houssaye lives vicariously through the sexuality of black females, being herself repressed by the mores of the society in which she lived. Christian Hommel has pointed out the difficulties of defining her work generically, as well as the complications of racial and class distinctions in her writing. Hommel has suggested that de La Houssaye's work focuses more closely on class than on racial difference and that de La Houssaye promotes a socially constructionist conception of race. Christine Elizabeth Koch Harris underlines the extent to which de La Houssaye conceptualizes race as performative rather than as biologically defined. Jarrod Hayes has also observed a performative conceptualization of race in these works, citing the constant processes of learning and renegotiation of racial identity undergone by their protagonists. Bénédicte Monicat has explored the often-paradoxical position of de La Houssaye's eponymous *Quarteronnes*, noting that the author simultaneously describes these characters according to essentialist conceptions of race and emphasizes their ability to "pass," such that they become indistinguishable from their white counterparts:

Lieu de tous les contraires et tous les discours, résistant et usant de la clôture des modèles conventionnels, insaisissable. Loin de n'être que de l'ordre—et j'entends ici ce terme littéralement—du stéréotype, les héroïnes noires de Sidonie de La

commentary, a highly dubious assumption given the impact of sentimentalist novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851-2) on nineteenth-century American history.

Houssaye révèlent les préjugés de race par le truchement des préjugés sexuels dans un message que l'on pourrait dire autodestructrice. (331)

Like previous scholars, I will explore the often-contradictory representations of race in *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans*. My reading of these texts favors conclusions that de La Houssaye portrays race as socially constructed. However rather than examining race as a purely performative phenomenon, my work examines the inscription of gendered racial hierarchies into the narrative spaces of the work. As I will show, the extensive patriarchal control over the borders of these spaces highlights the intersection of racial and gender hierarchies, thereby tracing a proto-feminist argument against segregationist ideologies.

Racial Segregation & Controlling Images

Central to both the works of both Augustin and de La Houssaye are the stereotypes that dominated representations of mixed-heritage women in the nineteenth century. For the purposes of this dissertation, I rely on Alexander Weheliye's definition of race and racialization, namely a set of "political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west" (3). This definition situates the origins of Louisiana's racial hierarchy in the asymmetrical power relations of Atlantic slavery, the consequences of which were the systematic deprivation of basic human rights on a monumental scale. Furthermore, as Weheliye points out, racialization occurs not only in the very real physical and legal violence of slavery, but also in epistemologies, customs, and systems of representation endemic to slaveholder society. As such, how race appears in works of fiction matters just as much as how it appears in legislation.

In examining fictional representations of women of color, I do not refer to race and gender as discrete categories. Rather, I approach the position of these characters intersectionally, examining how gendered racial hierarchies shape the narrative spaces they occupy. The deficiencies of single-axis analyses of social inequities have featured prominently in calls for more intersectional methodologies in both the humanities and in social sciences. As Kimberlé Crenshaw points out:

Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when practices expound on identity as woman or as person of color as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling. (1242)

Escaping the "either/or" of single-axis analysis is thus essential to understanding the authors under consideration (writing from a position of racial privilege and gender marginalization), their characters (depicted in positions of racial and gender subordination), and how these authors position themselves in relation to their characters. Drawing on this matrix approach, I will show how these authors' proto-feminist leanings enabled them to generate sympathetic descriptions of mixed-heritage characters and to implicitly challenge the patriarchal logic of segregationist ideology.

At this point, some clarification on the racist ideologies against which de La Houssaye's and Augustin's novels take place is in order. Colette Guillaumin cites the nineteenth century as the moment of an important epistemological shift in Western attitudes towards race. While eighteenth-century naturalists such as Buffon expended considerable energy cataloging the variety of human life, it was not until the nineteenth century that scholars widely began to attribute these differences to biological causes:

Pour le 18^e, l'origine des différences culturelles et politiques, arrachée à la théologie, était soit géographique, soit psychologique, soit pur mécanisme sociale,

en tous cas étrangère à la biologie. L'apparition de la causalité biologique marque la pensée sociale et psychologique du 19^e siècle. (25)

According to Guillaumin, most nineteenth-century scholars accepted the biological determinism of racial hierarchies as a given, with many going so far as to espouse the polygenist theories of Gobineau. Such theories certainly contributed to the articulation of much Jim Crow legislation, particularly in the case of anti-miscegenation statutes.

The racial hierarchies depicted in Augustin's and de La Houssaye's works clearly derive from eighteenth-century conceptions of race. As I point out later in my analysis, these authors describe multi-tiered racial hierarchies deriving from social systems of domination such as slavery in which interracial relationships are common. Thus, despite their recourse to well-worn gendered racial stereotypes, these texts depart noticeably from the dominant racial schema of their time.³³

This variance partly derives from the specificity of the local culture. Louisiana differed from many regions in the antebellum United States South in that it boasted a substantial population of free people of color. This population grew largely out of long-term relationships between masters and their female slaves which, during the colonial period, often resulted in manumission. As such, enormous gender disparities persisted among free people of color throughout the eighteenth-century. As Kimberly Hanger has noted, these demographic disparities

³³ It is important to note that the colonial racial taxonomy used by these authors included numerous categorizations of people of color according to their genealogy. Such terms included "mulatto," "quadroon," "octaroon," and "griffe" and suggested a strict social stratification according to these categories. In practice, however, many of these terms, especially "quadroon" and "octaroon" were used interchangeably and "mulatto" was often used as a blanket term for all people of both African and European heritage. Even Moreau de Saint-Méry, with his pages upon pages of tables of racial taxonomies admitted that "des yeux bien experts" were needed to distinguish between the various categories and that such divisions really derived from "la tradition orale ou écrite," meaning rumors or birth records, than from any empirical evidence (92). To cite an example from the texts in question, Sidonie de La Houssaye's eponymous Dahlia is referred to as a quadroon, even though according to the aforementioned racial taxonomy, she would technically be an octaroon. Without intending to ascribe any legitimacy to these labels, I will draw on such terminology in this chapter to refer to the racial categories used by the authors in their works.

were exacerbated by conditions of eighteenth-century colonial life including the relatively small number of white women and the risks incurred through illness and violence:

Given New Orleans' unhealthy semitropical climate and low-lying, mosquito-infested terrain, it is not surprising that inhabitants died frequently and at tender ages. Children in particular were subject to the ravages of smallpox, yellow fever, influenza, and malaria, women to the tortures of childbirth, and men to the uncertainties of warfare. The median age at death for white males was 30.6 years and white females 18.1 years; the figures for free blacks were even more dismal, although reversed by sex, with a median age at death for free black males of 8.1 years and for free black females 30.3 years. Interracial unions and the offspring they produced resulted at least partly from these demographic circumstances, as well as from a shortage of white women and an abundance of libre and slave women. (220)

These harsh realities conditioned the choices of both white men and free women of color, such that interracial cohabitation became common. Emily Clark has described the men in these arrangements as "bachelor patriarchs," noting that such relationships often bore many hallmarks of domestic life:

The permanent bachelorhood of the men who formed relationships with free women of color in late colonial New Orleans together with the pains many of the men took to create families that reassembled the markers of conventional contemporary families are particularly striking features of these partnerships. Shared households, notions of paternal duty, recognition of filial obligations fulfilled, and attention to extended families swelled by grandchildren characterized many of these men's lives. (102)

However these domestic partnerships resembled traditional marriages, they still bore the stigma of illegitimacy. After the institution of the Civil Code of 1808, which hampered the transmission of property to illegitimate children, they became less common.

Clark describes the bachelor patriarchs as part of her effort to distinguish them from the arrangement more stereotypically associated with Louisiana, namely *plaçage*, wherein women of color entered into long-term monogamous relationships with white men in exchange for financial support. These *mariages de la main gauche* were sealed by contracts, usually arranged by the

woman's mother.³⁴ Joan Martin has argued that the terms of these contracts were sometimes so favorable as to allow women of color to accumulate property.³⁵ Clark, on the other hand, has suggested that marriage had become the preferred pattern of family formation among free people of color in the nineteenth century, and that most *placées* were likely refugees from post-revolutionary Haiti without the resources or connections to find legitimate spouses.³⁶ Unfortunately, our understanding of the lived experiences of free women of color in Antebellum New Orleans remains hampered by the relative silence of the *placées* themselves. With the exception of evidence from legal cases, no first-person accounts of participants in this custom subsist today. As Clark has lamented, most existing descriptions of *plaçage* derive from tourist literature or travel narratives, suggesting only a superficial, sensationalized, and therefore unreliable understanding of New Orleans culture. This lack of solid documentation has left broad openings for the imaginations of writers of fiction, who have invested heavily in the sensuality and tragedy of the Louisiana quadroon myth.³⁷

³⁴ The term *mariage de la main gauche* was used to describe such common-law arrangements which required some degree of commitment from the two parties and often involved a transfer of property but which were not sanctioned by either the church or the state.

³⁵ "It was because of these left-handed marriages that many women of color became extremely wealthy. Property was frequently willed equally to legitimate and illegitimate heirs. Sometimes bitter fights ensued, and most often the mixed-blood heirs won in court" (68).

³⁶ The hypothesis of *plaçage* as an import from colonial St-Domingue has special implications for my analysis of *Le Macandal* which takes place in that setting and of *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans* in which the eponymous heroines are frequently exoticised.

³⁷ Legal evidence of long-term exogamous relationships exists in inheritance disputes wherein a deceased white man's legal family disputed his bequest of money or property to his mistress and their children. In many cases, the surviving mistress was able to defend her right to inherit. For more information see Virginia Domínguez (64) and Alecia Long (10-59). Kimberly Hanger has described the participation of free women of color in such arrangements as a matter of socioeconomic necessity given the lack of viable marriage partners in the patriarchal slave society in which they lived, and Joan Martin has suggested that the ersatz respectability of the practice grew from and contributed to the prosperity of free people of color in New Orleans. More recently, Emily Clark has refuted the prevalence of *plaçage* in nineteenth-century Louisiana, citing the increasing popularity of marriage among free people of color during this period and the fact that most contemporary accounts of the custom derive from tourist literature, designed to entice visitors with promises of illicit liaisons, or travel narratives by such visitors to the city.

The stereotype of the quadroon as a kept woman has had important implications in textual representations of women of color, both in post-bellum Louisiana where the two authors lived, and in colonial St-Domingue where Augustin's text takes place. For example, Augustin cites Louis-Élie Moreau de St-Mery's *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'isle Saint-Domingue* (1798) as the basis for her depiction of the island. In this text, St-Mery describes the racial hierarchy of the colony at great lengths, with both pages upon pages of taxonomic tables listing the various castes resulting from miscegenation and prose descriptions of the various inhabitants of the island according to their race and sex. This prose becomes markedly florid in his description of mulatto women:

L'être entier d'une mulâtresse est livré à la Volupté, et le feu de cette déesse brûle dans son cœur pour ne s'y éteindre qu'avec la vie. Ce culte, voilà tout son code, tous ses vœux, tout son bonheur. Il n'est rien que l'imagination la plus enflammée puisse concevoir qu'elle n'ait pressenti, deviné, accompli. Charmer tous les sens, les livrer aux plus délicieuses extases, les suspendre par les plus séduisants ravissements, voilà son unique étude ; et la nature, en quelque sorte complice du plaisir, lui a donné charmes, appas, sensibilité, et ce qui est bien plus dangereux, la faculté d'éprouver, encore mieux que celui avec qui elle les partage, des jouissances dont le code de Paphos ne renfermait pas tous les secrets. (106)

Here, St-Mery emphasizes the sexual appetites of mulatto women just as much if not more than their physical attractiveness. This woman, as represented by St-Mery is capable of seducing and manipulating her unidentified observer. Given St-Mery's later assertions that mulatto women live primarily in concubinage with white men, this anonymous partner is presumably a white male. His conspicuous absence from St-Mery's description camouflages his role in the sexual economy of the island. This simultaneous masking and objectification of the white male in St-Mery's description of the white male/mulatto female couple, situates the woman as the instigator and primary beneficiary of the relationship. St-Mery even goes so far as to describe her capacity to experience sensual pleasure as more dangerous than her ability to seduce.

Such textual representations of these practices have contributed to the creation of a controlling image of non-white sexuality. Patricia Hill Collins defines controlling images as stereotypical representations of Black womanhood “designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life” (69). The image of the sexually rapacious mulatto woman corresponds closely with Collins’ description of the “historical jezebel,” a controlling image that has its roots in coercive sexual relationships between male masters and their female slaves. The image of the woman in this relationship as sexually aggressive reverses the asymmetrical power dynamics of actual master/slave relations. In this account, as in St-Mery’s description, the anonymous white male subject becomes the victim of the non-white woman’s sexuality, his exploitation of her camouflaged and his desire for her absolved.

In addition to censuring black female sexuality, Collins’ controlling image of the “jezebel” also has important implications for representations of white women. Her analysis of the marginalization of black, female sexuality establishes a negative Other to prescriptive stereotypes of white, female chastity:

In the context of U.S. society, these [binary constructs] become racialized—White men are active and White women should be passive. Black people and other racialized groups simultaneously stand outside these definitions of normality and mark their boundaries. In this context of a gender-specific, White, heterosexual normality, the jezebel or hoochie becomes a racialized, gendered symbol of deviant female sexuality. Normal female heterosexuality is expressed via the cult of true White womanhood, whereas deviant female heterosexuality is typified by the “hot mommas” of Black womanhood. (83)

Within this schema, patriarchal and racial hierarchies intersect: the juxtaposition of black promiscuity and white chastity censures white female sensuality, reducing the white woman to a purely passive and maternal figure even as it justifies the sexual exploitation of black women.

Images of the dangerous and unbridled sensuality of exotic women are also ubiquitous in nineteenth-century French literature, constituting one of the more prominent tropes of Orientalism.³⁸ In his seminal work on the subject, Edward Said mentions that, “[...] the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies” (188). Like St-Mery’s description of women of color, this point of view favors a universal white male gaze upon the “passive, seminal, feminine, even silent and supine East” (138). The image of the voluptuous Other woman, full of mystery yet scandalously available for penetration and domination, thus participates in the constitution of the heterosexual colonial male subject. He becomes knowing, active, and dominant in the assertion of his gaze over the sensual, passive, and female Other.

In taking up the pen to describe free women of color, Marie Augustin and Sidonie de La Houssaye thus encroach upon a traditionally male site of enunciation.³⁹ It may be tempting to view this act as a simple appropriation of the male gaze. However, in her study of women’s Orientalist artistic productions, Regina Lewis has pointed out the extent to which gender shapes the conditions of production for such authors. The social pressures that inform white women’s experiences also come to bear on the motives and expectations that they bring to their work. As such, Lewis argues that,

[...] the textual status of the other woman in women’s cultural production cannot be separated from the economic and social conditions necessary for the emergence of Western women’s cultural agency; conditions which relied, among other things, on the displacement onto the feminized colonial other of forms of gendered exploitation now unacceptable at home. (27)

³⁸ Take for example Balzac’s descriptions of Paquita in *La Fille aux yeux d’or*, Flaubert’s *Salammbô*, or such poems as “Sed non satiata” by Baudelaire, “Bizarre déité, brune comme les nuits/ Au parfum mélangé de musc et de havane/ Œuvre de quelque obi, le Faust de la savane/ Sorcière au flanc d’ébène, enfant de noirs minuits... Ô démon sans pitié! verse-moi moins de flamme;/ Je ne suis pas le Styx pour t’embrasser neuf fois!” (lines 1-4, 10-11)

³⁹ Again, this exoticism is only exacerbated by the lack of literature by Francophone women of color from this period. As Gayatri Spivak has put it, “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is more deeply in shadow” (25).

In Lewis' analysis, the objectification of the Other woman offers a position from which European women can express their own subjectivity. This ambiguous position, even as it depends on racial privilege for its coherence, challenges the universality of the male gaze. Similarly, while the works of de La Houssaye and Augustin both display a strong investment in their position of racial privilege, they also underscore the extent to which patriarchal oppression undergirds racial divisions, thereby problematizing the racial and sexual politics of their time.

In addition to being perceived as lascivious, women of mixed heritage have also historically been portrayed as tragic figures, particularly in United States abolitionist literature. The "tragic octaroon" as typified by the eponymous character of Dion Boucicault's drama *The Octaroon* is a beautiful, phenotypically white young woman who has been raised by her white father. Upon her father's death, the woman discovers that she has never been freed, and, as part of her father's estate, must be sold as a slave to appease his creditors. This state of affairs places her at the mercy of sexual predators leading her either to be rescued by her (usually white) love interest or to commit suicide. This drama featured in many nineteenth-century texts, including *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The legacy of this stereotype is complex. While the immediate rhetorical advantage of the trope was to expose the potential for sexual abuse in antebellum slavery and thereby undermine paternalist defenses of the institution, twentieth-century critics have pointed out both its implicit racism and its potential to destabilize racial hierarchies. For instance, Sterling Brown, one of the first scholars to identify the trope, has traced its origins to nineteenth-century mythologies of blood heritage:

[...] the mulatto is a victim of a divided inheritance and therefore miserable; [...] worshipping the whites and despised by them, despising and despised by Negroes, perplexed by his struggle to unite a white intellect with black sensuousness. The fate of the octaroon girl is intensified—the whole desire of her life is to find a

white lover, and then go down, accompanied by slow music, to a tragic end. (77-8)

According to Brown, the emphasis on the plight of the mulatto as being somehow more tragic than that of someone of “pure” African descent can only derive from racist theories of genetic inheritance. Furthermore, the affective impact of the trope suggests that implicitly white audiences could only empathize with the plight of enslaved people who looked and acted like themselves. Brown also asserts that such tragic and often far-fetched melodramas served to remove the more typical lived experiences of enslaved people from the American imaginary, thereby shielding audiences from the real crimes against humanity.

More recent scholars however have pointed out the convention’s potential to destabilize culturally constructed binaries:

The mulatta's shifting cultural placement is symptomatic of her ambiguous character. She occupies a central space that is perpetually being erased or effaced in an effort to stabilize (reify) the tenuous, permeable boundaries between white and black, high and low, male and female, pure and impure. (Devere Brody 117)

Brody thus cites the mixed-race body as the limit of all the cultural binaries that inform American society. Far from being irrelevant, these authors’ awkward attempts to articulate this liminal body illuminate the fault-lines of an oppressive social order. As Werner Sollors points out, “the literary representation of biracial characters, whatever their statistical relevance may have been, does not constitute an *avoidance* of more serious issues, but the most direct and head-on *engagement* with ‘race,’ perhaps the most troubling issue in the period from the French Revolution to World War II” (240). Augustin’s and de La Houssaye’s ambiguous representation of mixed-heritage characters thus engages their work with the social hierarchies informing it.

Literary representations of Louisiana quadroons often cast them in a tragic light. For example, in his short story “Tite Poulette” (1874), George Washington Cable describes a former courtesan who must renounce her biological claim on her daughter so that the girl can marry a

white man. She is thus a tragic figure at the mercy of the white, male-dominated society in which she lives. Similarly, Armand Lanusse's "Un Mariage de conscience" (1843), one of the only descriptions of *plaçage* written by a person of color, also ends in tragedy. Here, a young woman, having been abandoned by her white lover in favor of a legitimate wife, throws herself in front of his carriage. Upon recognizing her, the erstwhile lover orders his chauffeur to continue driving.⁴⁰ These protagonists are helpless victims, unable to defend their hearts or their reputations from the vagaries of white male desire. Augustin and de La Houssaye create a more complicated picture of free women of color, as their characters struggle to control their own destinies in the face of unyielding gendered racial hierarchies, with highly ambiguous results.

