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Dictating Manhood: Refiguring Masculinity in Haitian Literature of Dictatorship, 1968-2010

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## Abstract

*Dictating Manhood: Refiguring Masculinity in Haitian Literature of Dictatorship, 1968-2010* explores the literary representations of masculinity under dictatorship. Through the works of Marie Vieux Chauvet, René Depestre, Frankétienne, Georges Castera, Kettly Mars and Dany Laferrière, my dissertation examines the effects of dictatorship on Haitian masculinity and assesses whether extreme oppression can be generative of alternative formulations of masculinity, especially with regard to power. For nearly thirty years, from 1957 to 1986, François and Jean-Claude Duvalier imposed a brutal totalitarian dictatorship that privileged tactics of fear, violence, and terror. Through their instrumentalization of terror and violence, the Duvaliers created a new hegemonic masculinity articulated through the nodes of power and domination. Moreover, Duvalierism developed and promoted a masculine identity which fueled itself through the exclusion and subordination of alternative masculinities, reflecting the autophagic reflex of the dictatorial machine which consumes its own resources in order to power itself. My dissertation probes the structure of Duvalierist masculinity and argues that dictatorial literature not only contests dominant discourses on masculinity, but offers a healing space in which to process the trauma of the dictatorship.

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There is a Korean proverb that says, “백지장도 맞들면 낫다.” It is better to lift together, even if it is just a blank sheet of paper. It means that it is always better to do something with the help of other people, even something as simple as lifting a single sheet of paper. By sharing the load, you not only ease the burden of work, but you create an experience. This is exactly what I had to learn in the process of writing this dissertation. It is not a solitary endeavor, it takes a community of scholars, friends, and family to bring the process to a successful conclusion. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped me lift this sheet of paper.

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## Introduction

The Duvalier dictatorship is undoubtedly one of the most horrific moments in modern Haitian history. Lasting nearly thirty years, from 1957 to 1986, François and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, established a totalitarian regime which privileged tactics of terror, fear and violence. This particular dictatorship left an inexpugible legacy which has continued to plague Haiti and Haitians, both inside and outside the nation, into the present. As a result, Haitian literature—insular and diasporic—has often engaged with the dictatorship in explicit and implicit ways. Literature is the space in which Haitian culture, society and politics have been defended and promulgated, but also redefined, contested and altered. It is within this context of oppression, constraint and terror that I examine the effects of dictatorship on masculinity through the works of Marie Vieux Chauvet, Frankétienne, Georges Castera, René Depestre, Kettly Mars and Dany Laferrière.

For thirty years, and arguably more, the Haitian people were subjected to a merciless totalitarian<sup>1</sup> regime which enforced its authority through extreme forms of violence and oppression. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot states, in *Haiti: State Against Nation* (1990), “Duvalierism distinguished itself by a *new kind* of state violence, one that systematically violated the codes governing the use of force by the state” (166 *emphasis in original*). Indeed, Duvalier changed the rules and traditionally protected groups such as women, children, the elderly, high-

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<sup>1</sup>Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that, “François Duvalier succeeded in providing what was, in Haitian terms, an unconventional response to the crisis: the transformation of the authoritarian political model of the past into a totalitarian apparatus” (17). Though some disagree with his assertion, I will consider Duvalierism as a practice in totalitarianism. See *Haiti, State against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review, 1990).

level civil servants, and nonpolitical groups and organizations were now subject to state violence and were no longer considered “innocent.” Thus, the state became the enemy of the people instead of its protector. When the state can no longer be entrusted with the security of its people, it provokes a crisis on the social as well as on the individual level. Given that the Duvalier regime privileged tactics of terror and violence, fear and suspicion infected society at large. As poverty and corruption ravaged the country, the citizens found themselves with absolutely no recourse and no reprieve. The result was a feeling of powerlessness that consumed the lives of ordinary Haitians who were trapped within a system of domination and violence, nowhere is this more pronounced than within the male subject and masculinity itself. According to Michael Kaufman, “the common feature of dominant forms of contemporary masculinity is that manhood is equated to having some sort of power” (145). He asserts that the key feature of masculinity is power, which also brings privilege; the axes upon which masculinity is constructed. Similarly, when the Haitian man is excluded from the matrix of power, he is divested of his traditional masculine duties, privileges and roles such as protector, provider, and, even, patriarch. He finds, instead, a situation of hopelessness, despair and a deep sense of a frustrated injustice.

As a result, many Haitians left voluntarily or were forced out by the state. Due to the strict censorship under Duvalier, publication and literary and artistic expression were difficult and often dangerous. Literary activity and publication diminished drastically during the dictatorship and many artists, intellectuals and writers went into exile to countries like the United States, Canada, France and Senegal.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the theme of exile is pervasive in contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> See J. Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination*, (New York: St. Martin's, 1988) 121.



Haitian literature, which Martin Munro identifies as the master trope of Haitian culture.<sup>3</sup> When writers Jacques-Stephen Alexis and René Depestre left to study in Paris in 1946, their departure sparked a dramatic upsurge in Haitian exile literature. A few writers who followed in their footsteps were: Anthony Phelps, Jean Métellus, Émile Ollivier, Gérard Étienne, Dany Laferrière, Jean-Claude Charles, Joël Des Rosiers and Edwidge Danticat.<sup>4</sup> Since Marie Chauvet's works were published while she was living in Haiti, I am reluctant to include her within the list of exiled Haitians writing and publishing abroad.<sup>5</sup> Given the audacious nature of her writing, she had to publish through foreign publishers in order to publish at all.

Even the *Spiraliste* writers published externally, though the group famously remained in Haiti during the dictatorship.<sup>6</sup> The most famous member of the *Spiraliste* group is writer and painter Frankétienne, who is constantly exploring the themes of exile and displacement in his works. He continued writing and publishing under the two Duvaliers, publishing nine novels in French and one novel in Kreyòl<sup>7</sup>, not to mention his theatrical achievements in Kreyòl as he wrote five plays for the Haitian stage. His fellow *Spiralists*, René Philoctète and Jean-Claude Figolé, were also very active under the dictatorships.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, both domestically and abroad,

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<sup>3</sup> See Martin Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrière, Danticat*. (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Munro 26.

<sup>5</sup> *La Danse sur le volcan* (1957), *Fonds des Nègres* (1960), and *Amour, colère et folie*. (1968) were all published under the eyes of Duvalier and her last publication prompted her departure to the United States. Most likely inspired by the death of Papa Doc, her last novel, *Les Rapaces*, was written between 1971 and 1973, but was only able to be published posthumously in 1986. For more information, see Joëlle Vitiello, "Chauvet, Marie Vieux." *Ile Enen Ile*. Lehman College (CUNY). <<http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/chauvet.html>>

<sup>6</sup> See introduction to Kaiama Glover, *Haiti Unbound A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> As there are many Creoles spoken throughout the world, I use Kreyòl to designate Haitian Creole specifically.

<sup>8</sup> Writing in French, René Philoctète published one novel and four collections of poetry, however he also wrote three other collections of poetry and four plays. Jean-Claude Figolé published the least under the dictatorship and broke his silence after the fall of the regime, but during the Duvalier years, he published four essays while participating in the Spiralist group. See their respective author pages on *Île en île*, Rodney Saint-Éloi, "René Philoctète." *Île En île*.

Haitian writers continued producing cultural and political texts in spite of the stiflingly oppressive climate generated by tyranny.

Accordingly, the appalling political and social climate is reflected inside the realm of literature as Haitian novels from the Duvalier era often portray tragic characters in hopeless situations.<sup>9</sup> Duvalierism affected all aspects of Haitian life and society with its ruthless tactics and extreme violence. Given the regime's proclivity for exerting violence and terror in order to increase its power and domination, I believe that the masculine subject and masculinity itself offer a particularly engaging lens through which we can examine the social and political implications of this crisis on subjectivity and agency. It is at this impasse that I propose to investigate the representations, expressions, and construction of masculinity in Haitian literature. More precisely, I would like to explore masculinity within an oppressive and despotic context and its relation to power, which I hope will reveal a generative and experimental space in which different kinds of masculinities are posited and assayed. I contend that it is in the realm of literature that alternative masculinities can be represented, imagined, and analyzed. This particular canon of texts written under and/or about the dictatorship not only reveals and critiques the toxic masculinity produced by Duvalierism, it also records the personal and collective experiences of the violence of the regime. Indeed, the dictatorial novels and poems want to make sense of the violence of Duvalierist masculinity and the ways that violence affect the public imagination and the practice of masculinity. My study will focus on the kinds of

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N.p., 28 Apr. 2017. Web. <http://ile-en-ile.org/philoctete/> and Josaphat-Robert Large, "Jean-Claude Fig nolé." *Île en île*. N.p., 1 Dec. 2003. Web. <http://ile-en-ile.org/fignole/>.

<sup>9</sup> See Rafael Lucas's "L'esthétique de la dégradation dans la littérature haïtienne," *Revue de littérature comparée* 2/ 2002 (302): 191-211. *Cairn*, he indicates "désarroi" as a symptom of the aesthetics of degradation at work in Haitian literature during and after the Duvalier dictatorship.

masculinities that emerge under dictatorship and assess whether crisis, oppression and terror can be productive of new theorizations of gender relations, identity formation and subjectivity. I also analyze the literary representations of a virulent dominant masculinity promoted by the dictatorship, tracing the social and historical origins of both the dictatorship and the masculinity it promotes. Through my examination, I hope to find how dictatorship alters traditional and imposed forms of masculinity and, in turn, the ways in which these new forms of masculinity can exert pressure back onto the dominant masculine and enact change.