The context in which Augustin and de La Houssaye wrote their texts was, if possible, even more racially charged than the antebellum world they describe. In 1892, the same year as Augustin's ill-fated publication of *Le Macandal* and two years before *Octavia*'s first appearance in serial form in *Le Meschacébé*, a colored man named Homer Plessy was arrested for riding the whites only section of a New Orleans streetcar. The ensuing Supreme Court ruling famously upheld segregation laws in the United States. In the city of New Orleans, implementing many aspects of such legislation proved difficult if not impossible. There would not be enough space to institute strictly distinct black and white neighborhoods until after the drainage of the back swamp in the early twentieth century. This reality did not prevent city officials from restricting the vice industry to a traditionally colored neighborhood that would eventually be known as Storyville in 1897. As Alecia Long has pointed out, the fact that these ordinances went into effect, despite the protests and legal challenges made by African American churches in the affected neighborhoods, "placed people of color on a plane with prostitutes and other sexual

⁴⁰ Caryn Cossé Bell has suggested that Antebellum writers have used the system of *plaçage* as a means of critiquing white exploitation of people of color without running afoul of bans on abolitionist literature that went into effect in mid-nineteenth-century Louisiana (112-7).

sinner, both conceptually and in terms of physical proximity” (138). Given the extent to which such superimposed sexual and racial hierarchies thus marked the terrain of de La Houssaye and Augustin’s lived experiences, it is hardly surprising that these divisions shape the narrative spaces of their works.

The controlling images of the hypersexualized mixed-heritage woman and the tragic octoroon are central to both Augustin’s *Le Macandal* and de La Houssaye’s *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans*. Both texts feature central characters who happen to be women of mixed racial heritage and whose identity develops both from and in tension with these controlling images. Not only are these women crucial to the stories in which they appear, they are also emblematic of the entire caste of free people of color within the larger narrative of their respective novels. The following analysis will show how the meta-narrative in which the disappearance of this intermediate class through either violence or assimilation hinges on the alternately promiscuous and self-destructing mixed-heritage woman and her capacity for exogamous relationships with white males. In these texts, however, the purportedly dangerous agency of the mixed-heritage woman also allows her to challenge patriarchal authority in ways that white female characters cannot.

Sexual and Racial Segregation

Both *Le Macandal* and *Les Quarteronnes* take place in racially segregated landscapes. Primarily set in Saint-Domingue on the eve of the Haitian revolution, *Le Macandal* opens on the ultimate scene of racial segregation: namely that of a slave auction. Here, Augustin presents the future rebel leaders not as individuals, but as racialized merchandise under the white male gaze embodied by M. de Villeneuve. Before describing the individuals of the group, Augustin insists upon their heritage describing them as “types caractéristiques de la race qu’ils représentaient,” namely “la belle race des Séclaves indigènes de descendance semi-africaine, semi-asiatique”

(11). Augustin's designation of her title character as Séclave or Sakalava is interesting given that St-Mery makes no mention of them in his exhaustive catalog of the African nations from which St-Domingue's enslaved population derived. As such, whatever sources may have informed her representation of this group are difficult to ascertain. Augustin clearly intended this ethnic label to set this family apart from other enslaved characters. Her insistence on their Asian heritage marks them as being not "purely" African, a distinction she later uses to explain Dominique's alternately stoic and animalistic behavior. It is worth noting that the Western imaginary has often associated the Sakalava with magic and sorcery, as twentieth-century scholarly titles such as *Witchcraft and Sorcery in a Pastoral Society: The Central Sakalava of West Madagascar* (Gardenier 1976) and *The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town* (Sharp 1996) attest. This association is relevant to Wamba's later role as "la reine des vaudoux" (Augustin 43) and her use of sorcery to harm and manipulate others. Augustin's choice to preface her description of these characters with a racializing label is thus far from haphazard, as she attributes the traits distinguishing this family from other slaves and ultimately determining the novel's plot to racial difference.

We learn of this difference through the appraisal of M. de Villeneuve, who "les admirait en connaisseur." From the very first page, the white male subject possesses Adam-like authority to name the African bodies offered for his perusal and eventual purchase. The narrator does not offer any conviction as to whether this gendered racial authority is right or just. Rather its objects adopt the role of unfortunate souls "qu'un incompréhensible hasard avait livrés aux horreurs de l'esclavage" (13). While Augustin thus concedes that slavery is horrible, she ascribes responsibility for its horrors to the vicissitudes of fate rather than to any wrongdoing by the white

characters of her novel (who were most likely based off of her own ancestors). This ambivalent attitude towards slavery continues throughout the novel.

Augustin concludes the prologue of *Le Macandal* with a reasonably accurate description of the 1750s exploits of the insurrectionist by that name. The primary action of the story concerns his fictitious son Dominique's revival of his father's efforts to eradicate the white population.⁴¹ Here Augustin abandons all pretense of fidelity to historical accounts, casting Dominique in the leadership role of the first slave revolt generally ascribed to Dutti Boukman and transplanting these events from 1791 to 1793. Given her adherence to historical accounts earlier in her work, it is safe to assume conscious authorial intent in these considerable liberties, especially the change of date to correspond with the Reign of Terror in France. The author continues to draw parallels between the two revolutions throughout the novel, referring both to events as echoes of European upheavals and to individual participants as Haitian incarnations of French counterparts. These parallels will later prove significant in my analysis of how racialization informs Augustin's representation of the Haitian Revolution.

⁴¹ CL James describes Macandal's rebellion thus: "[Mackandal] conceived the bold design of uniting all the Negroes and driving the whites out of the colony. He was a Negro from Guinea who had been a slave in the district of Limbé, later to become one of the great centres of the revolution. Mackandal was an orator, in the opinion of a white contemporary equal in eloquence to the European orators of the day, and different only in his superior strength and vigour. He was fearless and, though one-handed from an accident, had a fortitude of spirit which he knew how to preserve in the midst of the most cruel tortures[...] Not only did his band raid and pillage plantations far and wide, but he himself ranged from plantation to plantation to make converts, stimulate his followers, and perfect his great plan for the destruction of white civilisation in San Domingo. [...] Mackandal aimed at delivering his people by means of poison. For six years he built up his organisation, he and his followers poisoning not only whites but disobedient members of their own band. Then he arranged that on a particular day the water of every house in the capital of the province was to be poisoned, and the general attack made on the whites while they were in the convulsions and anguish of death. He had lists of all members of his party in each slave gang; appointed captains, lieutenants and other officers; arranged for bands of Negroes to leave the town and spread over the plains to massacre the whites. His temerity was the cause of his downfall. He went one day to a plantation, got drunk and was betrayed, and being captured was burnt alive." (20-21) Augustin's rapidfire description of these events is consistent with the above passage. Furthermore, she borrowed many aspects of the historical Macandal's life in the creation of his fictitious son Dominique. Like his father, Dominique is stoic, eloquent, and confident. Though he never takes the course of becoming a *marron* as his father did, his trajectory does encompass broad expanses of the Limbé region of the island. He further emulates his father in his careful and sometimes violent management of his followers as well as his predilection for the use of poison against his enemies.

Augustin couches her narrative of violence and social upheaval in a rather tepid and halfheartedly developed love story. The protagonist of this romance is Philippe Duverney, who is in love with the daughter of Dominique's owners, the de Lorris family. The narrative follows Philippe and Dominique across the island in their mutually antagonistic struggles: Dominique planning to foment rebellion and Philippe doing everything in his power to protect the de Lorris family.

The boundaries and contact zones over which Philippe and Dominique travel clearly derive from the slave society of colonial St-Domingue. The primary action of the novel occurs in three distinct locations, each occupied by a different social group. The first of these spaces is the plantation, domain of the white planter elite. Much of the plot takes place on the de Lorris plantation, a sumptuous estate overlooking the Limbé river. Any non-white characters who live on this plantation are enslaved to the de Lorris family. The plantation is described in the same breath as M de Lorris' daughter, the conveniently named Blanche: "Ce brillant cadre renferme une plante délicate, fragile—Blanche de Lorris" (27). While Blanche serves as the love interest of the white male protagonist Philippe, she does not play an active role in the events of the novel, nor is she described in great detail or depth: "Blanche a les yeux bleu-ardoise, pleins de rêverie, ombragés par de longs cils blonds; son regard franc, imprégné de douceur, attire; on se prend malgré soi d'une vive sympathie pour la belle âme qu'on y devine" (Augustin 27). The symbolic value of the name Blanche is very much in evidence here, as the narrator deduces her personality from her racial phenotype. According to this description, one has only to look at her blue eyes and blond lashes to know that she is sweet and honest and possessed of a beautiful soul. Throughout the novel, her virtue is never called into question, nor does the plot afford much attention to whether or not she reciprocates Philippe Duverney's affection. Duverney himself

describes her as “cet ange, si adorablement pur” (67). Thus, while Blanche is attractive to male characters, she is apparently devoid of sexual desire or agency, typifying what Hill Collins might describe as “the cult of true White womanhood” (83).

If the plantation is the privileged site of the ruling white elite, the Limbé river and surrounding plains constitute the base of operations for the revolting slave population. The space is desolate, almost devoid of human construction, and featuring only sparse vegetation. Augustin frequently compares the revolting enslaved people to animals, and the spaces they occupy are accordingly primitive. While the de Lorris plantation is presented as the home of Blanche, the Limbé plain is inhabited by Wamba, the wife of the first Macandal and the mother of his successor. After fleeing the de Lorris plantation, Wamba takes up residence in a tree hollowed out by lightning called the “Figuier Maudit” with her “fétiches” (20-1), a cat named Maya and a snake named Zombi. These spaces are defined by nature rather than culture and characterized by darkness.

The concomitance of the primitive and the occult suggested in the previous paragraph recurs frequently throughout the novel. Augustin describes Wamba’s lair thus: “Tout dans l’intérieur du figuier dénotait la présence d’un être adonné à la science funeste de la nécromancie ou sorcellerie” (21). Later, the novel depicts a version of the voodoo ceremony at Bois-Caïman, throughout which Augustin frequently emphasizes the Otherness of its participants with such expressions as “ce groupe fantasque, inouï” and “d’étranges contorsions” (44).⁴² When Wamba

⁴² This ceremony has figured in works as early as Antoine Delmas’ *Histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue* in 1814, where it was described thus: “Les dispositions de ce plan avoient été arrêtées quelques jours auparavant entre les principaux chefs, sur l’habitation Normand, au Morne Rouge. Avant de l’exécuter, ils célébrèrent une espece de fête ou de sacrifice, au milieu d’un terrain boisé et non-cultivé de l’habitation Choiseul, appelé le *Caïman*, où les nègres se réunirent en très-grand nombre. Un cochon entièrement noir, entouré de *fétiches*, chargé d’offrandes les uns plus bizarres que les autres, fut l’holocauste offert au génie tout-puissant de la race noire. Les cérémonies religieuses que les nègres pratiquèrent en l’égorgeant, l’avidité avec laquelle ils burent le sang, le prix qu’ils mirent à posséder quelques-uns de ses poils, talisman qui, selon eux, devoit les rendre invulnérables, servent à caractériser l’Africain. Il étoit naturel qu’une caste aussi ignorante et aussi abruti préludât aux attentats les plus épouvantables

speaks, the description of her voice concludes thusly: “on s’étonne que la parole puisse s’adapter à quelque chose d’aussi peu humain” (42). This emphasis on the Otherness and demonic nature continues to the conclusion of the scene: “Satan et ses légions avaient certainement hypnotisé ces... misérables” (45)! The natural world with which Augustin associates the revolting slaves of her story is also an occult, Other space, full of darkness and danger.

If the plantation is introduced as the home of Blanche de Lorris, who incarnates an asexual angelic purity, the plain is introduced as the home of Wamba, an old woman too monstrous and Other to be sexualized. At one point, even her maternal attentions to her son are met with repugnance: “Et, de ses doigts osseux, armés d’ongles crochus comme des serres d’un oiseau de proie, l’ex-reine des Séclaves caressa la tête de son fils; celui-ci parut goûter médiocrement cette caresse maternelle” (23). Here, the plain and the plantation are emblemized by dichotomous, racially charged representations of femininity as Light takes on the angelic form of Blanche while Darkness is represented by the demonic Wamba.

If the white planters, emblemized by Blanche de Lorris, make their home in the plantation and the revolting slaves, as represented by Wamba, inhabit the wild spaces of the

par les rites superstitieux d’une religion absurde et sanguinaire.” (117-8) Like Augustin, Delmas cites the voodoo rites as markers of ultimate cultural difference, emphasizing their strangeness and violence. The central role of the voodoo priestess is also constant in both descriptions. These descriptions echo Moreau de St-Mery’s assumption that voodoo was indicative of African susceptibility and the key to manipulating them: “Les nègres croient à la magie et l’empire de leurs *fétiches* les suit au-delà des mers. Plus les contes sont absurdes, plus ils les séduisent. [...] Il est un grand nombre de nègres qui acquièrent un pouvoir sur les autres par ce moyen et qui se servent de leur crédulité pour avoir de l’argent, de la puissance, et des jouissances de tous les genres” (56). This description of voodoo as an oppressive practice serves the rhetorical function of masking the liberating potential of such ceremonies as the one described above. While later historians such as C.L.R. James avoid the condescending tones adopted by his nineteenth-century predecessors, his description of events does not differ significantly from Delmas’ in the particulars: “On the night of [August] 22nd, a tropical storm raged with lightning and gusts of wind and heavy showers of rain. Carrying torches to light their way, the leaders of the revolt met in an open space in the thick forests of the Morne Rouge, a mountain overlooking Le Cap. There Boukman gave the last instructions and, after Voodoo incantations and the sucking of the blood of a stuck pig, he stimulated his followers by a prayer spoken in creole.” (87) Even in this less prejudiced description, the ceremony comes wrapped in all of the narrative trappings of a ghost story, complete with a dark and stormy night. The main difference in James’ account is the absence of the Voodoo priestess, according leadership of the ceremony to Boukman instead. Augustin’s depiction of this ceremony thus participates in a long tradition of dramatic embellishment.

Limbé plain, the free people of color of St-Domingue inhabit the city of le Cap, specifically the headquarters of the Société des Amis des Noirs.⁴³ The headquarters of this society in Augustin's text also serves as the base of operations for the primary instigators of the Haitian revolution, such as Chabannes, Ogé, and Louverture. The building is located "la partie haute" of the city, with none of the savage connotations of the Limbé plain. Rather, "le bon ton le plus parfait, l'ordre le plus rigide, une discipline presque militaire" characterize this space (55). Furthermore, it is described as a racially neutral zone, serving as "le rendez-vous des gros bonnets de couleur, Noirs ou Mulâtres, militaires ou *civiliens*, ainsi que des officiers de l'escadre française, ces derniers fort heureusement libres de tous préjugés de race" (55).

While the headquarters is described as a place liberated from the constraints of racial prejudice, certain aspects of the racial hierarchy remain firmly in place. Apart from a brief glance of Toussaint Louverture, the only black characters present at the auberge are servants. The servant who features most prominently in this scene is Toutoute, a young girl who spends several pages singing and dancing rather than waxing the stairs as she should. She accomplishes these antics in Creole, a dialect that Augustin reserves for characters in a position of servitude. Her audience during this impromptu minstrel show is Chabannes,⁴⁴ a man of mixed racial heritage. The dialogue between the two characters quickly devolves into an exchange of racial slurs.

Chabannes teases Toutoute because of her physical appearance, comparing her to a monkey.

⁴³ Historically, this society was comprised of prominent French abolitionists such as the Marquis de Lafayette, Jacques Pierre Brissot and Nicolas de Condorcet. Contemporary historians have critiqued the society for its gradualist approach to abolition and lack of political activism. Dorris Garraway has referred to the society as "the most famous example of flawed antislavery" (4), while according to William B. Cohen the organization was "but a pale imitation of its British counterpart" (139-40). As Cohen later elaborates, "The gradualist approach of the abolitionists revealed an unwillingness to attack slavery directly. There lingered the feeling that, even if slaves were humans, they were also legitimate forms of property. Gradualism revealed also a persistent suspicion of the Africans' ability to sustain freedom. Although the abolitionists blamed slavery for the Africans' condition, their hesitations about emancipation paralleled the slavers' argument that blacks were debased and unsuited for freedom" (153).

⁴⁴ Augustin based Chabannes on the historical figure of Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, who will be discussed in the following paragraph.

Toutoute retorts, still in Creole, that it is better to be black than mulatto, as mulattos have no country:

Oui, Toutoute samme macaque! oui, la tête Toutoute crottée! oui, li noire pacé saudière Soulouque! Main Toutoute guignin pays! Milates cé bâtards Blancs, moins ké chiens; chiens guignin pays, milates ïan pa. Pouah! (59)

Even in this supposed oasis of racial tolerance, the inequalities and prejudices of the colonial caste system apply with rigor. Rather than a post-racial utopia, Augustin's society features a mulatto class in favor of a gradualist approach to abolition negotiating an uneasy partnership with the revolting slaves of the Limbé plain.

This conflicted space is inhabited by Carmélite Ogé. Like the *Société des Amis des Noirs*, Carmélite has her historical antecedent in Vincent Ogé, a man of color who petitioned in metropolitan France for mulattos to receive the same rights as white citizens.⁴⁵ When his petition failed, he returned home and, alongside American Revolution veteran Jean-Baptiste Chavannes, fomented an unsuccessful revolt, at the conclusion of which both were captured, tortured, and summarily executed. This historical legacy was familiar to Louisianans. In an edition of *L'Union*, a pro-Union newspaper published by free people of color in occupied Civil War New Orleans, Henry Louis Rey drew on the example of Ogé and Chabannes in an impassioned call to arms (Bell 2-3). Their courage was clearly a source of inspiration to people of color long after their gruesome deaths. The actual historical figure of Vincent Ogé is conspicuously absent from this story in which real historical figures such as Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines make appearances. In Augustin's novel, the entire Ogé family is comprised of women. She further reconfigures the historical cast of characters by placing Carmélite Ogé and Jean-Baptiste Chabannes in a passionate but uneasy courtship, rather than portraying them as brothers in arms.

⁴⁵ See Cohen 114-5 and James 73-5.

This feminization of Ogé will later prove central to our examination of this text and its representation of how female sexuality simultaneously marks and blurs racial boundaries.

Given the importance of this feminization, Augustin's description of Carmélite certainly deserves our attention. Like St-Mery, Augustin ecstatically describes Carmélite's beauty, noting that she possesses "dans une rare perfection les attributs des femmes de sa classe: taille souple, ondoyante, mouvements félins, cheveux d'un noir lustré, longs, tellement ondulés qu'elle n'en savait que faire" (55). This description of sensual beauty, in particular of hair so lustrous and wavy that she does not know what to do with it, suggests a feminine sexuality that the character struggles to contain.

This struggle constitutes much of the depiction of Carmélite's moral character. Though Carmélite's physical description conforms to stereotypes of mixed-heritage women in St-Domingue, she does not live in concubinage and enjoys her spotless reputation as "la belle vierge dorée du Cap" (57). Augustin attributes this virtue to rigorous European religious education, described as "un moyen de prévenir Carmélite du dévergondage, héritage fatale de la race africaine" (56). While Blanche is presented as pure almost by default, Carmélite exists in constant tension between the "libertinage des filles de couleur en générale" and her strict Catholic upbringing. While the identities of Blanche and Wamba appear to be racially determined, Carmélite's identity is subject to a constant process of negotiation. Just as Augustin designates the Société des Amis de Noirs headquarters as the primary site of interracial contact and therefore conflict, Carmélite's body serves as the site of conflict between African impulses and European education, implicitly echoing racist tropes of African savagery.