## II. Portrait of the dictators: Papa Doc, Baby Doc, and the Duvalierist Image

In order to understand the impact of the dictatorship on the literary imagination, we must first become acquainted with the men themselves, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier and Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier. As the only dynasty in Haitian history, they would rule over Haiti for nearly thirty years.<sup>10</sup> Papa Doc’s reign lasted from 1957 to his death in 1971, whereas Baby Doc ruled from 1971 to 1986. Taking office on October 22, 1957, François Duvalier initially presented himself as a man of and for the (black) masses, however, he quickly executed a political about-face and concentrated on consolidating his own power and influence.<sup>11</sup> During the elections, the image that he constructed for the public was that of a soft-spoken bespectacled country doctor of modest origins. Indeed, Bob Nérée characterizes Duvalier’s appearance on the political scene in 1957 as such, “Il était apparemment inoffensif. Sobre et sage, il ne savait même pas user du pouvoir. Enfin, taciturne et médiocre, il ne pouvait donc avoir aucune idée en tête” (22). Using his

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<sup>10</sup> See Rod Prince, *Haiti : Family Business* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1985) 25.

<sup>11</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Yves Saint-Gérard, Jacques Val, J. Michael Dash, Martin Munro and Jana Evans Brazier (as well as many others) discuss François Duvalier’s public image as a black man fighting for the rights of the masses, while serving his own interests. Several scholars and journalists have noted his mode of dress and his eyeglasses have become an iconographic (and parodic) feature of François Duvalier. Val also mentions François Duvalier’s weak physical constitution, afflicted with diabetes and cardiovascular problems.

innocuous look to his advantage, he preached equality and promised change. Influenced by Jean-Price Mars, Duvalier exploited *noiriste* ideology to captivate the masses. He promised economic and educational reform which would, on the one hand, elevate the black masses, and on the other hand, curb mulatto dominance.<sup>12</sup> However, in his article “Homo Papadocus,” René Depestre describes that, “Le concept de *négritude* suivit dans la tête dérégulée de Duvalier la même trajectoire aberrante que le socialisme avait prise dans le cerveau d’Hitler” (57). The racially conscious ideology championing social change would take a sinister turn under Duvalier’s all-encompassing need for power.

After a perilous few years, in the beginning, with several attempted coups, invasions and even a kidnapping, François Duvalier would secure his power through a campaign of violence and terror.<sup>13</sup> On 14 June 1964, he was elected *Président à vie*, a title that he would later pass on to his son. The Duvaliers’ virulent tyranny and the authoritarian nature of their regimes stifled any and all reforms of revolt and dissent, real or imaginary. It is this moment that Trouillot identifies as, “a formalization of crisis,” where, “the legitimacy of daily violence became the very principle governing the relations between state and nation” (161). When violence officially became the rule of life.

The Duvaliers’ distinct brand of dictatorship was further reinforced by their expansive network of their personal militia, the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (VSN), nicknamed the

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<sup>12</sup> For more on Duvalier’s rise, see Chapter 7 in David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and national Independence in Haiti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> See Prince 25-7, James Ferguson, *Papa Doc, Baby Doc: Haiti and the Duvaliers*. (Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1989) 44-6, and Nancy Gordon and Robert Debs Heinl, *Written in Blood : The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1995* (Lanham, Md.: U of America, 2005) 553-562.

Tontons Macoutes.<sup>14</sup> Referring to a monster in Haitian folklore, they further reinforced their association with power by dressing in blue denim shirts and straw hats, evoking the image of the *lwa*—a vaudou spirit—of agriculture Papa Zaka<sup>15</sup>. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), Edwidge Danticat describes, “The *Tonton Macoute* was a bogeyman, a scarecrow with human flesh. He wore denim overalls and carried a cutlass and a knapsack made of straw. In his knapsack, he always had scraps of naughty children, whom he dismembered to eat as snacks” (138). Aptly named, they enforced Duvalier’s authority, and extended his power, by torturing, raping, murdering, and beating those who demonstrated any modicum of political or social opposition. As Eddy Arnold Jean confirms, in *Haiti, La Démocratie trahie : L’ère de la voyoucratie*, “L’action des tonton macoutes se réduit à cette trilogie macabre: tuer, piller et voler” (59). René Depestre even compares them to the German SS, calling them both “Horribles pourvoyeurs de cadavres” (Homo 58). Furthermore, their inescapable presence in every corner of Haitian society made them powerful enforcers and even better spies. Reporting directly to François, and later Jean-Claude, Duvalier, the Tontons Macoutes represented the extent of the president’s power and dominance. That is to say, they were an extension of the dictator’s own masculinity.

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<sup>14</sup> The intimate relationship between the Duvaliers and the VSN is common knowledge and many scholars have studied and commented on their involvement in the despotic machine. Lyonel Trouillot offers an insightful look into the mechanisms of tyranny and the vital importance of the VSN’s actions under Duvalier. Also, Jacques Val exposes the malevolent contributions of the VSN to Duvalier’s power structure. The VSN was formally created in 1959, though Duvalier employed a semi-secret band of *cagouleurs* as a coercive force. See also Chapter XV in Bob Nérée, *Duvalier: Le pouvoir sur les autres de père en fils* (Port Au Prince: H. Deschamps, 1988) and Eddy Arnold Jean *Haiti, la démocratie trahie: L’ère de la voyoucratie*. (Port-au-Prince : Éditions Haiti Demain, 2012) 59-61.

<sup>15</sup> See Amy Wilentz, *The Rainy Season: Haiti since Duvalier*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989) 34 and Yves Saint-Germain, *Haiti, l’enfer au paradis : mal développement et troubles de l’identité culturelle*, (Toulouse: Eché, 1984) 219 as well as Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 92. Both Wilentz and Dayan refer to the vaudou diety as “Cousin Zaka,” however, he is also referred to as Papa Zaka.

Once his office was secured, François Duvalier's primary focus was maintaining and cultivating his power.<sup>16</sup> One of the ways he did this was through the conscious manipulation of underlying paternalistic ideologies in the Haitian imagination and society. First and foremost, his position as president already evoked paternalistic associations. Indeed, the Haitian constitution of 1805 explicitly designates the head of state as the father of the nation. In the preliminary declaration, under article 14, it states, "Toute acception de couleur parmi les enfants d'une seule et même famille, dont le chef de l'État est le père, devant nécessairement cesser, les Haïtiens ne seront désormais connus que sous la dénomination générique de noirs" (Janvier 32). Furthermore, Yves Saint-Gérard reminds us of the importance of paternalist thinking in Haiti,

C'est aussi cette idéologie paternaliste qui fabrique des « *Ago* » (agronomes), des « *Dok* » (docteurs), des « *Gangan* » (ougans), des « *Bos* » ou « *Mèt-la* » (patrons, maîtres), des « *Chèf* » (détenteurs de quelque pouvoir), des « *Bon-papa* » (les présidents et les protecteurs)...Ce paternalisme aura été exploité à fond par le duvaliérisme qui, au début, bénéficiait de l'association de deux mots psychologiquement importants pour notre peuple : « *Papa* » et « *Dok* »... un bon *nègre* voulant à tout prix le bien des Noirs d'Haïti" (115)

Starting with Toussaint Louverture, "Papa" was attached to the names of various Haitian statesmen and authority figures, such as Papa Toussaint and Papa Dessalines.<sup>17</sup> The epithet served to bring the people both closer to the authority figure as family as well as placing a respectful distance

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<sup>16</sup> See Chapters I, II, and VIII in Nérée. See also Ferguson 44-52, Prince 25-7

<sup>17</sup> See notes, Trouillot 240.

between the “children” and the “father.” Duvalier further manipulated his public by adding the appellation “Doc,” fundamentally, a person who helps people.

Moreover, Papa Doc actively promoted paternalistic associations by claiming to be the reincarnation of Haitian national heroes. In a government publication called *Catéchisme de la Révolution*, a Duvalierist counterpart to Christian catechism, to the question, “Qu’est-ce que Dessalines, Toussaint, Christophe, Pétion et Estimé?”, Jean M. Fourcand’s answers, “Dessalines, Toussaint, Christophe, Pétion et Estimé sont cinq Fondateurs de Nation qui se retrouvent en François Duvalier” (17). Though James Ferguson and Rod Prince only interpret this response as a sign of Duvalier’s megalomania, it underscores the importance of the dictator’s hagiography: Duvalier presents himself as the inheritor of a heroic and masculine legacy. He is the reincarnation of all of Haiti’s founding fathers, not one but five. Through Francois Duvalier’s own writings, Nérée confirms that, “Le Dr. Duvalier se présente comme la ‘continuité vivante’ de Jean-Jacques Dessalines, fondateur de la patrie haïtienne. Il se réclame et se proclame héritier direct sinon la réincarnation de Dessalines” (103). In addition to the founding fathers, Duvalier absorbs power and authority from history, culture and even religion.

Though Duvalier took this paternalism to new heights, he was not the first to exploit historical heroism and patriotism. Robert Fatton Jr. formulates the notion of Haitian authoritarian *habitus* that has been shaped by Haiti’s history of both colonial domination and resistance. He argues that the Duvalier regime is a product of Haitian history and that dictators have always cultivated otherworldly associations and a strong cult of personality. He states that, “the presidential monarch has always pretended to have an all-encompassing sphere of competence. His presence has to be felt everywhere; he has to be perceived as the father of the nation, to whom

filial respect is always due” (33). This paternalistic attitude was amplified under Duvalier, bolstered by violence, terror, and a ravenous greed that Fatton calls, “*la politique du ventre*,”<sup>18</sup> leaving little room for agency or personal power. Duvalier’s dictatorial machine operated through the *politique du ventre* consuming its way through Haiti’s resources, reflecting the kind of masculinity the Duvalierists practiced.