In the *Macandal* the three components of the colonial caste system are thus segregated into three distinct locations in the topography of St-Domingue: the whites as incarnated by

Blanche de Lorrain in the plantation, the revolting slaves as incarnated by Wamba in the wild Limbé plain, and the free people of color as emblemized by Carmélite in the city. The whites and the revolting slaves exist in an increasingly hostile binary suggesting a degree of social militarization that Paul Gilroy refers to as “camp-thinking.” Though camp-thinking is most commonly typified by twentieth-century fascist regimes, Gilroy traces this mentality, which “communicated not only the entrance of ‘race’ into the operations of modern political culture but also the confluence of ‘race’ and nation in the service of authoritarian ends” (82), to European colonialism. For Gilroy, the implications of racially-determined social hierarchies could not be graver:

The spaces in which “races” come to life are a field from which political interaction has been banished. It is usually replaced by enthusiasm for the cheapest pseudo-solidarities: forms of connection that are imagined to arise effortlessly from shared phenotypes, cultures, and bio-nationalities. This is a period in which the easy invocation of “race” supplies regular confirmation of the retreat of political activity, defined here not as statecraft but as the exercise of power in a reasoned public culture capable of simultaneously promoting both self and social development. (41)

The construction of race as social status and identity forecloses any possibility of negotiation or non-violent evolution. In a society like Augustin’s colonial St-Domingue, the violent imposition of race-based slavery instantiates encamped mentalities and modes of occupying space, such that social status and identity derive from “ ‘race,’ nation, and ethnic difference, by the lore of blood, bodies, and fantasies of absolute cultural identity” (83). The intractable binary between white and black, slave and free, and the moral and cultural traits that supposedly stem from such distinctions leave the place and status of people of mixed heritage as a point of contention. Their very existence undermines such reductive ideologies of racial difference, highlighting the fissures of the slaveholding social order. As Gilroy points out, this positionality can involve “danger of encountering hostility from both sides, of being caught in the pincers of camp-

thinking” (84). It is this precarious space that Augustin brings to the fore in her depiction of the contested spaces of the *Société des amis de noirs* headquarters and Carmelite’s liminal body.

While the topography of Augustin’s novel encompasses the northern reaches of St-Domingue, de La Houssaye’s tetralogy takes place primarily in antebellum New Orleans. Though residential segregation does not feature prominently either in historical nineteenth-century New Orleans or in *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, de La Houssaye does use the physical spaces of her novels to establish divisions between characters, especially between white women and her eponymous quadroons. The locus of this division is private rather than public, allowing de La Houssaye to differentiate between modes of sexuality according to the intimate spaces with which she associates them.

De La Houssaye establishes spatial divisions along lines of race and sexuality in the first two books *Octavia* and *Violetta*, in which the eponymous anti-heroines wreak havoc on their lovers’ lives. After being jilted by her lover Alfred so that he can marry and sire a legitimate family, Octavia swears revenge and succeeds spectacularly. After lying in wait for years, she kidnaps the couple’s daughter, prompting Alfred’s wife to die of grief; she then raises the girl as her own, trains her in the arts of seduction, and eventually *places* her with her own unwitting brother. When Alfred discovers the family shame he shoots his daughter and then himself, while Octavia slips away unscathed. The anti-heroine of the following volume, sixteen-year-old Violetta, attracts the attention of a prosperous married merchant Pierre Saulvé then presses her advantage. Less calculating than Octavia, Violetta’s story unravels episodically, incorporating numerous and increasingly violent betrayals before culminating in the death of Saulvé and the financial ruin of his family.

From the beginning, de La Houssaye emphasizes the sensuousness of Octavia and Violetta by associating them with the stereotypically sexualized space of the boudoir, a space from which white women are categorically and conspicuously excluded. For example, in the first installation of the series *Octavia*, the title character is presented in her boudoir, her hair loose, her chest, legs, and feet exposed by her scanty clothes. She is reclined and, upon hearing the sound of footsteps, feigns sleep for the benefit of her lover, Alfred. De La Houssaye insists on the omnipresence of the color red in Octavia's home and whenever she refers to this particular room later in the series, it is always "le fameux boudoir rouge" (*Octavia & Violetta*, 185). In book two, Violetta is also associated with her boudoir. In this book, the boudoir is green, a color that aptly symbolizes the insatiable desires of its occupant. The boudoir itself in de La Houssaye's text becomes metonymic with sensual pleasure and passion. It is an intimate space, the goings-on of which La Houssaye often describes negatively. Take, for example, the following description of Violetta's rendez-vous with one of her lovers:

Que s'y passa-t-il entre ces deux enfants, jeunes et ardents tous deux, ivres la plupart du temps et fortement attachés l'un à l'autre? Je laisse ceci à deviner au lecteur. Mais, disons bien, une fois pour toutes, que la Marguerite de la Tour de Nesle, Lucrece de Borgia et même Messaline auraient pu recevoir des leçons de dévergondage, de luxure et du libertinage le plus vil, le plus grossier de cette petite quarteronne de dix-huit ans. (*Octavia & Violetta*, 222-3)

This teasing passage reveals no details of Violetta's "dévergondage," only suggesting that the young woman's debauchery surpasses that of the entire canon of European libertinage.

As an explicitly sexual space, Violetta's boudoir is forbidden territory. It cannot be described, only imagined. It is certainly off-limits to the white female characters of the series, none of whom appear to have boudoirs. When Pierre's daughter Marie goes to bring her prodigal father home to his son's deathbed, she must overcome the objections of her mother, the coach driver Josué, and even Violetta's aunt and procurer Aspasia, none of whom can bear the idea of

“cette pure créature dans ce repaire de débauche et de perdition” (258). Marie encounters all of this resistance in her attempt to enter Violetta’s dining room; the thought of the innocent, white virgin in the green boudoir is unthinkable. Upon her arrival, she immediately averts her eyes from the scantily clad quadroons, thinking “elles ne pouvaient appartenir au même sexe qu’elle”(259). De La Houssaye thus racializes active female sexuality, not only designating it as the province of “darker” women than she, but also relegating it to the outer darkness of unrepresentability.

This twofold obscurity suggests what Hélène Cixous might label a patriarchal binary mode of thought. Such thinking, she argues, derives from a deep-seated fear of the unknown or Other, whether the difference is racial or sexual:

On peut apprendre [aux femmes], dès qu’elles commencent à parler, en même temps que leur nom, que leur région est noire: parce que tu es Afrique, tu es noire. Ton continent est noir. Le noir est dangereux. Dans le noir tu ne vois rien, tu as peur. Ne bouge pas car tu risques de tomber. Surtout ne va pas dans la forêt. Et l’horreur du noir, nous l’avons intériorisée. (41)

Cixous posits a conflation of race and sexuality as supposedly menacing aspects, and the accumulation of spatial referents (region, Africa, continent, forest) is heavy with significance. Sidonie de La Houssaye’s narrator and characters have clearly internalized that fear, such that Marie cannot occupy the same space or even belong to the same sex as the women of color she meets. The multivalence of the French word “sexe” rings loudly, as Marie rejects her own sexuality as vehemently as she avoids Violetta’s boudoir. By associating her non-white characters with this “darker” sexuality, de La Houssaye assigns them a specific function within the sexual economy of her texts. By inserting them into spaces with such vaginal connotations, she literally puts them in their place.

If de La Houssaye’s quadroons are most noticeably associated with the boudoir, the white women of the series gravitate towards domestic spaces, especially the garden. The garden often

serves as the site of chaste romantic encounters, such as Léontine's first meeting with her future husband Hamilton or her daughter Alice's engagement to her suitor Yvon. This space would have held strong associations for Houssaye and her nineteenth-century audience, as Beverly Seaton points out in her exploration the significance of flowers and flower gardening during this period:

[...] in America flowers often symbolized the very civilization of the wilderness. It was commonplace in nineteenth-century popular literature that if a character rode through rude frontier regions and arrived at a cabin with a rose bush by the door, he knew before he got off his horse that a good woman lived there. (6)

According to Seaton, while flowers in the French imaginary appeared in the context of feminine seduction, American representations of female gardening emphasized the nurturing and civilizing aspects of the activity, thus constructing it as the epitome of womanly virtue (18).

Houssaye's novels clearly privilege this more local interpretation, establishing women's gardens as uterine spaces, sites of creation, innocence, and growth. It is worth noting that Octavia and Violetta, neither of whom ever become mothers, cannot stand the scent of flowers. While Octavia feigns motherhood and Violetta feigns a passion for her namesake flower, these pretenses only serve to underscore the danger of their chameleon-like talents. Motherhood is reserved for characters who fully adopt the nurturing, innocent traits evoked by the garden. All other female characters are restricted to their boudoirs. This spatial division reinforces the dichotomy between black female sexuality, represented in these texts as lascivious, unproductive, and driven by avarice and desire; and white sexuality, which is primarily reproductive and nurturing.

Both Augustin's *Le Macandal* and de La Houssaye's *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* establish important spatial divisions between racial groups. Augustin's topography sweeps over colonial St-Domingue, ascribing the plantation, the wild plains, and the city to the

three groups comprising the caste system of the island. In the first half of the novel, each location is emblemized by a female character: Blanche in the plantation, Wamba in the plain, and Carmelite in the city. De La Houssaye's topography is less visible, establishing divisions between modes of female sexuality by associating more vaginal sexualities, as typified by the controlling image of the lascivious woman of color, with the boudoir while uterine sexualities are more typically associated with the garden. In comparing these two topographies an important contrast emerges. While Augustin contrasts the natural space of the plain as a site of savagery with the constructed space of the plantation as a site of civilization, de La Houssaye juxtaposes the natural space of the garden as a site of purity to the artificial space of the boudoir as a site of corruption. For example, Octavia's quest to corrupt Alfred's daughter is described as a matter of extinguishing "toutes les lueurs de modestie, de franchise et d'honnêteté qui de temps à autre apparaissaient dans cette âme enfantine" (*Octavia & Violetta* 107). Thus while both hierarchies are predicated on stereotypes of white chastity and black promiscuity, they are articulated through a set of diametrically opposed associations: in *Le Macandal*, virtue is the result of proper Western education working against naturally savage human instincts, while in *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, debauchery occurs in artificial spaces, debasing the naturally pure space of the garden. However, as both works progress, transgressions of these racial boundaries will destabilize the social and moral hierarchies that they imply.

Transgression of Social Boundaries

Progressive violations of established boundaries occur in both *Le Macandal* and *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans*. In the former, these successive transgressions of encamped spaces drive much of the plot and are depicted as acts of violence, gradually eroding the social structure of the island until it implodes in scenes of apocalyptic savagery. For example, the first exchange between Monsieur de Lorris and Dominique takes place in the master's

library, a space replete with books, music, a globe, and other artifacts of Western culture and learning. Though Dominique is present in the library on Monsieur de Lorris' orders, the latter clearly expects the former to be ignorant of the room's function and is shocked when Dominique reveals that he is capable of copying music. Dominique's familiarity with such exclusive markers of social capital as written classical music constitutes a violation of the limits that traditionally circumscribe slaves' range of knowledge and education. While the Code Noir of 1685 did not prohibit teaching slaves to read and write as was common in the United States South, Dominique's education marks a clear departure from standard practice in slaveholding society. Symbolically, when M. de Lorris asks Dominique to copy a piece of music, the slave must ask his master for a pen. The pen is perfectly visible to Dominique, but as it is located near his master's hand, he must ask permission to touch it. The pen is thus articulated as a site of power that M. de Lorris cedes to his slave. The pen also operates as a phallic symbol, allowing Dominique symbolically to castrate his master. M. de Lorris, simultaneously impressed and intimidated by Dominique's accomplishments, gives him great responsibility and sends him abroad with his son Paul for the latter's education in England. This scene thus reads as Dominique's penetration into the exclusive space of the educated European elite, even partaking in Paul's voyage to Europe, a traditional rite of passage for wealthy colonists.

If Dominique's presence in the library is portrayed as a penetration into Western culture, Philippe Duverney transgresses upon the space of the revolting slaves by spying on Augustin's aforementioned adaptation of the *Cérémonie du Bois-Caïman*. Duverney attends this ceremony "à ses risques et périls." Furthermore his journey to this space is characterized as a descent into the shadows: "et descendant l'escalier, Philippe Duverney disparut dans les ténèbres" (Augustin 40). This descent marks an elevational contrast between the plain and the de Lorris' plantation,

which must be reached “en remontant le Limbé” (27). A spatial hierarchy is thus established between the heights of the de Lorris plantation and the hellish depths of the Limbé plain, between which Dominique and Philippe navigate, each with the intention of destroying the other.

Thus far transgressions of racial boundaries have been portrayed as male penetration of the space of the Other. The headquarters of the Société des Amis des Noirs, as a meeting place for people from various social strata, complicates this trend, being always already a site of conflict. Indeed, beneath the veneer of civility established in the initial description of the place, even the most mundane interactions between people of different social status are fraught with tension. Carmelite Ogé’s flirtation with her fiancé Chabannes is motivated primarily by fear of his jealous rage: “Les natures, comme celle du mulâtre, surexcitées, non seulement par le climat mais par le rencontre d’une vertu aussi farouche que l’était celle de Carmelite, peuvent, à un moment donné, devenir dangereuses. La jeune fille le savait” (62). Madame Ogé maintains discipline among her servants through liberal use of a cat-of-nine-tails. Upon arriving at the headquarters, Philippe receives a cold welcome from all concerned. His nemesis Dominique inspires terror from everyone on sight. The scene concludes fittingly, with Dominique’s first attempt at Philippe’s life. Augustin’s primary site of contact between members of different racial and social groups also serves as a primary site of conflict.

Given the prevalence of conflict in this site, it is fitting that Carmelite is its most visible occupant. As mentioned previously, Carmelite is named after the unsuccessful revolutionary Vincent Ogé, and Augustin’s description of her draws on both sensual and bellicose imagery. During her encounter with Chabannes her virtue is described as “farouche” (62) and she aspires “à faire pour Haïti ce que Jeanne d’Arc a fait pour la France” (56). This aggressiveness is particularly prominent when Carmelite’s virtue is in question. Her departure from the stereotype

of the libertine woman of color is portrayed as an act of resistance and courage. It is tempting to read Carmelite's choice to marry a man of her own caste rather than to live in concubinage as an act of resistance against colonial white supremacy, most visibly symbolized through the sexual availability of mulatto women. However, Augustin inverts the colonial history of white exploitation of non-white female bodies, citing the aggressive lust of Chabannes and Dominique, both non-white characters, as the primary threat to Carmelite's safety and chastity. Carmelite views the only white male character with whom she has any dealings, Philippe Duverney, as a protective figure:

Lorsque devant toute la congrégation de Notre-Dame, je fus insultée par cet officier français, vos soi-disant amis blancs y étaient au complet; mais ils étaient trop grands seigneurs pour défendre une femme de couleur. Philippe Duverney, obéissant à son noble cœur, ne voyant en moi qu'une femme en butte aux insolences d'un lâche, non content de le châtier, et méprisant les regards ironiques des gens de sa classe, ... ne rougit pas de m'offrir son bras et de me ramener à ma mère. (62)

While Carmelite does face insults from an unidentified French officer, it is the one named French character in the scene, Philippe, who comes to her rescue. He thus adopts a paternal role towards Carmelite, protecting her from insults and returning her to the custody of her mother. In the primary action of the story, Chabannes with his "tropical" temperament and Dominique with his "appétits cruels et sanguinaires" (37) present a much greater threat. Carmelite even teasingly suggests that she would prefer to be in a relationship with a white man, saying "il me semble moi qu'il faut avoir un bon caractère avec les amoureux de nos contrées tropicales, ma foi, j'avouerais franchement préférer ceux de la zone tempérée" (61). As is the case for Gayatri Spivak's third-world woman, Carmelite becomes an "*object* of protection from her own kind," constituting a "dissimulation of patriarchal strategy, which apparently grants the woman free choice as *subject*" (299). Whatever the danger, however, Carmelite agrees to set a date for a marriage to Chabannes when she realizes that his jealousy of Philippe might lead him to violence. Furthermore, her

eventual death comes quite literally at the hands of Dominique. As he squeezes her hand with a poisoned glove, he whispers in her ear “Chabannes pas plus que moi ne récoltera le prix de tant de vertu!” (99). The intimate and carnal nature of this murder suggests the fulfillment of Dominique’s desire for Carmelite. The resultant metonymy between sex and violence implies that Carmelite’s resistance to the stereotypical libertinage of her caste is also a struggle for survival, a struggle that ends tragically.

The story of *Le Macandal* thus reads as a progression of mutual violations of racially segregated spaces, from Dominique’s ascendance in the house of his master, to Philippe’s acts of espionage against the revolting slaves, to Wamba and Dominique’s destruction of their erstwhile master’s home and the murder of several members of the family, to the survivors’ escape of the revolt by taking refuge in Dominique’s abandoned cabin during the carnage. The violence culminates as Dominique murders Carmelite for having helped Philippe in the headquarters of the *Société des Amis des Noirs*. This act of brutality followed closely by Chabannes’ suicide symbolically evacuate the intermediate caste of free people of color from colonial society, leaving whites and blacks in an infernal binary, with each group bent on the subjugation or extermination of the other. Without an intermediate caste, there is no hope of reconciliation or negotiation; and the remaining society of encamped factions can only implode.

For much of *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* the primary spatial distinction is drawn between the garden and the boudoir. This binary falls apart in the increasingly labyrinthine novels *Gina* and *Dahlia*. Rather than focusing on its title character, *Gina* deals primarily with the fortunes of a white Creole woman named Léontine Castel and her family. Gina occupies one of the many subplots of the novel. She becomes the mistress of Léontine’s sickly but irrepressible seventeen-year-old son Percy, bears his daughter, and is finally

legitimized as his wife (in spirit if not by law) in the presence of his mother upon his deathbed. Dahlia, the only quadroon to whom the narrator refers with sympathy throughout the tetralogy, spends her character-forming years in a convent and believes herself to be white until she returns to New Orleans to live with her grandmother Babette. The primary action of the story is Dahlia's simultaneous struggle to protect herself from being sold into concubinage by Babette and to decide whether to act on her love for the white, aristocratic Valery Ashton, even though this relationship will never be legitimated through marriage. Finally, after Dahlia has become his mistress and is pregnant with his second child, Valery finally succumbs to family pressure and marries his cousin. The protagonist barely survives long enough to give birth before dying of sorrow.

Gina and Dahlia differ from their predecessors not only in the lesser financial strain they impose on their lovers, but also in their affinity for domestic spaces, including gardens. When Percy engages to buy Gina (amongst other things) a mansion costing no less than ten thousand dollars, Gina shreds the contract. She insists they set up house instead in a cottage, which she describes as “un vrai nid d’amoureux” (*Gina* 321), far too small to contain a boudoir, and “tout enveloppé de fleurs” (323). Dahlia complicates matters even further. At her first appearance in the series, the narrator exclaims, “C’était un ange déchu, c’est vrai! Mais c’était un ange” (*Octavia & Violetta* 197). The ambiguity of the fallen angel epithet associates Dahlia with both the innocence of the garden and the sensuality of the boudoir. Even as a child, Dahlia gravitates both towards her boudoir, to which the narrator also refers as “un petit sanctuaire,” and, more importantly, to her garden:

Mais, l’objet de la vénération de l’enfant, adoration qui excitait la surprise de tout le monde, c’étaient les fleurs! La possession d’une fleur lui donnait plus de bonheur que le plus beau des joujoux[...] Et, chose extraordinaire, cette enfant de six ans avait, lorsqu’il s’agissait des fleurs, un instinct, un tact singulier qui étonnait tout le monde: comme elle

s'était fait un boudoir d'un coin reculé de la chambre de sa grand-mère, de même elle se fit un parterre de la seconde cour qui s'étendait derrière la première et qui couvrait un espace d'une douzaine de pieds tout au plus. (*Dahlia* 17)

Six-year-old Dahlia already has the nurturing capacity to grow a garden in the barren soil of her grandmother's courtyard. She keeps this space a secret, knowing that the avaricious Babette would sell all her flowers if she knew of its existence. Later on, a similar fear of being commodified and sold into concubinage by her grandmother drives much of the novel's plot. This parallel between Dahlia's childhood desire to protect her flowers and her later attempts to protect her independence and virtue reinforces the symbolic value of the garden.

The garden is so crucial to Dahlia's identity that she chooses to name herself after her favorite flower. At the onset of the novel, Babette, Dahlia's grandmother and sole caretaker, does not bother naming her but refers to her simply as *Petite*, a name that neatly encapsulates the child's physical stature and monetary value. Dahlia responds by creating her own identity even as she establishes her garden and her boudoir for herself. Throughout the novel, Dahlia struggles to cultivate this identity in the harsh terrain of Antebellum Louisiana. The third space that she has created within the divided sexual economy in de La Houssaye's tetralogy proves intimidatingly precarious.