In a calculating move, the president further enhanced his image and authority by linking himself to the *lwa*—or vaudou spirit—of the dead, Baron Samedi.<sup>19</sup> He deliberately fashioned himself after the image of Baron Samedi by appearing at public events dressed in dark suits and wearing a bowler hat or top hat and his iconic dark-rimmed glasses. His mode of dress would have been instantly recognizable as that of Baron Samedi to the Haitian public, a point that René Depestre parodies in his novel *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979). Papa Doc’s manipulative appropriation of Baron Samedi’s iconography allowed him to transfer the *lwa*’s mystical powers and dominion over (life and) death to himself. As both doctor and *lwa* of death, he authorized himself to be the one who would decide who lived and who died.

While Baron Samedi is a powerful and important figure in the vaudou pantheon as well as in Haitian culture in general, Papa Doc also borrowed from Christianity in order to strengthen his hold on the Haitian imaginary.<sup>20</sup> In a fantastic example of propagandistic megalomania, François Duvalier is pictured standing in front of Jesus, who has one hand on Duvalier’s shoulder and the

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Fatton Jr. defines *la politique du ventre*, “represents a form of governability based on the acquisition of personal wealth through the conquest of state offices... The tragedy of Haiti’s systemic foundation is that it has literally eaten the decency and humanity of perfectly honest men and women, transforming them into what people have now dubbed *grands mangeurs*, big eaters—a rapacious species of office holders who devour public resources for their exclusive private gains” (32). See “The Haitian Authoritarian “Habitus” and the Contradictory Legacy of 1804.” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 10.1 (2004): 22-43.

<sup>19</sup> Dayan 126, Dubois 331, Heintz 540-41.

<sup>20</sup> See Dubois 331-2 for Duvalier’s appropriation of vaudou and Christian imagery



other gesturing towards the public. Above their heads is written, “PEUPLE CROYEZ EN LUI/ JE L’AI CHOISI,” and at the bottom of the poster, it reads, “PAIX/ SUR HAITI AUX HOMMES/ DE BONNE VOLONTE”. These posters were displayed and distributed to intensify the belief that Papa Doc was divinely chosen and had access to the supernatural. Privileging paternalistic forms and imagery, he cloaked himself in a masculine shroud of mystery. Trouillot makes a similar observation when he writes,

Duvalier, with cynical care, took up all the slogans of his past speeches and writings that emphasized this identification of the chief of state with the nation and had them written in neon lights at city entrances and in public places: ‘I Am the Haitian Flag, One and Indivisible.’ ‘My Only Enemies Are Those of the Nation.’ ‘To Wish to Destroy Duvalier Is to Wish to Destroy Haiti.’ Propaganda techniques reminiscent of Mussolini’s Italy or Hitler’s Germany presented Duvalier as the incarnation of the founders of the nation, if not God himself. (196)

He reminds us that Duvalier effectively closed the circle of power and became both state and nation. He coveted the idea of embodying all the forms of masculine power, while disregarding the populace that makes up the nation. As the slogans demonstrate, Duvalier wanted to portray himself as the ultimate paternal figure, invoking figures such as Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Toussaint Louverture. His eagerness to liken himself to such important paternal figures appears again when he changed the Haitian flag.<sup>21</sup> As a lifelong admirer of Dessalines, Duvalier reclaimed the Dessalinian flag and adapted it for his own reign. Consequently, his slogan, “I Am the Haitian Flag, One and Indivisible,” can be seen as a commandeering of Dessalines’s paternalism. The act

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<sup>21</sup> See notes in Trouillot 240.

of assuming the Dessalinian mantel as well as his not so subtle appropriation of Christian and vaudou iconography, gave power and shape to the kind of masculinity that François Duvalier embodied and portrayed. Although Duvalier did not physically represent a stereotypical masculinity, he sought to acquire the power, omnipotence and respect with which these figures are associated.

Papa Doc was consumed by the need to secure his power, which required that he ensure his legacy through his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier. Though he had four children, he only had one son through whom the Duvalier name and legacy could live on.<sup>22</sup> Understanding that a female ruler would be difficult to accept for most Haitians, Duvalier *père* consciously promoted a masculine line of succession, forgoing his more mature and capable daughter Marie-Denise for his son.<sup>23</sup> Upon François Duvalier's death on April 21, 1971, Jean-Claude Duvalier was installed into office the very next day. At only nineteen years of age, Jean-Claude Duvalier was Haiti's next *Président à vie*. Ill-suited to his position in addition to being immature, Jean-Claude deferred to his mother and sister in political and public matters. Simone Duvalier, along with the old guard Duvalierists known as the “dinosaurs,” became the de facto ruler of Haiti in the early years of Baby Doc's reign, until his marriage to Michèle Bennett.<sup>24</sup>

Jean-Claude Duvalier, or Baby Doc, was generally viewed—by the public and especially the press—as a lazy, dim playboy with no aptitude for work.<sup>25</sup> In his section entitled “La personnification de la nullité,” Bob Nérée describes Jean-Claude Duvalier thus: “L'on peut

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<sup>22</sup> Dubois 349

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Abott, *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 157.