Dahlia has been previously characterized as an iteration of the tragic octaroon trope.⁴⁶ Like the tragic octaroon of American abolitionist literature, Dahlia is forced to confront her racial identity upon the death of her father. As a young woman growing up in a convent in Baltimore, Dahlia is blissfully unaware that she is not in fact white. She does not learn about her unwhiteness until after returning to New Orleans and being publically humiliated by the mother of one of her school friends. Like the tragic octaroon, Dahlia must be rescued from sale to a sexually predatory man. However, the main action of the story revolves around Dahlia's decision

⁴⁶ See Hommel, 186-7.

of whether to enter a relationship with Valery. This struggle is punctuated by Dahlia's staggered discoveries of the implications of her racial identity. Despite the warnings of her friends, Dahlia does not accept the fact that Valery will not leave Louisiana and marry her. While Dahlia initially refuses to become Valery's mistress, when his life is in danger she abandons all her deliberations and rushes to his side. The narrator's repeated interjections of "Pauvre Dahlia!" throughout this chain of events suggest that her story is a tragedy. While Dahlia's virtue, wealth, and accomplishments would have made a white woman extremely marriageable; she is haunted by the tragic flaw of her racial identity. The tragedy in fact seems to be the dissonance between Dahlia's aspirations and social status. As a highly educated and cultured young woman, Dahlia aspires to marry a wealthy man in the liberal professions, like Valery. However, as a woman of color, the choices society offers her are a *mariage de main gauche* to a white man or a legal marriage to a working-class man of color like Nicolas. Dahlia's tragedy thus follows Léontine's diagnosis of the condition of New Orleans quadroons:

Elles sont pieuses et ne demandent que d'être vertueuses... Mais qui épouseront-elles? où est l'époux qui doit les guider dans le sentier des honnêtes femmes? La loi leur défend d'épouser un blanc et leur goût délicat les éloigne des hommes de leur race qui sont généralement des brutes sans éducation et plus ou moins ivrognes... (*Gina* 50)⁴⁷

To borrow Patricia Hill Collins' terms, Dahlia's education predisposes her to aspire to the cult of true White womanhood, while her non-whiteness precludes her assimilation into that identity.

⁴⁷ While Léontine's assessment is blatantly prejudiced against men of color and may seem to contemporary readers to wallow in a politics of pity, her reasoning is similar to that of recent historical research on the subject. The demographics of colonial New Orleans suggests that given the relatively small number of free men of color in the city and the legal proscription against marriage between free people of any color and slaves, that many free women may have had no real marriage prospects at all. In this context, their resort to *plaçage* constitutes a calculated strategy for survival in an unforgiving patriarchal society. For example, Joan Martin asserts that "Free women of color, then, by law, could not marry slaves and they could not marry free white men. And free men of color of marriageable age were virtually unavailable. The free woman had to accept the fact that with her choice of mate taken out of her hands, she was at the mercy of any man, white or black, who chose to do her harm. Her decision to use the *plaçage* system to save herself and her progeny was not only pragmatic, but in a sense, ingenious" (64). Even Emily Clark, who has pointed out the growing popularity of marriage among free people of color in the nineteenth century admits that "There were only forty-five adult free men of color in the city for every one hundred free women, so competition for grooms was stiff" (91).

However, Dahlia does put up much more of a fight than Boucicault's Zoe. De La Houssaye devotes hundreds of pages to Dahlia's quest to reconcile her seemingly contradictory desires, aspirations, and social status.

The strongest indication of Dahlia's agency in the story is her mobility. The novel traces the negotiation of her conflicting motivations through a series of flights across the city of New Orleans. Dahlia first flees Babette's house and the peril of being forcibly *placed*. She then takes refuge with the aptly named Viriginie LeBon, the only woman of color in the series to marry a man of her own caste. When her love for Valery wins out over her desire for a legitimate marriage, however, she rushes to his side. Dahlia's peregrinations end when she and Valery settle down in her own house. In many ways Dahlia's residence resembles that of a white family. Like the houses of many white families in the series (such as the Castels' *Les Muriers* or the Saulvés' *Les Magnolias*), it has a name (*Les Dahlias*). Having inherited enough money to become financially independent, she furnishes it as she pleases and molds it into a model of domesticity. This self-established space, not borrowed from Babette but legitimately belonging to Dahlia, serves as a refuge from the prejudices of New Orleans society. Her ordering of this space conforms so neatly with the hallmarks of whiteness favored by de La Houssaye (modesty, education, and culture) that when Valery's legal wife Camille eventually visits, she is immediately impressed by Dahlia's superior education and domestic skills.⁴⁸ Dahlia's appropriation of spaces previously designated as "white" thus disrupts the racial and sexual dichotomies of the first two novels and throws their stark essentialisms into question.

⁴⁸ "Camille regardait et le rouge de la honte lui montait au front: pouvait-elle faire illusion? Pouvait-elle ne pas comprendre l'immense différence qui existait entre elle et la maîtresse de son mari? Elle qui n'avait jamais tenu un pinceau? Qui n'avait jamais ouvert son piano depuis le moment qu'elle avait épousé Gérard, elle enfin qui lisait bien rarement et qui ne lisait que de mauvais romans [...]" (*Dahlia* 445)

While Dahlia does challenge the racial dichotomies of her society, her resistance is nearly as short-lived as Carmelite's in *Le Macandal*. However her trajectory illustrates the value of creativity and flight in the negotiation of social identity. This latter tactic especially highlights the centrality of space to the construction of that identity. Dahlia cannot remain virtuous in her grandmother's house or act on her feelings for Valery while living with Virginie LeBon. The failure of *Les Dahlias* to ensure her happiness is the final straw—New Orleans is no fit place for women of color who aspire to more than servitude or concubinage from life. As such, the resolution of *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans* takes the strategy of flight to a transatlantic scale as de La Houssaye's protagonists continue their quest for acceptance and legitimacy.

Erasure of Intermediate Class from Racial Hierarchy

Both *Le Macandal* and *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* feature free women of color as emblematic of an intermediate caste between the dominant white caste and the enslaved black population that primarily constituted antebellum society in the United States South. The death or emigration of these women at the conclusion of these novels implies the elimination of this intermediate caste, leaving a starkly divided racial binary in place of the more complex tripartite system. In both works, these women's power (and in some cases their downfall) derive from their capacity to establish relationships, especially with members of the white male elite. Examining these relationships and how they contribute to the symbolic disappearance of free people of color from a society will allow us to determine the significance of this erasure, especially given the contentious and racially charged context in which these texts were produced.

Le Macandal concludes with Philippe and Blanche along with the other surviving members of the de Lorris family and their faithful servants on board a ship heading for Louisiana. No mixed-heritage characters survive. In their absence, a microcosm of a binary racist

society, consisting solely of white masters and black slaves, is left in the boat.⁴⁹ A closer examination of the disappearance of the intermediate caste, as incarnated by Carmelite Ogé, will help clarify the importance of this erasure in Augustin's text.

From her first appearance in *Le Macandal*, Carmelite is not only a revolutionary leader but the object of desire for several major characters. As mentioned previously, this attractiveness is consistent with stereotypes of mulatto women from the period. However, while St-Mery's ecstatic description of mulatta beauty suggests the gaze of an anonymous white male, Carmelite's most visible admirers are her fiancé Chabannes, a man of her own caste, and Dominique, a slave. There is no evidence that Carmelite is aware of the latter's feelings for her until the moment of her death. While she refers to having been insulted by a French officer at some point, the only white male with whom she has any dealings during the primary narrative of the story is Philippe Duverney, who is motivated mainly by his love for Blanche de Lorris. While Carmelite's ostensible feelings towards Philippe are merely gratitude for having come to her rescue after the aforementioned insult, her affection for him is visible enough to incur the jealousy of Chabannes. Eventually, she sacrifices her life and compromises the rebellion in order to help Philippe rescue Blanche, suggesting much stronger devotion than simple, platonic gratitude. The plot of *Le Macandal* thus revolves around a network of desire with Carmelite at its center. This network reinforces the racist hierarchy of the slave society, as each character desires someone of

⁴⁹ Actual immigration to Louisiana following the Haitian Revolution included many free people of color, causing consternation to Spanish officials and their American successors, many of whom feared that augmenting the already sizeable population of Caribbean slaves and free people of color in the colony/territory would facilitate similar slave revolts there. As Bell notes, "As early as May, 1790, a Spanish decree ordered royal officials to prohibit the entry of slaves and free blacks from the French West Indies. After the American takeover, continuing fears of a slave revolt and the city's growing black majority inspired a similar series of restrictive enactments. Territorial officials continued the ban on West Indian slaves, and on June 7, 1806, the territorial legislature barred the entry of free black males from the French Caribbean over fourteen years of age" (35). Given these restrictions, the gender imbalance among the free people of color who immigrated to Louisiana in the early nineteenth century is hardly surprising and had important consequences for Emily Clark's argument concerning the Caribbean origins of the *plaçage* myth (6-9).

equal or greater whiteness than him or herself: Dominique and Chabannes desire Carmelite who secretly desires Philippe who desires Blanche.

It is Carmelite's implicit and unrequited desire for Philippe that will occupy my attention here. In a reversal of the trajectory of the historical figure of Vincent Ogé, who fomented a revolt only to be captured and executed by the white authorities, Carmelite gives up her role in the revolution to help Philippe and his white love interest and is subsequently murdered by Dominique, leader of the slave uprising. While the intermediate caste of Saint-Domingue ultimately used the success of the slave uprisings to supplant the white planters as the dominant order on the island, Augustin's mulattos, as personified by self-sacrificing Carmelite and suicidal Chabannes, eliminate themselves from the social order.

By feminizing Vincent Ogé, Augustin inserts him/her into an economy of desire through which s/he can be assimilated, controlled, and eventually erased. However, if Carmelite inverts the trajectory of her historical antecedent, she also subverts the stereotype of the lascivious mulatto woman as presented by St-Mery. Rather than jeopardize the dominant order through her irresistible and insatiable sexuality, Carmelite reinforces the hegemony of that order through her self-sacrifice.

While Carmelite departs noticeably, both from her historical antecedent and from the stereotypes that inform her physical description, her actions resonate powerfully with the history of free people of color in antebellum Louisiana. This group was predominantly female and managed to thrive, particularly in New Orleans, in the face of increasing discrimination on the part of the American government. Just as Carmelite established a school both for black and mixed-heritage people, the free people of color of New Orleans established their own schools. Thanks to these schools, many of which were funded by charitable organizations allowing poorer

students to attend free of charge, the literacy rate among free people of color in antebellum New Orleans was higher than that of the city's white population during the same period.⁵⁰ In fact, if Carmelite resembles anyone, with her rejection of racial stereotypes and her dedication to social justice, it is Henriette Delille. Born to a quadroon mother in New Orleans, Delille was brought up to participate in the system of *plaçage*. After the death of her mother however, Delille, not being permitted to join an all-white convent, used her inheritance to establish her own religious community called the Sisters of the Holy Family. As in Carmelite's case, Delille's commitment to her faith constituted a rebellion against the norms of her social milieu:

Instead of securing a favorable alliance with a wealthy and influential white man, Delille insisted on pursuing a religious calling that she proposed to fund with her inheritance. In her family's view, the young woman would forfeit her financial security and diminish the household's fortunes by such a course of action. They refused to cooperate, but she persisted. (Bell 129)

Like Carmelite's school, this community aspired to provide educational opportunities for children of color, both enslaved and free.⁵¹ The ingenuity and perseverance of such individuals as Delille was vital to the prosperity and success of the free people of color of New Orleans in the face of social stigma and political oppression.

Though Carmelite herself does not join religious life, Augustin's choice in naming her after a Holy Order, the execution of whose members during the French revolution inspired so many artistic representations, is not arbitrary. The fact that she dies a virgin further emphasizes this implicit parallel with the lives of the Sisters of the Holy Family founders. The disappearance of Carmelite and the educated and civically engaged caste she represents signals the foreclosure of any reconciliation between the racial binary of planters and rebels. From Augustin's perspective, such an outcome can only result in further bloodshed.

⁵⁰ See Bell 122-125 and Dunbar-Nelson 29-30.

⁵¹ For more on Henriette Delille and her work in New Orleans consult Bell 127-34.

Sidonie de La Houssaye concludes *Les Quarteronnes de La Nouvelle Orléans* with these words: “J’ai mis sous tes yeux différents types de quarteronnes, mais lorsque ta voix s’élèvera pour vouer au mépris des femmes comme Octavia, Violetta et Adoréah, sois indulgent pour ces douces créatures, Gothe, Gina et Dahlia, poussées par la fatalité dans le sentier du mal, et plus dignes de pitié que de mépris” (*Dahlia* 481). By this point, all the women in this latter category who have survived the many reversals of fortune in the series have made their way to Paris. These protagonists have made longing references to Europe throughout the series, as a place where they can marry their white lovers unimpeded by Louisiana’s anti-miscegenation laws. The conclusion of the tetralogy finds them living in “une colonie louisianaise” where they freely mingle with the elite of Paris society.⁵² The life they enjoy there is the stuff of fairy tales, complete with *hôtels particuliers* and aristocratic marriages. In the final pages of *Dahlia*, the narrator comments:

Qui eût dit en contemplant ces êtres d’élite, ces femmes si belles, si gracieuses, si distinguées, ces hommes si haut placés, d’une éducation de premier ordre, les uns artistes, les autres appartenant au barreau, à la finance, à la littérature, qui eût oser dire que ces créatures avaient été forcées de quitter leur patrie pour échapper à l’infamie de leur naissance, et à la honte qu’elles rencontraient à chaque pas! Qui eût osé dire qu’elles appartenaient à une race rejetée de la société, à une race à laquelle il est défendu de s’allier, à une race maudite, à celle des quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans. (480-481)

In this description, according to every index that de La Houssaye considers important (class, profession, education, respectability), these characters belong to a social elite, allowing them to assimilate seamlessly into the Parisian upper class. Her repetition of the title of the series, wherein the gendered racial category of “*les quarteronnes*” is paired so inextricably with the city

⁵² While the idea of establishing a colony in the metropole might seem problematic, nineteenth-century American readers would have readily associated this term with the “repatriation” efforts of the American Colonization Society in Liberia, especially given that members of this particular colony happen to be free people of color. Nor would de La Houssaye’s further reconfiguration of this inverted Atlantic Triangle—sending her protagonists to France rather than Africa—have seemed unusual given that many free people of color in Antebellum Louisiana, such as the playwright Victor Séjour or the engineer Norbert Rillieux, did immigrate to France to avoid racial oppression. On this latter tendency, see Benfey 122-139.

of New Orleans, underscores the extent to which that label is a local (and hence socially constructed) phenomenon. Effectively these characters have become white.⁵³

If some of de La Houssaye's heroines manage definitively to cross over the color line, it is important to note the conditions of possibility for such a transition to occur. First of all, the quadroon must leave Louisiana. The minute Octavia returns to New Orleans from her honeymoon-like European tour with Alfred, she resumes her position in the racially segregated demi-monde. As long as Dahlia lives in Baltimore, she enjoys the life of a sheltered, white, young lady. The tragedy of her adult life does not begin until she returns to Louisiana, where the forbidden fruit of her racial difference is more or less thrown at her by the prejudiced mother of a Baltimore schoolmate, who refuses to allow Dahlia to remain friends with her daughter. Racial identity is thus specific to place and sociocultural context. On her deathbed, Dahlia explains this specificity in one of the most glaringly critical passages of the series:

Je ne veux pas que mes enfants demeurent à la Louisiane. Je suis fière de mon fils, je rêve pour lui un brillant avenir... et ici! Vous le savez, madame, à ceux dont les veines sont souillées par une goutte de sang de couleur, toutes les carrières sont fermées, ils sont les parias de la société et qu'importe s'ils sont bons, nobles, intelligents, ils ne peuvent parvenir à rien et sont forcés de courber le front sous le poids du mépris qui les poursuit. (*Dahlia* 446-7)

Her jeremiad concludes with her hopes for her daughter: "Je ne veux pas qu'on puisse l'appeler Célima la quarteronne comme on a appelé sa mère Dahlia la quarteronne" (447). If the racial division between Dahlia and Valery's wife, and all the differences of gender identity and social status entailed therein, can disappear over the course of a transatlantic voyage, then essentialist definitions of race are clearly not in operation.

⁵³ Christine Harris refers to this process as "ascending," and cites it as evidence that de La Houssaye promotes a performative conceptualization of race (15-6). As I argue later, however, this process requires the complicity of a white man, regardless of a character's conformity to standards of "whiteness." The place-specificity and direct patriarchal control over "ascension" suggest that racial barriers in de La Houssaye's work cannot be completely reduced to performance of cultural norms.

If racial identities can simply be left on one side of the Atlantic, why do not all of de La Houssaye's heroines take that route? The answer lies in their gender, for if the color line is specific to Louisiana, the patriarchy is not. The emigration tactic is only successful when undertaken as the legitimate daughter or spouse of a white man. In each of de La Houssaye's novels, white men are the ultimate racial gatekeepers, and no woman, no matter how indistinguishable from her aristocratic counterparts, can hope to cross that threshold without their consent. Octavia may play at being Alfred's wife abroad, but as long as he refuses to marry her, it will only be a farce. Gina's "whitening" occurs as a result of Percy's deathbed legitimization of her and their child. Meanwhile, Dahlia can balance on the pedestal of "true White womanhood" as gracefully as she likes, but she will always be "Dahlia la quarteronne" outside the bounds of marriage. As Jennifer DeVere Brody asserts in her work on the tragic Octaroon: "Because white men controlled miscegenation, they were the ones who made black women and women black" (111). No matter how de La Houssaye's heroines scheme, masquerade, conform, resist, pray, or love, their social status remains subject to the caprices of white men.

De La Houssaye further problematizes this imbalance of power through decidedly unsympathetic portrayals of male characters. Alfred brings about his own destruction through his blindness to Octavia's genuine devotion for him, considering his mistress as a simple commodity: "il s'était paré de la belle quarteronne comme on se pare d'un bijou précieux, et il l'avait acheté comme on achète un cheval ou un tableau de prix" (*Octavia* 80). Furthermore, his rationale for leaving Octavia—namely "la preuve d'estime et de confiance que venaient de lui témoigner ses concitoyens en le choisissant pour leur juge"—speaks more to his professional aspirations than any newfound moral qualms (82). He then exacerbates the situation by underestimating Octavia, believing that her only weapon is her alleged knowledge of poisons. He

never credits her with the psychological acuity necessary to thoroughly understand his desire to establish a legitimate family or to thwart that ambition with such devastating precision. This damning depiction of Alfred leaves the careful reader wondering at the meaning of the narrator's final hopes that "la justice de Dieu, aussi bien que le mépris des hommes, s'attachera à jamais aux pas d'Octavia la quarteronne" (141). Alfred is not an isolated case: throughout the series, white men ruin and abandon their families, spoil or neglect their children, forge checks, abuse their wives, and shamelessly debauch themselves. The final straw is Valery, who does not dare defy social norms to marry Dahlia, but expects her to forsake her virtue to become his mistress. In summation, the men of *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans* are prejudiced, profligate, incontinent, cowardly, and in power.

In her critique of de La Houssaye's work, Alice Parker declares it inconceivable that the author could sympathize with women of color over men of her own caste (92). Yet Sidonie de La Houssaye does precisely that.⁵⁴ As Léontine, the character who most resembles de La Houssaye in the series, has pointed out in the aforementioned quotation, her protagonists have no hope of walking the "path of honest women" or of achieving social legitimacy outside the patriarchal institution of marriage. Furthermore, as the aspersions Léontine then casts on men of color illustrate, not just any marriage will suffice. The power to determine who is virtuous and who is not rests in the hands of (white) men, and their influence increases when gendered racial difference factors into the equation.

In the final pages of *Dahlia*, de La Houssaye wrests this power from the men who have thus far dominated the series. Long after Dahlia's death, Valery's (white) adopted daughter Hélène falls in love with Dahlia's son Val. Rather than submit to her parents' objections to their

⁵⁴ De La Houssaye's own marital experience, during which she sued her husband for control of her property, most likely informed this outlook. See Hommel's introduction to *Octavia* 8-9.

union, she elopes with him to France, declaring, “L’obstacle qui, d’après vous et papa, existe entre nous est un infâme préjugé auquel, bien certainement, je ne sacrifierai pas mon bonheur” (476). Upon discovering the young couple’s flight, Valery reacts, not with anger but with admiration: “Oh! La noble enfant! quel exemple elle me donne! Ah! que n’ai-je fait comme elle” (478)! In her determination and confidence, Hélène bears little resemblance to the passive, two-dimensional angels of domesticity that punctuated the beginning of the *Quarteronnes* series. Rather, she acts decisively on her judgment, brazenly thwarting patriarchal authority, and achieves far better results than her father.

This happy ending runs profoundly counter to the venomous zeitgeist of the time at which it was written. Notably, *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans* first appeared contemporaneously with Ida B. Wells’ anti-lynching pamphlets, in which she reported the brutal killings of hundreds of black men. Wells noted that, to “excuse some of the most heinous crimes that ever stained the history of a country, the South is shielding itself behind the plausible screen of defending the honor of its women.” This rationale for the reign of terror that followed the end of Reconstruction drew on now familiar white prejudices, fear of emasculation, and desire to reassert racial dominance. At the time, belief in stereotypes of black sexual aggression was so strong and widespread that Wells found herself defending the seemingly obvious statement: “Afro-American men do not always rape white women without their consent.” Though lynch mob racism may seem like an extreme example, the fact that so few lynchers were ever prosecuted suggests widespread complicity in this ideology. Wells further demonstrates the injustice of lynch killings by describing the rapes of black women and girls by white men, none of whom were lynched and some of whom escaped punishment altogether. The visceral racism that drives Wells’ opponents thus clearly intersects with patriarchal power structures: the white

lynchers perceive all women as territory to be occupied and controlled by one man or another. They perceive all intercourse between black men and white women as rape because they view black penetration of white women as violation of their own territory. According to the residual mentality of slavery however, black men cannot own property, leaving their women freely available to white men's pleasure. The humanity and agency of women of color are thus doubly denied. Such patriarchal racist attitudes were not simply prevalent in post-Reconstruction Louisiana but legitimated by Jim Crow legislation that segregated every aspect of life in the state.

Conclusion

Neither Marie Augustin nor Sidonie de La Houssaye could have been expected to escape the influences of the period in which they lived. In their abstention from any direct critique of slavery and in their uncritical adoption of some stereotypes such as the devoted house servant, these authors show evidence of investment in their own racial privilege. Furthermore, they both inscribe racial and sexual hierarchies similar to those promulgated by Jim Crow racism into the narrative spaces of their work. While Augustin's characters navigate the hierarchically organized and encamped spaces of the plantation and the plain, tracing a stark binary between white and black, master and slave; de La Houssaye peers into the intimate spaces of an antebellum demi-monde, constructing a racially charged contrast between libidinous and generative sexualities as expressed through the metonymous loci of the boudoir and the garden. These frameworks inscribe themselves with particular urgency onto the bodies of mixed heritage women, either as a site of interracial conflict as in *Le Macandal* or as an expression of sexual Otherness as in *Octavia* and *Violetta*. This initial view of the texts supports the racist ideology that there are two basic kinds of people, white and black, normative and deviant, who should be kept apart insofar as possible. However, in both novels such boundaries cannot hold.

The group of exiles huddled in the boat at the conclusion of *Le Macandal* sets out for Louisiana carrying a microcosm of post-Reconstruction society. There is no room in this boat for complicated figures like Carmelite or Dahlia who do not neatly conform to any script for racialized character or behavior. There are only white masters and black slaves. This impoverished society results from the camp-thinking instantiated by the rigid hierarchies of plantation society such that all contact between groups becomes conflict. Caught between the horrors of slavery and the horrors of revolt, the only hope for negotiation and resolution lies in the capacity of the mixed-heritage woman to form relationships with people at all levels of society. Here, rather than a threat to the social order or the incarnation of black subjugation to white male desire, the figurative promiscuity of the free woman of color represents the only way out of the infernal binary of slave society. In the case of de La Houssaye, characters such as Gina and Dahlia challenge previously established binaries, engaging in patterns of resistance and flight that throw their arbitrary nature into sharp relief. Both Augustin and de La Houssaye had numerous historical examples to draw on in the creation of these characters, from moral crusaders like Henriette Delille to brilliant exiles like Victor Séjour. The trajectories of their fictional characters point back to the accomplishments of free people of color in Antebellum Louisiana, before the imposition of the more typically American racial binary. This nostalgic parallel heightens the tragedy of Carmelite and Dahlia's deaths. Carmelite's attempt to negotiate her various allegiances to the rebels and to Philippe is as doomed as Dahlia's effort to establish her own garden in the inhospitable soil of segregated New Orleans. Jim Crow Louisiana has foreclosed all possibility of renegotiating race relations, a foreclosure that Augustin and de La Houssaye represent as loss.

CHAPTER FOUR: NEGOTIATING LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN THE POETRY OF BEVERLY MATHERNE AND DEBORAH CLIFTON

In the previous two chapters, I have explored the complex approaches adopted by Louisiana francophone women writers towards hierarchies of gender and race. I have shown how the liminal positionality of these women informs the ambiguities of their works. In this chapter, I examine contemporary multilingual works by Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton and show how they adopt a similarly complex approach to the linguistic hierarchy that has structured Louisiana society since the beginning of the twentieth century. This hierarchy derives from the aggressive anglicization that effectively eliminated Louisiana French from the public sphere, precluding the production of French-language publications throughout much of the twentieth century and resulting in the chronological gap between Matherne and Clifton and the writers discussed in previous chapters. I refer to Matherne and Clifton as contemporary Louisiana French writers, meaning that their works have emerged since the Cajun Renaissance of the late twentieth century. Such poets write in and about a complex cultural landscape. While advocates of Cajun and Creole cultures in the region have made great strides against English-only prejudices in recent decades, the language persists primarily in its oral form. Today, many speakers of Louisiana French cannot read or write the language.

As such the creation of a literary form of Louisiana French is currently an ongoing process in which poetry plays a vital role. While code-switching features prominently in such poetry, Matherne and Clifton are unique in explicitly incorporating shifts between English, International French, Louisiana French, and, in Clifton's case, Creole into the structure of their works. As such, they enact an interdiscursive poetics that deterritorializes all its component

languages, placing them in dialogue and contesting the hierarchies that usually obtain between them. These texts therefore perform what Lise Gauvin would describe as acts of *langagement*, or self-conscious literary engagement with a diglossic context of enunciation, and fulfill the subversive functions ascribed by Deleuze and Guattari to minor literatures. Drawing on close readings of the texts informed by the the Glissantian concept of detour, I argue that these works creatively engage with the asymmetrical power relations informing that context and generate space for further literary production in Louisiana French and Creole.

Louisiana French and Creole

The sociolinguistic situation of French and Creole in Louisiana is complex. Louisiana French is an umbrella term referring to multiple language varieties. Albert Valdman and Thomas Klinger have referred to these varieties collectively as “a finely meshed continuum in which it is possible to delineate two idealized speech norms: Standard French and Louisiana Creole” (109). Within this continuum, three varieties consistently feature in linguistic scholarship, though the terminology used to refer to them has shifted over time (Valdman, Rottet, and Ancelet xii): Plantation Society French (referred to as “Louisiana French” by Hosea Phillipps in 1979, 174), Cajun French (also referred to by the more general term of “Louisiana French” by Valdman, Rottet, and Ancelet in recognition of the multiplicity of its historical roots and the diversity of its speakers), and Louisiana Creole (often referred to as Negro French or negro dialect in early twentieth-century sources).⁵⁵ Though Plantation Society French has disappeared from use in Louisiana, Cajun French and Louisiana Creole continue to enjoy vernacular use in southern Louisiana.

⁵⁵ Phillipps 175. For an example of the racializing framing of Creole by white authors, consider Marguerite Wogan’s minstrel play written in 1934. Wogan prefaces this work by referring to the language as “real negro dialect” (5).

As Carl Blyth points out however, delineating between these varieties is an extremely thorny process, particularly as many speakers of Louisiana French often “move back and forth along the continuum to suit communicative needs, frequently mixing varieties in the process.” The fluidity of this code switching is such that Blyth has remarked that many individuals who primarily speak what linguists would refer to as Cajun French identify themselves as Louisiana Creole speakers and vice versa (27). As such, a clearly defined demarcation between Cajun and non-Cajun French is well beyond the scope of this project. I will therefore use the term Louisiana French to refer broadly to Louisiana language that offers significant lexical variation but minimal structural variation from International French.⁵⁶ I use the term Creole or Louisiana Creole to designate Louisiana language production that includes typically Creole grammatical structures such as invariable first- and second-person pronouns and the use of invariable auxiliary verbs to indicate tense.⁵⁷ Renouncing any attempt at formal linguistic differentiation, my focus is on the textual and translational strategies Matherne and Clifton use to incorporate Louisiana French and Creole into their works.

⁵⁶ I use the term International French to refer to the variety of French often called Standard French, namely the language as defined and regulated by the Académie française. As the term “Standard French” implies a rigid norm from which any variation must necessarily be considered deviant, I use the term “International French” to bypass these hierarchal connotations. As an example of what I mean by Louisiana French, consider the following: “Lui, il était paré/ pour faire tout pour la rendre contente” (“He was prepared/ to do anything to make her happy” Clifton, *À cette heure*, “La Babine” 11-12) or “Mon papa, y sent rienque/ les Picayunes et le Jax” (“My daddy, he don' smell nothin'/ But Picayunes and Jax” Matherne, *Blues*, “Maman marchait comme le vent danse” 11-12, her translation).

⁵⁷ As an example, consider the following: “Mo té voit Lapin-là apé sauté” (“I saw that Rabbit leaping” Clifton *À cette heure* “Bouki fait gombo, Lapin mangé!” 1). While a comparison of Louisiana Creole and the Creoles of Haiti and other Caribbean islands is well beyond the scope of this project, historical sources, pointing to the importation of Louisiana’s first generations of slaves directly from Africa via the Caribbean as well as linguistic analyses suggest that the variety developed independently *in situ*. As Hall notes: “The Louisiana Creole language was created by the African slaves brought to Louisiana and by their Creole children. It belongs to a special language group, the Atlantic Creoles, which are languages created by African slaves brought to the Americas. These languages are markedly similar in grammatical structure, in pronunciation, and in literal translations of African idioms, though the vocabulary is largely that of the language of the respective European colonizers” (187).

As the aforementioned shifts in terminology implies, the evolution and contemporary uses of Louisiana French varieties derive from the stark socioeconomic realities that have shaped the history of the region. If, as Bourdieu asserts, linguistic exchanges constitute “des rapports de pouvoir symbolique où s’actualisent les rapports de force entre les locuteurs ou leurs groupes respectifs” (*Langage et pouvoir* 60), any examination of Francophone or Creole literary production of contemporary Louisiana requires an understanding of the power relations informing their enunciation. Plantation Society French, as the name suggests, was the language of the nineteenth-century planter elite. Supported by immigration from Revolution-struck Haiti and France and by the practice of sending wealthy children to complete their studies in France, this language varies very little from International French. As the high prestige idiom of the state until the Civil War, it was also the language of regular publications such as *L’Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans* and *Le Méschacébé* as well as novels and poems by Louisiana authors such as Alfred Mercier, Sidonie de La Houssaye, and Armand Lanusse.⁵⁸

Today’s Louisiana French and Creole however developed as low prestige vernaculars. This lack of prestige is evident in how such languages appear (or fail to appear) in nineteenth-century literary texts. As such, a superficial survey of such representations will provide a genealogy of the literary presence of these languages. The Acadian ancestors of today’s Cajuns arrived in Louisiana in the late eighteenth century after having been expelled from what is now Nova Scotia by the British. The attitudes of the planter elite towards this group are clearly encapsulated in Sidonie de La Houssaye’s novella *Pouponne et Balthazar* (1888). The story is ostensibly narrated from the point of view of de La Houssaye’s Creole ancestress Charlotte, who is shocked by the rough manners of the newly arrived Acadians in her parish. Having learned of

⁵⁸ For a more detailed description of nineteenth-century Louisiana Francophone literary production, including specific works and dates of publication, see Christian Hommel’s introduction to *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (18-20).

their plight however, she eventually becomes a mentor to an orphaned Acadian girl named Pouponne who eagerly adopts Charlotte's more refined manners. Pouponne's tractability is rewarded when her long-lost fiancé finds her: the pair wed and become educated before successfully assimilating into planter culture and becoming fabulously wealthy. One of the most important ways by which Pouponne distinguishes herself from her fellow Acadians is through her eventual mastery of Planter Society French. Throughout the novella, de La Houssaye distinguishes Louisiana French from the planters' "langage pur" (98) primarily through the elision of neutral vowels rather than through any significant lexical variation. The passage in which the Acadian character Terencine scolds her daughter is typical: "Tout-à-l'heure j'vas t'fermer l'museau, fille sans cœur! Ah! C'est donc ça qu't'as appris au catéchisme?" (57) Apart from the typically Louisianan conjugation of "j'vas" and the dropping of the *m* in "catéchisme," the aforementioned elisions are the only linguistic variation from International French. The lexical richness acquired through contact with Louisiana Creole and other local languages is entirely absent. De La Houssaye thus presents Louisiana French as a peasant dialect, associated with poverty and ignorance and remediable through proper education. This stereotype remained constant through the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century. As a Cajun descendent of the eighteenth-century Acadian refugees, Beverly Matherne's use of Louisiana French is informed by the history of the Grand Dérangement and subsequent class relations.

Louisiana Creole dates back even further in Louisiana history. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall asserts that Louisiana Creole was developed primarily by the first generation of enslaved Africans in Louisiana drawing vocabulary from French and structures from their own Senegambian languages (188). As such, it is most typically associated with the racializing

asymmetrical power relations of slavery, leading to such epithets as *français nègre*.⁵⁹ However, Hall states that the often-intimate relationships between enslaved speakers of Creole (particularly those involved in childcare) and their owners allowed the language to spread to all strata of society: “Louisiana Creole became a vital part of the identity not only of Afro-Creoles but also of many whites of all classes who, seduced by its rhythm, intonation, humor, and imagination, adopted it as their preferred means of communication” (189). This claim is substantiated by the literary works of Alfred Mercier and George Washington Cable, which feature Creole dialogue among white and non-white characters alike.⁶⁰

Outside quotation marks however, appearances of Creole in Louisiana literature are few and far between. Most Louisiana writers, whether white or of color, wrote in standard French. Creole appears sparingly in dialogues and songs and thus its literary iterations are fossilized as appropriated folklore or the hackneyed language attributed to black servants by white authors. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Louisiana literature, the use of Creole in dialogue in French-language literature is consistently indicative of a position of servitude on the part of the speaker. In Marie Augustin’s *Le Macandal* (1892) for example, free people of color and rebellious slaves speak in standard French, thereby indicating their refusal to submit to

⁵⁹ As in chapter three, I rely on Alexander Weheliye’s definition of race and racialization, namely the “political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west” (3). As such, the repression or use of Creole languages participates in the negotiation of political power relations articulated through processes of racialization.

⁶⁰ As an example, consider this excerpt from a conversation between a female slave Mamrie and her master’s son Démon in one of the first chapters of Alfred Mercier’s novel *L’Habitation Saint-Ybars*:

“To bon toi, lui dit Mamrie; to oté li so la liberté é to oulé li contan. Mo sré oulé oua ça to sré di si yé té mété toi dans ain lacage comme ça.”

“Mété moin dans ain lacage! s’écria Démon sur la ton de la fierté indignée; mo sré cacé tou, mo sré sorti é mo sré vengé moin sur moun laïé ki té emprisonnin moin.” (45)

Though the rich symbolism of this conversation, in which the enslaved woman chides her young master for having caged two wild birds and expecting them to be happy about it, is beyond the scope of this project, Mercier’s rendering of the Creole dialogue is significant. Here, Démon’s Creole is identical to Mamrie’s, suggesting that use of the language did occur in all social strata of antebellum Louisiana society.

enslavement. Their more submissive counterparts on the other hand speak and sing in Creole. Other writers have emphasized the code-switching skills of mixed-heritage characters. In Sidonie de La Houssaye's novels *Les Quarteronnes de la Nouvelle Orléans* (1890s), the ability of her eponymous mixed-heritage heroines to "pass" as white is contingent on their mastery of standard French in addition to the Creole that they speak in private. Only in a few texts such as Alfred Mercier's *L'habitation St-Ybars* (1881) and George Washington Cable's *Grandissimes* (1880) do both free and enslaved characters routinely code-switch. Early twentieth-century literary iterations of Creole include Marguerite Wogan's minstrel play *Cancans Kisinières* (1934), a work so replete with negative stereotypes of blackness that Sybil Kein has referred to it as a "savage depiction of the Creole language and songs" (146). Thus the primarily oral status of Louisiana Creole and Louisiana French and their limited presence in literary fiction have cemented their status as low prestige languages. As a Creole, Deborah Clifton's use of Louisiana French and Creole is shaped by this history of racial prejudice and domination.

The stigmatization of Louisiana French and Creole only intensified with the Anglicization of the state. Begun in earnest with the 1864 state constitution establishing English as the sole language of state communication, the imposition of English-only public schools in 1916 all but eradicated Louisiana French from public life. Having faced humiliation and corporal punishment for speaking French on school grounds (even during recess), Louisianans came to feel ashamed of their language. This forced linguistic integration is an example of what Pierre Bourdieu would describe as, "un produit de la domination politique sans cesse reproduit par des institutions capables d'imposer la reconnaissance universelle de la langue dominante, est la condition de l'instauration de rapports de domination linguistique" (*Langage et pouvoir* 71). As Bourdieu points out, when the social, political, and economic institutions required to enact such

integrations are effective, the dominated come to recognize the dominant language as superior, and by extension to denigrate their own.

Though French is certainly not a minor language on a global scale, the French spoken in Louisiana persists as a marginal language, due to the aggressive anglicization of the first half of the twentieth century. As such, while Louisiana French persisted in oral forms such as songs and folk tales, its presence in print culture during the early to mid-twentieth century was minimal, thus explaining the paucity of Louisiana Francophone texts deriving from the years between 1900 and 1980. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, when Edward Larocque Tinker wrote his catalogue of nineteenth-century Louisiana Francophone literature in 1932, he flatly stated that “l’usage d’écrire en langue française a réellement cessé en 1900 en Louisiane et que cet usage ne reviendra plus” (8). Two decades later, in his catalog of North American Francophone literature, August Viatte described the linguistic situation of Louisiana as follows: “Après un siècle et demi de régime américain, des vieillards parlent encore un peu français à la Nouvelle-Orléans, et des villageois aux districts acadiens; quelques éducateurs, de temps à autre, tentent de réintroduire le français à l’école. Mais la littérature franco-louisianaise a pris fin” (299). This extended lapse in Francophone literary production explains the chronological leap from the late nineteenth-century works discussed in Chapter Three and the late twentieth-century works under consideration in the present chapter.