<sup>24</sup> Ferguson 61

<sup>25</sup> Abbott 205-6, Ferguson 60-1, Nérée 52-9

aujourd'hui se permettre de définir le chef d'Etat Jean-Claude Duvalier. Il a donné jusqu'au 7 février '86 toute la mesure de ses capacités et c'est sans méchanceté mais plutôt avec une pitié mêlée d'indignation, que l'on affirmera qu'il a personnifié l'incompétence au pouvoir et qu'on dira avec Grégoire Eugene, qu'il n'était qu'une 'insignifiance'" (52). Along the same lines, Frankétienne, who remained in Haiti for the duration of the dictatorship, compares the father to the son, "Il ne faut pas nier que l'homme [François Duvalier] était pourvu d'un certain sens politique, qu'on n'a pas retrouvé chez Jean-Claude, son fils. Lui, c'est l'imbécile, le gaga" (Jonassaint 264). Despite the skepticism and disparaging estimations, Jean-Claude Duvalier managed to stay in power for nearly 15 years, outlasting his father's rule and proving the power of the dictatorial machine.

Under Baby Doc, Haiti would become increasingly more dependent on foreign aid, especially from the United States.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, poverty increased to the point of provoking a mass exodus and public demonstrations in the 1980's. Hunger and poverty would lead to protests and marches led by women, students, and the peasantry—the most targeted individuals by the regime—which would ultimately contribute to the fall of the dictatorship.<sup>27</sup> Poignantly summing up the regime, Frankétienne identifies four stages of Jean-Claude's reign,

Il y a un premier moment, il a été important pour nous de le comprendre, c'est le moment où il se réclame encore du père; puis un deuxième moment, qui en est un moment de flottement, où il laisse croire qu'il va libéraliser ; ensuite, un troisième moment, celui de la

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<sup>26</sup> Jana Evans Braziel *Duvalier's Ghosts: Race, Diaspora, and U.S. Imperialism in Haitian Literatures* (Gainesville: U of Florida, 2010) 192-95, Dubois 350-54, Ferguson 69-75

<sup>27</sup> For more on the impact of feminism and women's participation in overthrowing the government see, Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminism (1980-1990)" *Feminist Studies* 21.1 (1995): 135-64. For general information on the fall of the dictatorship see, Chapter 4 in Ferguson's and Chapter 8 in Michel-Rolph Trouillot's books.

pseudo-libéralisation ; enfin, un quatrième moment, où il essaie de resserrer les mailles du filet, pour ne pas laisser échapper les petits poissons, il était déjà trop tard. Ce quatrième moment marque la décomposition du régime jean-claudiste. (Jonassaint 274)

Here, Frankétienne emphasizes the lasting influence of François Duvalier's legacy, yet he, also, indicates a break in the second moment where Baby Doc comes into his own. Many consider Jean-Claude's marriage to Michèle Bennett to be the defining moment of the shift of power inside the administration.<sup>28</sup> However, their lavish lifestyle and indifference to the plight of their country citizens worsened their public image and further estranged the state from the nation.<sup>29</sup>

Though Jean-Claude lacked the gravitas of his father, he built on to the Duvalier image through wealth and excess. As Elizabeth Abbott reports, "Jean-Claude's clothes reflected this conservative bent, and also his obsessive one-upmanship. Everything he owned was tasteful and well made, and it was also just that much better than anyone else's. His shoes were made-to-order, his ties \$250 a piece, his suits and shirts exquisitely tailored, and everything was imported" (206). She identifies, here, one of the vectors around which Jean-Claude's masculinity is constructed: money. His masculinity is projected and reinforced through his financial dominance and economic power. He has unlimited access to the national coffers enabling him to one-up an entire country. Indeed, he was often pictured wearing fancy suits and driving luxury cars, and his wedding to Michèle Bennett was reported to cost \$5 million dollars.<sup>30</sup> In fact, their overly ostentatious lifestyle added to the public's growing resentment and outrage.

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<sup>28</sup> Ferguson

<sup>29</sup> Trouillot 217-9

<sup>30</sup> Heintz and Heintz 643, or see Ferguson 72, who reports that the wedding cost \$7 million dollars.

While Jean-Claude Duvalier promised an economic revolution, conditions only worsened under his rule. The only people to benefit from the regime's development strategies were those who were affiliated with the regime. Under the guise of liberalization, the strict Duvalierist censorship softened, slightly, and state-sponsored violence appeared to be on the decline. However, the regime had only devised new ways to circumvent foreign interference and continued to receive aid from international organization and agencies.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the economic policies known as *Jeanclaudisme* were a massive failure provoking a deep economic crisis in which the already exacerbated living conditions continued to deteriorate. The last year of the dictatorship was plagued by rebellions, protests, and threats of *coups*, which all required violent responses by the tyrant. Finally, due to a combination of factors including U.S. intervention, public dissent, and fracturing inside the government, on February 7, 1986, Jean-Claude Duvalier and his wife fled the country. However, the fall of the dictatorship did not mean an end to Duvalierism<sup>32</sup>.

Given Haiti's unique history, we must consider the ways in which this past informs and contests contemporary understandings and constructions of masculinity and the masculine ideal. Going back to the slave trade and through the revolution, Haiti's historical engagement in politics and its struggle against oppression are the foundation of the Haitian consciousness and identity. However, the volatile political climate in Haiti and its dependence on and exploitation by foreign powers created the conditions under which the state could attain sole control over the various national institutions and entities; thus, becoming a totalitarian apparatus.<sup>33</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the state turned its back on the needs and desires of the nation, that is to say, the

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<sup>31</sup> Braziel 192-3

<sup>32</sup> See Braziel *Duvalier's Ghosts: Race, Diaspora, and U.S. Imperialism in Haitian Literatures* for more on the legacy of Duvalierism and the phenomenon known as "Duvalierism without Duvalier"

<sup>33</sup> Trouillot 178

needs and desires of the people. Unlike their revolutionary forbearers, who held a paternalistic vision of the state, the Duvalierist state reinforced the estrangement between the state and civil society.

Indeed, the strategies and tactics employed by the Duvaliers created the conditions for further abuse and political debasement even after the fall of the regime. Jana Braziel engages with the indissoluble consequences of the dictatorship and the ways in which Duvalierism and the Duvalierist state was aided and maintained by a powerful transnational network of influence.<sup>34</sup> Through a critical investigation of post-Duvalier Haitian cultural productions, she exposes the lasting effects of the Duvalier's brand of dictatorship inside and outside of Haiti. She argues that, "The State apparatus, though marked by the despotic bodies of François and Jean-Claude Duvalier, cannot be reduced to these two bodies, but rather extends across this field of state power = Duvalierism without Duvalier; or, more diffusely, across a militaristic, juridical, administrative, discursive 'perpetual field of interaction.'" (24). Father and son became emblematic of corrupt governance and violent omnipotence which extended beyond physical, geographical, and temporal borders and into the Haitian imaginary and memory. Even after Jean-Claude fled the island, Haiti suffered under Duvalierism without Duvalier on political, social, and personal levels. Indeed, cultural productions such as films, plays, and literature attest to the lasting impact of Duvalierism. Furthermore, her emphasis on the persistence of the legacy of the dictatorship highlights the importance of considering cultural texts produced after the fall of the regime. With the memories of the dictatorship still fresh in the minds and hearts of the Haitian

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<sup>34</sup> See Braziel, *Duvalier's Ghosts: Race, Diaspora, and U.S. Imperialism in Haitian Literatures*

populace, cultural productions attest to the persistence of Duvalierism while offering a space within which reflection and the processes of reconciliation can occur.

With his position as the head of state, father of the nation, and *Président à vie*, François Duvalier placed himself at the pinnacle of masculine power. As a result, he posited his own formulation of masculinity that was really only available to him and later his son. How then can the common man develop a masculine identity when denied any access to the model of masculinity and masculine power? As I will show in this dissertation, writers have demonstrated a continuing interest in the problem of male heroism under dictatorship as well as the gendered power dynamics that sustain and animate the Duvalier dictatorships themselves. In the texts that I examine, masculinity is often compromised, thus necessitating the creation of different, and perhaps unconventional, masculine figures such as the female patriarch, the gigolo, and the *zombi*.

### III. Gender Theory and Methodology

The complexity of gender constructions such as masculinity are nearly impossible to define. Instead of a definition, which would be antithetical to our purposes, I offer an exploration of masculinity. Before delving into the theoretical considerations on gender, it must be noted that masculinity, in this study, is neither innate, natural, nor unchanging. In fact, due to the very changing and malleable nature of society and culture, masculinity is an extremely unstable concept which is subject to constant transformation. As R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt remind us, “Masculinities are configurations of practice that are constructed, unfold, and change through time” (852). Furthermore, as scholars like Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick and Judith Halberstam suggest, social constructions like masculinity do not and cannot exist on their own

and depend on a variety of historical, social and political factors. The masculine subject, as well as masculinity itself, is always in communion with itself and others, its environment, history, society and politics. Thus, it is imperative that masculinity be studied in various, yet specific contexts such as Duvalierist Haiti.

As a social construct, masculinity is contingent on a number of factors, but specifically it is conceived in relation to femininity. Luce Irigaray observes this duality, “Within sexual difference, therefore, *finiteness*, *limit* and *progression* are needed: and this requires two bodies, two thoughts, and a relation between the two and the conception of a wider perspective” (86). Thus, not only does one require the other, but a wider perspective can be reached through the recognition of sexual difference and understanding the relational character of gender. Furthermore, this wider perspective rejects simple dualistic formulations of gender based on opposition or complementarity, instead, it strives to transcend the exclusionary paradigms and open up a new ethical space in which alternative frameworks can be conceived.