Resistance to Anglicization did not truly begin until the 1960s with the establishment of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (or CODOFIL), which has consistently lobbied for French education in Louisiana schools and sponsored scholarships to allow students to study in Europe and Canada.⁶¹ Despite this progress, many Louisianans retain an internalized

⁶¹ To learn more about CODOFIL, see the official website at <http://www.crt.state.la.us/cultural-development/codofil/index>

sense of linguistic inferiority.⁶² Even Jean Domengeaux, the founder of CODOFIL, when asked about the problematic practice of importing French teachers from Belgium or Canada rather than employing Louisianans, reportedly answered: “But they can speak better than any damn Louisianian, I’ll tell you that!” (Blyth 32)

The linguistic situation of Louisiana thus remains what Albert Valdman has described as a “multiply embedded diglossia” (4), wherein Louisiana French suffers intense stigma in a multi-tiered linguistic hierarchy. As Blyth explains:

Standard French (also called International French) is the high-prestige language used for communication of an official nature such as business correspondence or CODOFIL publications and announcements. As non-standard vernaculars accorded less prestige, [Cajun French] and [Louisiana Creole] constitute the low language varieties and are generally restricted to intimate domains. Second, the so-called French “varieties” all stand in relation to the dominant and more prestigious English language that is increasingly used in domains once reserved exclusively for the French varieties. (30)

It is in this context, wherein only 6.7% of Louisianans claimed to be native speakers of French as of 1990 (Blyth 28) and wherein literacy in French is estimated to be even lower, that Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton wrote the works under consideration in this chapter.

As in the case of Deleuze and Guattari’s minor literatures, the exiguity of this linguistic space is such that any literary production in Louisiana French becomes a political act (30). In their self-conscious use of French, English and Creole in their works, Matherne and Clifton demonstrate what Lise Gauvin refers to as a “*surconscience linguistique*,” a position she attributes to emergent literatures, wherein explicit discussion of language and its literary status are central to a writer’s expression of identity (8). Gauvin connects this this linguistic hyper-

⁶² Matthé Allain has proposed a more optimistic view of Louisianans’ self image since the establishment of CODOFIL: “CODOFIL has reversed the trend toward acculturation and especially has reversed the Cajun self-image. The French language they speak, once a stigma of social inferiority, has become a badge of pride, and the traditional Cajun culture something to be flaunted, not a heritage of shame” (15).

awareness to minor literature through its inherently political and revolutionary potential, noting the deterritorializing influences of transmitting oral languages into writing (9). Such acts intervene in the power relations that usually obtain between literary and vernacular languages; as Matherne and Clifton give literary form to Louisiana French and Creole they challenge the dominance of English and International French. Gauvin refers to such practices as “*langagement*,” a term that illustrates the centrality of language to more traditional questions of literary *engagement* in the sociopolitical sense (12). I argue that Matherne’s and Clifton’s works constitute acts of *langagement*, written in resistance to the attrition of Louisiana Francophone literary expression and the sociological connotations conditioning use of Louisiana French and Creole.

Contemporary Louisiana French Literature

Contemporary Louisiana French literature grew out of the Cajun Renaissance, which began in the 1960s. The first literary product of this movement was *Cris sur le bayou: Naissance d’une poésie acadienne*, published in 1980.⁶³ This collaboration consists of poems by eight Francophone writers, including three by Deborah Clifton. In his preface, Barry Ancelet describes the work as “les premiers cris d’un enfant qui a longtemps attendu pour voir le jour” (13) and insists on its importance to the survival of Cajun and Creole culture: “[...] si le mouvement en Louisiane doit réussir, il faut que la culture grandisse, qu’elle ait plus de débouchés qu’asteur, et la littérature écrite en est un aspect important de ce grandissement” (11-12). Unlike their nineteenth-century Creole predecessors, the contributors to *Cris sur le bayou* eschew international French, choosing to put Louisiana French to paper and give it written form,

⁶³ Though less well-known, late twentieth-century Louisiana has produced French works in prose including Jeanne Castille’s autobiography *Moi, Jeanne Castille, de Louisiane* (1983) and a collection of short stories entitled *Feux Follets: Anthologie de la nouvelle louisianaise* (1998) edited by David Cheramie.

unbounded by quotation marks. These literary iterations of Louisiana French contest its marginal status with relation to International French, divorcing it from its traditional function of merely adding local color and allowing it to become the vehicle for more complex forms of self-expression.

In his preface, Ancelet cites the *Rencontre des francophones de l'Amérique du nord* in 1978 in Quebec as its original inspiration. According to Ancelet, this event threw Louisiana's lack of recent Francophone literary development into sharp relief when compared to that of Quebec. In his comparison of the two literatures, he cites the influential poem "Speak White" by Michele Lalonde as a model of the latter's superior development.⁶⁴ It is unsurprising then, that the best-known poem of *Cris sur le bayou*, "Schizophrénie linguistique" by Barry Ancelet (under the pen name Jean Arceneaux), bears strong resemblances to Lalonde's work, particularly in its use of code-switching, frequent shifts in register, and repetition.⁶⁵ The title of this poem posits the psychological disjointedness deriving from the diglossic state of Louisiana, wherein Cajuns and Creoles feel alienated from their French-speaking heritage, resulting in a divided and unstable sense of self. It opens with the infamous lines that Louisiana children often wrote as punishment:

I will not speak French on the school grounds.
I will not speak French on the school grounds.
I will not speak French...

⁶⁴ "On avait du mal à imaginer un petit conte de la Louisiane entre *Speak White* de Michèle Lalonde et la nouvelle symphonie de Claude Léveillée. Même l'Acadie y était convenablement représentée par Herménégilde Chiasson. Mais la pauvre Louisiane illettrée..." (9)

⁶⁵ On an autobiographical note, the reference to schizophrenia is interesting given Ancelet's insistent references to his poet alter-ego Jean Arceneaux as a separate person as in the following anecdote: "J'avais avec moi, par hasard, un texte (personne n'avait osé dire poème) de mon ami Jean Arceneaux intitulé 'Chanson pour Louise,' mais je savais très bien qu'il n'avait jamais eu la moindre idée d'exposer sa pensée en public, et surtout pas officiellement. [...] J'ai obtenu la permission de Jean et son 'poème' est devenu partie du programme." (10) Ancelet is not alone in his strict adherence to the division between his writing persona and his private identity. The poet and musician known as Zachary Richard goes by his given name Ralph when in Louisiana.

I will not speak French...
 I will not speak French...
 Hé! Ils sont pas bêtes, ces salauds.
 Après mille fois, ça commence à pénétrer
 Dans n'importe quel esprit.
 Ça fait mal; ça fait honte.
 Et on ne speak pas French on the school grounds
 Et ni anywhere else non plus. (1-11)

The shifts between languages and registers in these lines echo those of “Speak White.”⁶⁶

Ancelet/Arceneaux’s text also resembles Lalonde’s in its insistence on the link between language and symbolic power, dwelling heavily on the classist implications of Louisiana’s anglicization.⁶⁷

However it is worth noting that “Schizophrénie linguistique” eschews the racialized language of “Speak White,” with “coonass” being the closest approximation of a racial slur in the text. Nor does Ancelet/Arceneaux adopt the sweeping anticolonial rhetoric that characterizes Lalonde’s poem, preferring to focus on language as an economic and social issue within the specific context of Louisiana.⁶⁸ Indeed, while race has played an important role in the marginalization of Louisiana Creole, the use of racial language evidenced by such Québécois titles as Pierre Vallières’ *Nègres blancs d’Amérique* (1965) does not translate smoothly into a society so profoundly and lastingly marked by slavery and Jim Crow segregation. Thus while

⁶⁶ Consider the following extract: “speak white/ tell us that God is a great big shot/ and that we’re paid to trust him/ speak white/ c’est une langue riche/ pour acheter/ mais pour se vendre/ mais pour se vendre à perte d’âme/ mais pour se vendre” (Lalonde).

⁶⁷ Parce qu’il faut pas qu’ils parlent français
 du tout.
 Ça laisse voir qu’on est rien que des
 Cadiens.
 Don’t mind us, we’re just poor coonasses.
 Basse classe, faut cacher ça.
 Faut dépasser ça.
 Faut parler anglais. (22-7)

⁶⁸ Lalonde traces the history of British North American colonialism throughout his text, mentioning the Boston Tea Party, the Thames, the Patomic, and the Magna Carta among other well-known Anglo-Saxon points of reference. In the second half of the poem however, he broadens the scope further, alluding to French colonialism with references to St.-Domingue, Vietnam, Congo, and Algeria. Drawing on these parallels, he concludes the text with a statement of solidarity: “Nous savons/ que nous ne sommes pas seules.”

questions of race and language are deeply intertwined as forms of political, economic, and cultural domination, Louisiana authors do not approach them in the same manner as their Québécois counterparts.

In the following decades, poetry remained the privileged mode of written expression in published Louisiana French. Subsequent publications include *Acadie Tropicale* (1983) a collection of the works of no fewer than seventeen Louisiana authors and Carole Doucet's *La Charrue* (1982). Like Arceneaux's "Schizophrénie linguistique," all these poems engage self-consciously with their use of Louisiana French and the difficulties facing their culture. Doucet, for example, concludes her poetry collection with an image of a rusted plow, drawing on the etymological association of culture with agriculture. In her poem, the rusted plow must be used in order to be saved, a clear metaphor for the Louisiana French language and literature. This deliberate and politically engaged writing evinces the *surconscience linguistique* described by Lise Gauvin and constitutes an act of *langagement*. The poetry of the Cajun renaissance thus enacts a call for action to maintain Louisiana's linguistic and cultural heritage.

As the aforementioned literacy rates in Louisiana French might suggest, finding a readership for such poetry is a delicate business. A number of contemporary Louisiana French texts, including *Cris sur le bayou* and *À cette heure la louve*, were published in Canada rather than in Louisiana.⁶⁹ Despite this publishing practice and the previously noted influence of Québécois authors on the development of contemporary Louisiana literature, the focus of these works is decidedly local. In his work on Cajun music, Charles Stivale has noted a similar pattern, which he has described using Édouard Glissant's concept of rooted errantry. Glissant describes

⁶⁹ At this time *Cris sur le bayou* and *Acadie Tropicale* are both out of print. Some Francophone artists have accommodated their non-reading Louisiana public by releasing texts with accompanying audio recordings, as Zachary Richard has done with his collection of poems *Faire récolte* (1997). In this vein, Beverly Matherne includes audio-recordings of her poetry on her professional website: <http://www.beverlymatherne.com/le-blues-brillant.html>

this *errance*, not as rhizomatic, but as rooted “dans un vouloir et une idée” (*Poétique* 53), tracing it to an “ailleurs diversifié, qui pour finir concourt toujours à magnifier un ici souverain” (49). According to Stivale, this persistent tension manifests in Cajun culture as “a desire for stability and for home in the face of difficult economic and sociocultural circumstances, but without the luxury of an ideal provenance or possible elsewhere” (44). Tracing their roots back to the forced migration of the eighteenth-century Acadians, the Cajun musicians of Stivale’s study such as Bruce Daigrepont, Wayne Toups, or Zachary Richard frame their identitary claims in idealized representations of their Cajun ancestors and painful stories of migrations to and from an Edenic Louisiana homeland. This errantry characterizes not only the lyrics of this body of work, but also the professional trajectories of many of its practitioners. In this tendency, Zachary Richard’s career is representative, incorporating extended periods of productivity both in rural Louisiana and in Montreal. Dynamics of rooted errantry also characterize the works and lives of Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton. While both have experienced exile (Matherne over the course of her academic career in Michigan and Clifton during her upbringing in Ohio) and have been educated primarily in English, both cite Louisiana and Louisiana French as a home to which their works express a longing to return.

Among contemporary Louisiana Francophone literary works, Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton’s work are unique both in their scope, consisting of full published works rather than individual poems or short stories, and in their deliberate use of multiple languages including French, English, and Creole. While some authors have used English in individual poems, as in the case of Arceneaux’s “Schizophrénie linguistique,” Matherne and Clifton incorporate multilingualism into the very structure of their texts. This multilingualism takes the shape of a consistent practice of translation in the work of Beverly Matherne and that of almost constant

shifts between both languages and genres in the work of Deborah Clifton. As in chapter three, the gendered position of these authors informs their approach to social hierarchies, which in this case are primarily linguistic. In the following pages, I analyze how Matherne's and Clifton's texts occupy the liminal space between languages, noting how this space enables them to contest the sociolinguistic hierarchies that have informed their trajectories as thinkers and writers.

Between Languages

Both Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton grew up with limited access to Louisiana French and Creole. In "Translating from English to Cajun French: A Healing Process" Matherne describes how she spent her earliest years speaking Louisiana French with her grandparents before having to abandon the language when they died and she began school. According to Matherne, these experiences resulted in a sense of profound fragmentation, a sense of self divided:

Beverly who is French vs. Beverly who is American
Beverly who speaks French vs. Beverly who speaks English
Beverly who spoke Cajun French as a child vs. Beverly who speaks Standard French as an adult
Beverly who was devalued as a child for being French vs. Beverly who was admired as an adult for getting a Ph.D. in English etc. (16-7).

As in Arceneaux's "Schizophrénie linguistique," Matherne expresses what Susan Bassnett describes as "the classic dilemma of the writer educated formally in the language of the hegemonic power, while at the same time functioning in other areas of his or her life in another language" (40). Matherne's poetic trajectory is similarly fragmented. She began her work as a poet in English and gradually began translating her works, first into the International French that she learned at school and later into Louisiana French, which she refers to as a "Cajun dialect." My examination of her work centers on a collection of the latter set of poems, translated from the English almost completely into Louisiana rather than International French.

Clifton also describes a trajectory of identity fragmentation pointing out her ability to perform different social roles and linguistic tasks in different languages. Born into the Louisiana diaspora, Clifton grew up with her Creole family in Ohio and went on to do both creative and academic work with Creole language and culture in South Louisiana. In her article describing her anthropological fieldwork in Louisiana, Clifton reports feeling divided between linguistic selves:

I have moments when I feel totally schizoid, since I have the beginnings of a literary career in French and Creole and the beginnings of a scientific career in English. Sometimes the two seem poles apart. This is primarily the result of a lopsided education and of not having had the opportunity to study technical subjects in French— with the exception of one year spent in Montreal. This is a source of enduring pain to me. I feel that I have been cheated out of the chance to become truly literate in French. Of course, I don't write poetry in English. ("Are you in" 52)

As one of contributors to *Cris sur le bayou*, Clifton was doubtless familiar with Ancelet/Arceneaux's "Schizophrénie linguistique" and she recuperates this image of psychological disjointedness resulting from the profound scission at the heart of her linguistic experience. This description indicates a linguistic division of labor typical of diglossic situations, as Clifton was only able to acquire technical expertise and professional advancement in the dominant language (English), while she can only find her poetic voice in the marginalized native language (French). As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari point out, examination of the comparative functions of the various languages at play in a multilingual social space exposes "le système hiérarchique, et impératif du langage comme transmission d'ordres, exercice du pouvoir ou résistance à cet exercice" (43). As such, Clifton's primarily English education informs her feelings towards and capacities in her native language. In response to this sense of fragmentation and dispossession, she, like Matherne, reappropriates French and Creole through creative literary production.

I argue that Matherne's and Clifton's texts are examples of minor literature, defined by Deleuze and Guattari as literature written by a minority within a dominant language thereby deterritorializing that language (29). Though these texts are only partially written in English, my subsequent analysis shows that these texts constitute a space between the multiple languages, permitting deterritorialization of both dominant and marginal idioms and renegotiating the hierarchy that usually obtains between them. In placing English, French and Creole texts side by side, as well as through occasional slips in and out of each language, these authors undertake an exploration of how these various languages interact, expanding the range of expression available to them in French and Creole and contesting the cultural hegemony usually accrued to the English language in American literature.

The creative and often humorous character of these linguistic explorations enacts a Glissantian detour in the texts. Édouard Glissant defines detour as the primary tactic of the culturally dispossessed, a description that certainly applies to Louisianan speakers of French and Creole. He arrives at the term *détour* through self-conscious play on the word *retour*, referring to Aimé Césaire's work *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939). Refuting the possibility of a return to some originary essence, Glissant proposes *détour* as a return to the point of imbrication, embracing the hybridity that derives from Creolized cultures while still challenging the forms of domination that conditioned their formation.⁷⁰ Glissant posits the Creole language itself as his primary example, depicting it as a sustained desacralization of the dominant institution from which it derives, namely the French language (*Discours* 49). In the context of Louisiana, English has assumed the dominant role held by the French language in Glissant's Martinique. As in the development of Creole described by Glissant, Matherne and Clifton do not reject the linguistic

⁷⁰ "Le Détour n'est ruse profitable que si le Retour le féconde: non pas retour au rêve d'origine, à l'Un immobile de l'Être, mais retour au point d'intrication, dont on s'était détourné par force [...]" (*Discours* 57).

hybridity that informs their experiences. Rather, they create multilingual narrative spaces in which they can engage creatively with the hierarchies that obtain in present-day Louisiana.

These works express an identity that takes form in opposition to the homogenizing and anglicizing influences of dominant society. Given that the imposition of English-only education resulted from the discovery of oil in Louisiana and the subsequent influx of interest from companies such as Standard Oil and later Shell and BP, the influence of globalization on the linguistic and cultural evolution of the state cannot be understated. The suppression of Louisiana French is not an isolated case; as participation in global economies becomes more widespread, many people in the world find it difficult to maintain regional languages, cultures, and social networks. The often-disruptive influence of global flows of people, media, and capital have been underscored by Arjun Appadurai. In *Modernity at Large* (1996), he points out that the constant movement in which many individuals now live impedes the usual mechanisms of cultural reproduction, such that the construction of cultural identities now occurs as much through imaginative work as through Bourdieusian habitus:

As group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits, and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification, and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences. (44)

Appadurai cites the separation of families as young people throughout the world often migrate in search of work as an example of such a disjuncture. According to Appadurai, this disruption of family structures of cultural reproduction leads to the production of new cultural forms. In the case of Louisiana French and Creole, flows of global capital and media in the form of multinational oil corporations and English-only education have disrupted the normal processes of cultural reproduction that once assured their continued presence in the region. As a result,

Clifton, Matherne, and many other Louisianans grew up speaking mostly English as Louisiana French had been driven from the public sphere in order to facilitate economic growth in the region. As such, their participation in Louisiana French culture requires conscious choice and imaginative work. In the face of these overwhelming influences, I argue that Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton undertake such creative tactics as Glissantian detour and the production of minor literatures in order to create literary spaces for continued use of French and Creole.

Le Blues brillant

In their multilingual texts, Matherne and Clifton enact a poetic practice of resistance to the suppression of French in Louisiana. All four collections of Matherne's poetry feature her original English poetry with side-by-side translations into either International or Louisiana French. Despite the obvious importance of language to Matherne's poetry, this aspect of her work has garnered little critical attention thus far. Pascale Mongeons, for example, offers a Proustian reading of Matherne's poetry, paying particular attention to the use of sensory details in the communication of individual and collective memory. While certain aspects of this analysis are quite compelling, Mongeons completely neglects Matherne's practice of writing her poetry first in English and then translating it into French and how this process shapes the poetics of her work. Furthermore, Mongeons predicates her argument on the assumption that one of the primary goals of Matherne's poetry is "la résurrection mémorielle d'une communauté et d'une époque révolues" (45). Admittedly, many of her poems such as "Tante Bette et Nonc Jude," "Grand-grand-grand-père," and "Je me demande comment c'était" do dwell fixedly on the speaker's family history: the faulknerian violence that befell Tante Bette, the decrepitude of the family's tomb, and the idealized imagining of her parents' courtship. Such poems do evoke nostalgia for a Louisiana that is no more and may have never been. This tendency is especially in evidence in some of Matherne's earlier collections such as the aptly named *Je me souviens de la*

Louisiane (1994). I argue however that Matherne's work does more than memorialize her heritage. By translating her poetry from English to Louisiana French she establishes a common space in which she can engage her linguistic heritage with her present-day life and create possibilities for future creative work in Louisiana French. This translation process is thus central to the poetics and politics of her work.

In translating her work from English to French, Matherne does not engage in a simple exchange of equivalent signifiers resulting in a transparent transfer of meaning. Indeed, Matherne's practice more closely follows Barbara Godard's definition of translation as an "interdiscursive production of meaning" (69), as translation plays a decisive role in the production of her texts. This definition flies in the face of traditional distinctions between author and translator, which describe the work of the translator in gendered terms of fidelity and betrayal.⁷¹ As Lori Chamberlain has pointed out, such binary divisions are deeply enmeshed in gendered hierarchies, investing authorship with stereotypically patriarchal prerogatives of creation and production while relegating translation to a secondary, reproductive role:

[...] though obviously both men and women engage in translation, the binary logic which encourages us to define nurses as female and doctors as male, teachers as female and professors as male, secretaries as female and corporate executives as male also defines translation as, in many ways, an archetypal feminine activity. (323)

This dichotomy recuperates patriarchal divisions of labor even as it devalues the translator's work. Matherne's project of self-translation, especially her choice to place the French version of each poem first thereby upsetting the usual order of original before translation, unsettles this heavily gendered, hierarchal paradigm. Whereas side-by-side translations usually feature the original followed by the translation, Matherne reverses this order and thereby troubles

⁷¹ A paradigmatic example of the gendered language used to describe translations is the seventeenth-century moniker *les belles infidèles*, which, as Sherry Simon points out, suggests that "like women, translations must be either beautiful or faithful" (10).

the usual hierarchal binary of original and translation.⁷² This disruptive tactic also challenges the parallel hierarchy that obtains between English and French, constituting an act of *langagement* in resistance to English supremacy.

Sherry Simon has examined further how feminist interventions in the field of translation studies have destabilized such hierarchal dichotomies. She pays particular attention to novels such as *Between* by Christine Brooke-Rose (1968) or *Le Désert mauve* by Nicole Brossard (1987), which incorporate translation and multiple languages within a single text. As Simon points out, such works “smudge the distinction between original and secondary forms of writing, troubling (but not yet toppling) the entire edifice of conceptual complicities which maintain the power of author over translator, creation over reproduction, male over female” (166). Simon further emphasizes the collaboration between Brossard and Susanne de Lobotinière-Hardwood (1990), describing the agency accorded to the translator in the (re)creative process. According to Simon, this “optimistic view of translation as re-creation brings novelty to a field dominated by tired clichés of betrayal and failure” (160). I assert that, in addition to the superimposed binaries of male and female and of author and translator catalogued by Simon, Beverly Matherne’s poetry also disrupts contemporary Louisiana’s linguistic hierarchy, positing spatial and textual equality between English and French.

Despite the profound influence that translation exerts on her work, Matherne describes her translations as simple exchanges of signifiers, rather than as transformative interventions in her creative process:

As a translator, I am in a unique position. Though far from home, I never perceive the body of work I translate as “other.” The material is mine. To borrow the language of critical theory, “the signifier” (the sound system, the grammar, the

⁷² As an example of the tendency to favor originals in the layout of bilingual editions, see *Creole Echoes* (2004), an excellent anthology of nineteenth-century Louisiana poetry edited and translated into English by Norman Shapiro. In this book, the French originals appear on the left page with Shapiro’s translations and notes on the right-hand page.

syntax) changes when I do the translating, but the signified (what the poems are about—love, loss, hurt—what they mean to Cajun culture) does not change and even what they mean across other cultures beyond Cajun Country does not change. (“Translating” 19-20)

While Matherne’s status as self-translator does remove the possibility of misinterpretation of the author’s intentions, the intricate differences between the English and French versions of her poems bely her claims of simple equivalence of meaning between them. Rather, a close examination of these differences reveals a creative process that takes place in the liminal space between these languages. According to Matherne, this process evolved gradually—her earliest translations were almost entirely in the International French and she gradually began to integrate Cajun idioms into her work.⁷³ Her most recent work is entirely in Louisiana French.⁷⁴ Her practice of translating her poetry from English to French allows her to migrate between the language in which she conducts her professional life and the nearly forgotten language of her childhood. Translation thus constitutes a linguistic form of rooted errantry in which Matherne’s readers can participate, journeying from the French version on the left-hand page to the English version on the right and back again. In this way, she puts the two languages

⁷³ In this practice, Matherne departs from the practice of many Francophone authors, especially in the Caribbean. In that region, Creole is widely spoken but many authors such as Maryse Condé write consistently in International French. Matherne’s work more closely the trajectory of Acadian authors such as Antonine Maillet who has famously incorporated idiomatic language into works such as *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (1979). This similarity further emphasizes the connection between twentieth-century Canadian authors (and Acadian authors in particular) and the writers of contemporary Louisiana.

⁷⁴ Matherne’s use of autotranslation as a means of rediscovering her language establishes an interesting parallel with the work of European Renaissance poets. As Rainier Grutman notes, “it was not uncommon for poets to translate their own Latin musings, as finger exercises. Trained in Latin, they had reached a level of competence unequalled even in their native language” (257). Barry Ancelet has also compared the development of Cajun French poetry to the cultivation of vernacular languages in early examples of French literature: “La naissance de cette expression poétique est justement ça: une naissance. Il n’y a aucune prétention à la Grande Littérature comme celle de la France. Les Français ont une tradition littéraire depuis la *Chanson de Roland*, et ce n’est pas François Villon qui aurait écrit l’anti-roman existentialiste. Il fallait passer par des étapes naturelles pour arriver jusque là” (12-13). As the early modern vernacularists hoped to promote and expand the range of their language through translation, Matherne works to promote Louisiana French through the production of translated poetry.

in dialogue with each other and renegotiates the hierarchal relationship that structures post-Anglicization Louisiana.

Matherne describes this process as a healing of the scission she experienced as a twentieth-century Louisianan French speaker. Like Arceneaux/Ancelet, Matherne describes her diglossic upbringing as a source of psychic disjuncture and pain. Through translation, she regains parts of herself lost during the time when she did not use Louisiana French:

When I translate my English poetry into Cajun French, however, the fragments of my identity come together. Indeed, when I started to translate painful events that had taken place when I was a child, I could hear the voices of my grandparents. I could hear them speaking. I had totally forgotten their language. To recall it was a miracle. (17)

Matherne thus effectuates psychic recovery through creatively engaging with the language of her grandparents. Using rhythms, assonances, and vernacular expressions that retain the orality of the language she successfully gives it new life in her poetic works.

In her 1999 collection *Le Blues brillant*, Matherne addresses topics ranging from Rosa Parks to cancer. The most prevalent theme, however, is that of exile. Though her creative work draws inspiration from her youth in Louisiana, Matherne lives and works in Michigan. The theme of longing for home in the midst of Northern snows occurs both in the poems “Blues brillant” and “Je vas vendre mon chasse-neige.” Regardless of subject matter, almost all these poems adopt the basic AAB structure of traditional blues lyrics, punctuating repeated lines with exclamations of “yeah” in English or “Ouais” in French. Matherne also imposes the lilting syncopated rhythms of the blues on her poetry. This practice deterritorializes both languages, requiring them to conform to a common verse structure and meter. It also enables the Louisiana French to retain its orality even as Matherne transfers it to a poetic register. Many of the poems also contain blatant sexual double entendres typical of blues lyrics, referring to bees landing on

flowers, cocks admiring chicken thighs, and the speaker's desire to return to Louisiana in search of a "boudin chaud" ("Je vas vendre mon chasse-neige" 34). Here, carnal desire is articulated through metaphors of nature (such as bees or chickens) or through localized food references (longing for a boudin sausage specific to Louisiana). She thus evokes the absent South by adapting the musicality of her poetry to the rhythms and earthy aesthetic of the blues.

The choice of the blues as the medium for this collection also has important social, political, and historic implications. Nourished by African rhythms and call-and-response musical forms that survived the Middle passage and over two hundred years of slavery in the New World, the blues took shape during the Jim Crow era. As such the genre has long held associations with the pain and suffering caused by the racial violence of the time. As R.A. Lawson has pointed out, the blues served as an important vector of counter-cultural ideology throughout the Jim Crow era.⁷⁵ Furthermore, though the genre derives from the Mississippi delta, it traveled with its practitioners during the Great Migration to the urban Midwest:

As they moved north, they held onto many of their southern traditions, and the blues idiom worked as well in the northern cities as it had in the rural South. As blues had been a tableau for the expression of Jim Crow frustrations, so too was it a message board for the celebration (and disappointment) of escaping the Jim Crow South. (114-115)

Like the transplanted blues musicians, Matherne has brought her Louisiana French with her to the Midwest and adapted it to her new setting. She further draws on their example by using the genre to express her longing for home while implicitly contesting the sociopolitical forces that would silence her altogether.

⁷⁵ "The musical and lyrical creations of blues artists reflected the uncomfortable social position of their working-class black audience, and blues musicians created, told, and retold stories that were culturally oppositional—opposed to white supremacy, Christian forbearance, and bourgeois pragmatism and propriety" (1-2).

The form and orality of these texts take on politically acute dimensions, as Matherne's English poetry in *Le Blues brillant* is consistently dialectal. Louisiana French thus assumes a rough equivalency with the rhythms and idioms typically associated with African American speech. The implicit comparison between these speech patterns and Matherne's own Louisiana French indicates that she uses this language sympathetically rather than condescendingly. Rather than aspiring to a position of cultural hegemony, of "speaking White" as Lalonde would say, Matherne's poetics of translation strive to establish a position of solidarity between Francophone Louisianans and the racialized Others who were also silenced during the first half of the twentieth century. She makes this solidarity explicit through her use of the "nous" form throughout her ode to Rosa Parks. Though Matherne does not openly adopt the racialized language of the Québécois writers of the Révolution tranquille, she does establish similar parallels between linguistic and racial hierarchies through her practice of translation and her choice of poetic forms.

A close examination of the poetic devices in this work suggests a shift in the directionality of Matherne's translation. As mentioned previously, the English versions of her Louisiana French poems make liberal use of colloquialisms and United States Southern dialect, as in the following example: "Je dis, mame, mais/ comment les oignons?"/ "I say, Mama,/ How ya gettin' alon'?" (*Blues Brillant* "J'appelle Maman dessus le téléphone"/ "I Call Mama on the Telephone" 5-6). While Matherne's usual method is to write the English poem before translating it into French, the use of the idiomatic expression solely in the French version raises questions. The typically Louisianan expression "Comment les oignons?" in the first stanza parallels the question that opens the third, "Comment les bourdons"/ "How them bees" (13) and establishes the call-and-response structure of the poem. The assonance between the words "oignons" and

“bourdons,” completely absent in the English version of the poem, further emphasizes this parallel. In addition to undermining her claims of translational transparency, Matherne's reliance on such poetic devices despite the lack of satisfying English equivalents thus indicates that, assuming she did indeed write the English version first, she did so with the eventual Louisiana French product already in mind. The English version of the poem thus enacts a Glissantian detour through which Matherne can explore and regain mastery of Louisiana French.

For Matherne, this rediscovery of Louisiana French is both an act of personal healing and an act of *langagement*, as evidenced in the first poem of the collection, “Maman marchait comme le vent danse” or “Mama walk like the wind dance.” Here, the richly layered imagery of the first stanza compares the titular mother’s gait to the wind dancing in the sugarcane and her hair to a long wave in the Mississippi river. These comparisons endow the mother with polysemic significance: the term refers simultaneously to the speaker’s actual mother, her mother state with its rivers and sugarcane, and to her long-repressed mother tongue. The tense of the poem advances in linear fashion: the first stanza uses the imperfect tense (“Maman marchait”/ “My mama used to walk” 1), while the second and third stanzas are in present tense. The imagery in the first two stanzas is ambivalent, comparing the mother to wind in the sugarcane or a wave of the Mississippi. The mother’s description is articulated in relationship to the landscape of the sugarcane and river. However, being like the wind and the river’s wave, the mother herself is mobile and capable of abandoning the places with which the speaker associates her.

The third stanza introduces an abrupt shift in the poem. Having progressed suddenly from imperfect to present tense, the focus shifts from the mother to the father, indicating that the mother has indeed left. Here “Mon papa, y sent rien que/ les Picayunes et la Jax” (“My daddy, he don’ smell nothin’/ but Picayunes and Jax” 11-12). The negation of the phrase implies lack—the

mother has left the father alone, with nothing but the scent of cigarettes and beer. Again, the speaker insists on setting, this time using Louisiana brands to situate the father, alone and deprived of the solace of mother language. In its/her absence, he can only derive a sense of cultural identity from commercial products intended to intoxicate rather than nourish. The father's relationship to these intoxicants is established through his sense of smell—he breathes them and thus relies on them for inspiration. Just as many Louisianans bemoan the commercialization of their culture, luring tourists with promises of exoticism and intoxication without providing support for local culture, the father exists in a drugged and impoverished state without the support of the mother tongue.

The absence of the mother is confirmed in the following stanza, when the speaker disrupts the lilting descriptive tone of the poem with an abrupt imperative: “Viens back, maman” or “Come back home, Mama” (16). In the French version, the use of the English word “back,” with its harsh terminal plosive “k,” and the absence of any translation for the word “home” renders the sudden command even more jarring. “Back” is a word of transit, suggesting specific and directional movement. Untempered by the resolution implied in the word “home,” it interrupts the lyrical French expression, indicating the disjointedness between the idyllic Louisiana of the poem and the Anglicized reality of contemporary Louisiana and the poet's exile from the state. Unlike the mother, closely associated with the physical geography of Louisiana, the word “back” is rootless. The speaker gives no hint as to where the mother has gone or from whence she must return. Rather, the English word connotes the flows of global capital and culture that interrupt local mechanisms of cultural reproduction. Matherne portrays this disruption through the disfunction of the parental couple. Normally the primary agents of cultural as well as biological reproduction, the parents in this poem are either absent (in the case of the

mother) or lost in a drugged stupor (in the case of the father). As such, they cannot assure the transmission and perpetuation of their language and culture. Without traditional modes of cultural transmission, Bourdieusian habitus, so deeply ingrained as to appear “natural” like the wind or the river, will no longer assure the perpetuation of Louisiana’s Francophone culture. Read in this way, the poem serves as an opening invocation, recalling Louisiana’s language and calling, not only for its return, but for its creative construction. This reading also implies that language is constantly in motion, like the wind through the canes or the waves of the Mississippi. If it has all but left the state, it is still possible for it to return.

Ironically, though Matherne’s use of Louisiana French stems from her longing for home, her use of the language to describe exile enables her to broaden its literary thematic range. The language travels with her and comes to bear on new settings, beyond the magnolias and cypress groves that typically populate Cajun poetry and songs:

Quand la neige couvre les chemins,
les savanes,
et que la nuit est claire,

J’entends brailler le blues,
jusqu’au printemps.

When snow covers the streets,
the meadows,
And the night is still,

I hear the blues cryin’
all the way to spring.
(“Blues Braillant” 1-5)

In carrying her language with her to Michigan, Matherne breaks away from the bygone era to which Mongeons would consign her culture. Her use of Louisiana French to describe the frustration and depression brought on by Michigan winters illustrates the thematic breadth of the language. This rooted errantry whereby Matherne brings her Louisiana French to bear on cold

Northern winters deterritorializes the language while assuring its continuation in the present tense.

As the poem continues, Matherne disrupts the literal translation of the text as the blues interrupt the speaker's exile and depression. The translation at this point differs from the original, as the French version's expression, "Ça me fait perdre mon chemin" appears vague next to the English text "it takes me off the freeway" (16). Absent from the French version, the freeway of the English version is laden with connotations of transience, modernity, and the flow of global capital. However, the idiomatic significance of the French version ("It makes me lose my way") is more richly suggestive of the speaker's state of mind than the image of the freeway. The linearity of the freeway figures in stark contrast to the subsequent image of the speaker flung to the heavens where she incarnates the Egyptian goddess Nut who spreads herself across the sky. The cosmic coupling between Nut and the Egyptian god Geb appears as a return to warmth as well as communion with nature:

Et pis un jour comme toujours,
nos mains se touchent,
Et on brûle à travers cette neige icitte. On est
racines, eau vive, narcisses,
nuit sombre, étoiles, planètes, entr'mêlés.

And then one day like clockwork,
our hands touch,
and we burn through that snow. We are
roots, runnin' water, narcissus,
black night, stars, planets, in one. (28-32)

The encounter, occurring "comme toujours" or "like clockwork," is cyclical rather than linear and profoundly generative, as Nut and Geb are both associated with fertility. The subsequent lines juxtapose images of earthen elements of roots, water, and narcissus against celestial elements of night, stars, and planets through the parallel structure of the two lines before collapsing the

categories with the single word “entr’ mêlés.” The effect is profoundly rhizomatic, suggesting contact and creation without hierarchy.

Though the poem begins as an expression of homesickness, as the blues reaches the speaker through the cold, the imagery of the above passage, with its reference to narcissus, evokes a Mediterranean setting rather than Louisiana, maintaining the ancient Egyptian mythological metaphor. This metaphor eschews the linear logics of Western progressivism and late capitalism. Rather, the poem culminates in a Glissantian detour, creating a hybridized site of encounter rather than a return to a site of origins. The space found by the reunited lovers is neither the ancestral territory of Louisiana nor the hypermodern non-place of the freeway, but a transcendent communion that burns through time, space, and snow.

Despite Matherne’s insistence on the semiotic transparency of her translations, slippages of meaning between English and French are common and relevant. Matherne’s practice of translation creates a space for dialogue and rooted errantry between these languages, demonstrating the thematic range of Louisiana French and destabilizing the hierarchies that usually obtain between English and French, original and translation. Her simultaneous recourse to the rhythms of the blues associated with her home state and to references outside her own culture suggests a search for a space that is simultaneously open to the Other and in which she can use her native language.

À cette heure, la louve

Deborah Clifton's work *À cette heure, la louve* takes linguistic hybridity a step further. Rather than side-by-side translation, Clifton alternates between passages in International French, Louisiana French, Louisiana Creole, and English. In addition to frequent code switching, she also alternates between genres, interspersing the prose narrative of an “homme normal” (45) named Georges who marries the eponymous “louve” with poetry. Some of the poetry is relevant

to the master narrative, some of it not. For example the poem “Tu ne m'as jamais connue” (46) describes a relationship doomed by the monolingualism of the speaker's partner, echoing the fate of Georges and the she-wolf. The Creole poem “Ti-Crapaud jaune” (23) on the other hand presents a culturally rich allegory with no clear link to the culture-crossed lovers.

This complex work has received noteworthy critical attention. Anna Malena interprets Clifton's multilingual texts as performances of a Creole identity. She pays particular attention to Clifton's refusal to translate her work entirely into English, noting that to translate the Creole self entirely into the dominant medium (English) is to obliterate its specificity:

The Creole self therefore moves in contradictory ways, both translating herself—using English at a crucial point in the narrative—and stopping short of transforming herself into a more acceptable *American* self. She is thus always performing just outside the reach of the “normal” interpreter. (67-8)

The opacity of Clifton's work thus explicitly rejects the illusion of transparency offered by translation, insisting on the hybridity of Creole identity through the use of multiple languages and genres. Malena's conclusion informs my own research as I explore more closely how Clifton's language shifting corresponds with generic and narrative shifts in her work *À cette heure, la louve*. As in the case of Matherne's work, I will show how Clifton's use of Creole stretches the thematic range of the language creating space for its use in contemporary society.

Seemingly acknowledging the linguistic complexity of her work, Clifton provides a glossary at its conclusion, providing definitions for terms in International French. The use of this idiom would usually suggest that Clifton intends the book for a French-speaking audience and intends to provide definitions for English and Creole vocabulary and expressions. There are indeed several instances of Creole expressions. However, in some cases, as in her translation for the phrase “m'apé pour partir marron,” Clifton retains elements of Louisiana French in the translation “Je suis après partir marron” (70). Any attempt to rely on the glossary for a full

translation into International French is futile. Clifton does not intend to translate her work, but rather to play with the reader's expectations, placing him or her in the position of a cultural outsider. This anti-translation forces the reader to confront the irreducible opacity of linguistic difference.

However, the parodic glossary is not present merely out of spite. Rather, Clifton uses the glossary to emphasize what she means by her use of specific terms. For example, in her definition of the word "chow," she emphasizes the foreign origins of the breed and its reputation for ferocity. In several poems, Clifton compares herself to a chow, noting that, like the dog, she is "non-domesticable" (69), and therefore unresponsive to Georges' domination and ill adapted to his conformist lifestyle.⁷⁶ Some definitions in the glossary are even further imbricated in the context of the poetry, one going so far as to the form of a question:

N'ôte pas mon masque: on pourrait se poser cette question dans le monde des loups-garous: quel côté de sa personnalité porte vraiment le masque? Le côté qui fait semblance de conformité sociale? ou le côté du loup? (70)

Here, the term that Clifton dissects is the title of a poem in the collection. Her definition destabilizes our understanding of the title rather than confirming it. Rather than allowing the reader passively to consume a prepackaged explanation, she invites us to question the dichotomy of societal conformity and wild authenticity on which the work presumed centers. She thus uses the glossary as an opportunity to emphasize the slipperiness of signifiers regardless of linguistic code. The glossary thus alerts the reader to the ambiguity of the work rather than reducing it.

Clifton adds to the intricacy of this work through her coordination of generic and linguistic shifts. The work begins with an introduction in International French. Over the course of the master narrative that follows, the narration shifts back and forth along the spectrum of

⁷⁶ This comparison participates in Clifton's parodic auto-dehumanization, as I point out on page 150.

Louisiana French, sometimes containing only minimal variations from International French but drawing liberally on Louisianan vocabulary and idioms at others. At one point, the eponymous heroine interrupts the third-person omniscient master narrative to share her point of view on the proceedings in the only English-language passage in the work.

Undergirding the frequent shifts in language and genre are thematic variations and intricate narrative evolutions. As in Matherne's work, the theme of personal and cultural scission is prominent. Clifton portrays this condition, not only through the formal and generic hybridity of her work, but by depicting Creoles as werewolves, a condition that the narrator also refers to as that of having two heads. The figure of the werewolf is not new to Louisiana folklore. In Lyle Saxon's work on Louisiana folktales, he claims that Cajuns frighten their children with tales of men who take the shape of wolves and congregate in the Bayou Goula where they "carry on just like animals" (191). Saxon's description coincides with Clifton's in his insistence on the wolves' red eyes and sharp teeth. Other stories depict the *loups garou* as mysterious and ghostly creatures who would "pull all kinds of capers" (Pitre 274) without any particular malevolence. The common theme of these tales is that the *loups garou* live independently of normal human scrutiny and codes of conduct, often defying detection. Protean creatures par excellence, they are capable of linguistically and culturally "passing" as "normal" at some times and appearing "animal" or "savage" at others.

Clifton's multilingual text follows the course of their transformations. International French first appears in the prose introduction, framing the basic narrative plot of cultural incomprehension as a fairy tale. The primary narrative of this story unfolds over the course of several prose passages that punctuate the book's progression. This language also recurs frequently in introspective poems expressing frustration with a romantic relationship such as "Tu

ne m'as jamais connue” (46). Most of these poems address an unidentified interlocutor connecting the text with the master narrative and establishing the she-wolf as the speaker. As the language of the European fairy tales of transformative love, International French tracks the she-wolf's story to the disillusionment of its conclusion.

While the prose narrative of Georges' encounters with werewolves consists mostly of International French, the tone is distinctly vernacular and increasingly laced with Louisiana French expressions as the story develops. For example, at a point when Georges has unwarily befriended the she-wolf's uncles and prepares to sleep in their home not knowing that he is among werewolves: “Le jeune est allé tout de suite à sa palette et a ôté son linge et il s'est allongé sur la palette et a haussé les couvertures à l'entour de son cou. Il *était après arranger* son oreiller en train de s'endormir quand trois hommes sont entrés dans la chambre” (13 emphasis added). The simplicity of the vocabulary and sentence structure marks the orality of the text, though it rarely strays either lexically or syntactically from the norms of International French. The one exception is the emphasized phrase “Il *était après arranger* son oreiller” instead of “Il arrangeait son oreiller” (“He was arranging his pillow”), which employs the typically Louisianan construction of using “après” as an auxiliary to a participle. The phrase is casually inserted into the text, as if the narrator had momentarily slipped in his or her linguistic performance of International French. Like Georges, who remains oblivious to the fact that he is among werewolves despite their occasionally bared teeth or red eyes, the inattentive reader may overlook signs of linguistic variation and read the narrative as a simple tale devoid of any cultural import or specificity.

Georges' inability to understand that he is among werewolves initiates an accumulation of binary oppositions that eventually structure his failed relationship with the she-wolf. When

Georges is on the brink of recognizing the cultural difference between himself and his hosts, he represses his intuition: “'L'intuition était une qualité qu'il trouvait bien féminine. Et Georges était le macho des machos" (25). Georges' binary mode of thinking thus places him in opposition to his heterosexual partner. He is male while she is female; he is human while she is only partially human; he is rational while she is intuitive; he is civilized while she is savage; he is Anglophone while she is Creole. His hyperbolic insistence on maintaining these binaries and on closing himself off from the spectrum of identitary possibilities outside them prevents him from understanding his hosts or the she-wolf. In the poem “Tu ne m'as jamais connue,” the speaker cites this attitude as a cause of deprivation rather than strength:

La langue de tous les jours
n'est pas la langue du cœur.
La langue du travail
n'est pas la langue de l'âme.
 En assurant ta dominance
 en refoulant ma langue,
Tu t'es coupé du soulagement
de ma passion. (15-22)

At first, this passage recuperates the division of labor implicit in diglossic societies, implying that English is the language of the workplace whereas Creole is the language of the heart. The speaker then troubles the hierarchy of this division however, when she cites the repression of her native language as a loss to both parties.

Clifton makes use of the Creole language herself in *À cette heure, la louve*. At the outset, Clifton's Creole appears only in hauntingly simple love poems. These texts fit neatly into the tradition of existing Louisiana Creole songs, many of which originated in Antebellum slave society and engage with themes of love and loss. The lyrics of “Pauve piti Mamzelle Zizi” are representative:

Pauve piti Mamzelle Zizi!

Li gagnin bobo dans cœur!
Pauve piti Mamzelle,
Li gagnin tristesse dans cœur!

Poor lil' Mamzelle Zizi!
She has pain in her heart!
Poor lil' Mamzelle,
She has sadness in her heart! (Saxon & Tallant, 477, their translation)

Clifton recuperates the plaintive tone and simple structure of such songs in her first Creole poem “Loin, loin, mo cœur”: “Loin, loin, mo cœur,/ Mo cœur vec to cœur,/ C'est tout” (“Far, far, my heart/ My heart is with your heart,/ That's all” 5-7). Her first forays into Creole in *À cette heure* thus echo the folk songs, which still constitute the sole contact that most non-speakers have with the language. On a practical level, this tactic provides those unfamiliar with Creole with an accessible introduction to the language, allowing them to develop their understanding of it as they progress.

As the work progresses, however, the intricacy and thematic range of Clifton's Creole poetry expands drastically. While retaining the folklore and stock characters of Creole culture, even going so far as to include appearances by Bouki and Lapin, Clifton moves from the minimalist beating of her lovesick heart to tackle such diverse topics as mortality, Mondays, hangovers, and internet dating. Through this gradual development, Clifton invites the reader to follow her as she discovers her poetic voice in Creole. Having been educated in English, Clifton would have initially experienced Creole as a primarily oral language, such that adapting it to writing would require tenacity, exploration, and creativity. Towards this end, the poem “Exercice de conjugaison” is telling, allowing the speaker to play with incessant repetition as she exhausts her repertoire of ways to express her intention to “partir marron.” The use of this expression, which originally referred to escaped slaves, implicitly juxtaposes a long history of racial oppression and a failed romantic relationship, resulting in a simultaneously jarring and humorous

effect. While traditional themes of longing or the quest for freedom continue to occupy a privileged place in Clifton's Creole poetry, she aptly demonstrates the capacity of Louisiana Creole with its wealth of idiomatic expressions and oral traditions to engage creatively with life in postmodern America. A prime example is “Moun sans lundi” in which she introduces the traditionally Creole figure of the zombie to the middle-class working week: “Mo té pas gain vider ma tête pour travailler comme mo fait lundi/ pas gain café/ pas gain zombis dans la rue” (“I didn't have to empty my head to work like I do on Monday/ no coffee/ no zombies in the street” 10-12) The trope of the zombie, whose original North American incarnation embodied the loss of free will and humanity incurred by Atlantic slavery, is resituated in the tedium of postmodern labor.⁷⁷ Clifton's Creole is more than a reconstitution of an oral tradition; it is a generative and humorous adaptation of that tradition to the conditions and exigencies of present-day life.

As mentioned previously, English appears in only one three-page section of the 68-page work. This first-person prose passage is prefaced by another first-person prose passage in Louisiana French entitled “Et la louve qui parle.” In it, the narrator explains why she has decided to intervene in the story telling: “Mais en tout cas, juste pour que ça soit compris, que nous-autes [les femmes] aussit, on a bien des gueules pour parler et des mains pour écrire, je vais vous raconter mon côté de toutes ces affaires-là” (34). This preface, with its insistence of the specificity of the narrator's voice destabilizes assumptions established in the first narrative passages of the work. The she-wolf's opening assertion that she usually prefers to “quitté les hommes parler” (“let the men talk” 34) suggests that the opening passages of the story have been narrated by one or more of the male characters rather than by a disembodied omniscient narrator. The reliability of this account falls into question as the she-wolf's intervention invites the reader to doubt the universality of dominant narratives.

⁷⁷ Métraux, Alfred. *Le Vaudou Haïtien*. 114-126

In the English-language passage that follows, the wolf/woman describes her failed attempt to assimilate into mainstream, born-again Christian American society. The preceding French passage is posed as a preamble to her speaking, suggesting that to speak in French is not to speak. If a monolingual Anglophone were to read *A cette heure, la louve*, he would only be able to understand the subsequent English-language passage. Given the paucity of readers of French in Louisiana (and of Louisiana Creole everywhere), the French writer becomes mute. Only through the act of translation into English, however partial and incomplete does the speaker achieve any real communication.

As in the mostly International French accounts of Georges' adventures, the narrator does not entirely succeed in keeping her language “en cachette” (35). The sudden linguistic shift and the narrator’s occasional lapses into Louisiana French suggest that the wolf has playfully assumed her “human” form. As was the case for her uncles however, flashes of teeth and glimpses of red eyes are inevitable. According to the narrator, this inability literally stems from somatic Otherness as much as from cultural differences, subtly pointing to the racializing stigma implicit in the repression of Creole language and culture: “The problem with the face was that it wasn't an *American* face. And the only problem avec the hair is that it wasn't *American* hair” (36 emphasis hers). Here, rather than a simple indicator of nationality, the term “American” is laden with cultural and linguistic connotations. Since the nineteenth century, the term “American” in the context of French-speaking Louisiana has been used to refer to English-speakers rather than to anyone born on American soil. This usage of the term has emphasized the increasingly minor status of Louisiana French since 1803.

However, Clifton’s use of italics in the above passage problematizes the hierarchal relationship between English and French. Whereas common practice dictates the use of italics to

indicate the presence of a foreign term, Clifton refrains from italicizing the French word “avec.” She does italicize the word *American* however, thereby unsettling our perception of this familiar term. This practice challenges Anglo-American assumptions about what is foreign and what is not, once again linguistically disorienting the reader. The term *American* is further complicated when brought to bear on the narrator's face and hair. This negative description implicitly defines *American*-ness according to physical criteria. The racial implications of the narrator's inability to assimilate because she looks like “Genghis Kahn with Jerry Curls” (37) are clear.

The dehumanizing racial and cultural stigma imposed on the narrator alienates her to the point where she identifies more with her pet chow than with Georges. If, as Weheliye asserts, the effect of racism and racialization is to exclude nonwhite subjects from being considered as fully human, the she-wolf, rather than insisting on her own humanity, enacts a Glissantian detour, exaggerating her perceived somatic differences from an assumed cultural norm and embracing a fantastic extra-human identity. She compartmentalizes her life, describing behaviors and attitudes that fail to conform to the norms of mainstream Christian Anglo-America as “the alpha wolfette kind of stuff I could get into” (35). Further on, she enunciates a Creole catechism of sorts, describing her upbringing with her *loup-garou* uncles:

[My elders] taught me all this good stuff: dancing; playing cards; how to pick the worms out of greens; how to eat okra pickles and how to distinguish tequila from white lightning—especially in the unmarked bottles bootleggers liked to use; the value of speaking almost any language but English; how to pray facing the gulf of Mexico; a little spiritualism in their spare time; and most importantly, how to be a *loup-garou*. (37)

From the narrator's perspective, her divergence from mainstream standards of appearance, thought, language, and behavior does not constitute a failure to assimilate into the category of the human, but a transcendence of that classification. Being a *loup-garou* is a learned condition, not the result of mere genetics, allowing the speaker to simultaneously embrace and reject her

exclusion from the condition of the human. This superhuman state is the basis for the narrator's claims of having two heads: her human face that allows her to at least partially assimilate into human society and her wolf persona that is free from the oppression of social norms. The wolf persona also provides her with protection from those norms; when the wolf woman's uncles first mention her, they explain to Georges, “Elle est une louve. Elle a des dents tu sais” (31). When she becomes the alpha wolfette her elders raised her to be, the wolf woman is free and capable of self-defense.

It is at this point that my analysis of *À cette heure* seriously diverges from that of Anna Malena. In her examination of the symbolism of the werewolf figure, Malena emphasizes the fact that wolves are social animals:

A wolf is both a lone figure and a social being: Clifton's poetry expresses this duality of an individual being at ease with the wolf pack, which is not stereotypically lurking menacingly at the edge of mainstream society but is actively taking part in it and always ready to do battle within it. (68)

While this description might be true of Clifton herself, given the author's work as an educator and anthropologist in southwest Louisiana, it is hardly accurate of the she-wolf in her text. This character's pack lives in such isolation from mainstream society that when Georges first encounters it, the narrator describes that meeting as a visit to another world. Joining this pack constitutes a rejection of mainstream society and allows for mutual solidarity against its prejudices. Clifton's text thus affirms the importance and vitality of marginalized collectivities.

Conclusion

When speaking about her work, Matherne describes herself as part of a greater effort to sustain Louisiana language and culture. She notes with some optimism that, “the language and culture survive and will continue to survive, producing new writers, now with the help of its bilingual schools. These writers will, in turn, play their role to keep French alive in Louisiana”

(19). Far from a work of memorialization, Matherne and Clifton work to generate possibilities for new artistic and quotidian expression in Louisiana French and Creole. At first glance, these texts echo the diglossic division of labor of Louisiana society, designating Louisiana French and Creole as the languages of the heart and home and English as the language of hypermodernity and transience. This distinction is further charged with superimposed binaries as the repressed languages are also gendered and racialized. However, the insistence of both authors on the presence and importance of French and Creole in their works challenges the hierarchal nature of these binary oppositions. Furthermore, their frequent slipping between languages and registers blurs the boundaries between them, effectively destabilizing the multi-layered dichotomy through which these languages are marginalized. The resulting texts expand the thematic range of French and Creole, inviting further literary production in these languages.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Within the field of Francophone studies, questions of how literature can engage with the asymmetrical power relations endemic to colonial and postcolonial societies have long been of primary concern. However, just as Louisiana occupied a marginal place in the French empire during the colonial period, its French-language literature has until recently received relatively little critical attention from Francophone scholars. This neglect has taken place despite the persistent engagement of Louisiana authors with questions of gender, race, and language that are so crucial to Francophone studies. Previous studies of Francophone Louisiana literature such as those by Edward Larocque Tinker and John Perret have evinced frustration at the sheer diversity of this corpus and the inherent unassimilability of many Louisiana Francophone works to any single literary movement such as romanticism or naturalism. However, more recent studies such as those by Christine Elizabeth Koch Harris and Catharine Savage Brosman have celebrated this liminality, pointing out that the marginal positions of Louisiana Francophone writers in relation to both French and American society offer unique perspectives on their respective contexts of enunciation.

Drawing on this latter perspective, I argue that the gendered marginal discursive position of Louisiana Francophone women writers informs their respective approaches to intersecting social hierarchies of gender, race, and language. By tracing the evolution of these authors' engagement with these issues, I show how their works constitute a distinct and socially relevant literary corpus issuing from the margins of patriarchal Anglo-America. At the outset, this engagement took form simply through the act of writing, as authors like Marie Hachard and

Désirée Martin navigated between patriarchal institutions in order to participate in public discourse. As opportunities for publication became more common in the late nineteenth century, novelists such as Sidonie de La Houssaye and Marie Augustin engaged with gendered racial hierarchies through ambivalent recourse to racial stereotypes. While retaining tropes of non-white female licentiousness, these authors also portrayed the patriarchal power on which these racial hierarchies depended in an extremely negative light. Such ambiguities represented a serious departure from the racial essentialism that undergirded Jim Crow era segregation. Shortly after the appearance of these works, aggressive Anglicization policies effectively eliminated French from public life in Louisiana, resulting in an extended lapse in Francophone writing. This silence did not end until after the outset of the Cajun Renaissance, whose intellectual leaders spearheaded a revival of literary production in Louisiana French and Creole. Rather than compose works entirely in French, poets Beverly Matherne and Deborah Clifton create multilingual texts wherein the liminal spaces between English, French, and Creole can be thoroughly explored. Despite the significant chronological gaps between these authors and the formal and thematic diversity of their works, they all share a liminal discursive position that conditions and nuances their literary engagement with imbricated hierarchies of gender, race, and language.

It is my hope that this theoretical approach will facilitate further examination of Louisiana's rich corpus of Francophone literature. Even within the limited scope of women's literary production, this dissertation is far from exhaustive. Given the opportunity to continue research on this topic, I plan to explore the work of nineteenth-century Creole poets such as Léona Queyrouze and Emilie Evershed. In the future, I also intend to study the fraught linguistic, racial, and identitary politics of Marguerite Wogan's minstrel play *Cancans kisinières* (1931) as

well as the prose works of the Cajun Renaissance, such as Jeanne Castille's autobiographical *Moi, Jeanne Castille de la Louisiane* (1983). The incorporation of these voices will contribute to our understanding of the diversity and complexity of Louisiana Francophone writing.

In continuing this research, I also aspire to contribute to the visibility of Louisiana women's Francophone writing. Throughout most of the twentieth century, production and study of Louisiana Francophone literature were hampered both by the suppression of French language use and by the limited availability of many Francophone texts. Fortunately, recent reversals in these trends are helping to promote this important body of literature. Since the founding of CODOFIL in 1968, French has enjoyed increasing presence in primary and secondary schools, and the state now boasts 26 immersion programs. More importantly, attitudes about French have changed dramatically, according to former CODOFIL director David Cheramie: "Now (kids) are proud to speak it—and not ashamed like they were 50 years ago. It was an 'honte' (embarrassment).... Talking to your kids in French, it was like child abuse... Now it's the opposite—the attitude has totally changed" (qtd. in Panetta). The prevalence of French-language education and the erasure of the stigma attached to the language create opportunities for more widespread engagement with the Francophone literature of the region.

In addition to the increased visibility of Louisiana French, university presses such as Éditions Tintamarre at Centenary College of Louisiana have published new editions of Louisiana Francophone texts, greatly expanding the availability of these works. When I began this project in 2012, the only way to read *Dahlia*, the final installment of de La Houssaye's *Quarteronnes* series, was to view the original manuscript in Louisiana State University's special collections. Editions of *Le Meschacébé* in which the novel originally appeared in serial form could be found on microfiche; however, with many issues of the publication either missing or poorly preserved,

it was only possible to read the first part of the novel in this way. Since the release of the Tintamarre edition of *Dahlia* in 2015 however, the entire *Quarteronnes* tetralogy is now available to the general reading public, possibly for the first time in history. Given the renewed appreciation of Louisiana's Francophone heritage and the increased availability of its French-language texts, I believe that these works will be more widely studied in the near future.

Over the course of this project, I have found that the diversity and complexity of Louisiana Francophone women's writing has provided a deeper and more nuanced awareness of the complex cultural encounters and power relations that have shaped the history of the region. In tracing the evolution of this corpus and of its engagement with intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, and language, I hope to initiate further exploration and discussion of Louisiana Francophone literature and of how robust literary traditions can emerge from marginal sites of enunciation.

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