Though masculinity is traditionally associated with power, not all men benefit from this association. Power is distributed in incommensurable ways, thus producing a disjuncture between masculine ideologies and masculine subjects. To put it within the Haitian context, power, and by extension dominant masculinity, is available to Duvalier and his sphere of influence, but not to the average Haitian. The constant oppression and exploitation by the Duvalier regime not only renders the Haitian powerless, but also excludes him from a masculine political subjectivity. The role of protector and provider is usually attributed to the father or another masculine figure, however, this role is denied to the Haitian man. Instead, families live in fear and the men find themselves unable to protect or provide for their families. Such a



deprivation corresponds to a crisis in masculinity for the average Haitian, which in turn affects both sides of the gender binary, thus changing society and social relationships at large.

When engaging with a concept as evasive as masculinity, Judith Butler offers a valuable way of understanding gender. Emphasizing gender's constructed nature, her theory of performativity and her definition of gender as, "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being," are a productive avenue of discourse and interrogation, and inform my project (45). Indeed, the Duvaliers fully capitalized on the power of performativity in constructing their own brand of masculine power and masculinity. Through repeated forms of violence, Duvalierism enabled the creation of a new form of hegemonic masculinity. Their performance not only generates a masculine identity, it also excludes those who would not adhere to this new norm; as Butler contends, the body produces meaning as well as acting as a regulating force in society. As Duvalierist masculinity became the law, any masculinities deviating from the new form could be interpreted as discordant, at best, and antagonistic, at worst. Under the Duvalier dictatorship, performativity is integrated into the state apparatus and employed as an exclusionary practice in society.

The practice of, rehearsal and the repetition of certain behaviors and practices reveal and displace dominant structure norms. As Butler intimates, on the subversive potential of parody,

The critical task is, rather to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (201)

For Butler parody has the capacity to destabilize and resist dominant power structures, such as gender and natural sex, through acts of *répétition*. Moreover, parody opens up a space for the consideration of subaltern masculinities. She adds, “As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself” (188). Thus, in addition to gender performativity and its function in producing normative gender identities, I will identify parodic gestures—however small—with the potential to subvert and expose dominant structures and practices in literature and poetry as they themselves are representations of culture and society. For example, chapters one and three examine caricatural performances of masculinity through the female patriarchs Rose and Claire in Chauvet’s novella and the fictional dictator Zoocrate Zacharie in Depestre’s novel. Imitation, in these words, work less like flattery and more like a mirror that reflects back the damaged and toxic masculinity of the dictatorship.

In a like manner, Brazier’s *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora* (2008) explores and expands on these ideas through the Kreyòl concept and figure of the *gwo nèg*, presenting a uniquely Haitian understanding of black masculinity. She reports that, “To be a *gwo nèg* in Haiti and its diaspora is to be a powerful man, one who commands respect, social stature, and above all, authority” (1). Indeed, we can see how the Duvaliers sought to capture the essence of the *gwo nèg* and assume its power and authority. Furthermore, the figure of the *gwo nèg* offers crucial insight into the ways in which Haitian men have manipulated and embodied various characteristics of the *gwo nèg* in order to gain currency in the economies of power. Her reformulation of this popular Haitian concept is especially illuminating with regard to the representations of historically and socially inherited ideas of masculinity at work in

Haitian literature, especially in relation to power, which deconstruct, resist, parody and reconstruct the conceptualization of the *gwo nèg*.

Extending beyond Butler's formulation of performativity, Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* (1998) demonstrates the limits of understanding masculinity and maleness exclusively in relation to men. Setting out to define a conception of masculinity unhinged from the male body, he promotes the idea of female masculinity as a way of depathologizing gender variance and expounding the multiple and alternative genders already circulating in society. He explains, "Precisely because virtually nobody fits the definitions of male and female, the categories gain power and currency from their impossibility" (27). As an alternative, he presents female masculinity, which is both performed and embodied. Female masculinity fosters new understandings and a new awareness of masculine identities and behaviors that are not specific to white middle class men, nor even the male body.

Furthermore, he reveals the ways in which certain kinds of normative masculinity and maleness (such as James Bond and in our case, Duvalier) actually gain power by subordinating alternative masculinities. Through female masculine figures we understand that masculinity is always plural and that female masculinity has the power to defamiliarize dominant forms of masculinity and make visible alternate masculinities and sexualities. In Haitian literature, we encounter atypical masculine identities expressed through female characters such as Claire and Rose in Marie Chauvet's novellas. Even more, cultural productions under dictatorship reveal the ways in which normative, Duvalierist, masculinity gains power through the subjugation of other kinds of masculinities and identities. The concepts of female masculinity and performativity offer a productive avenue for uncovering the new and divergent performances of masculinity under

oppressive circumstances and the ways in which alternative masculinities can push against the norm.

Moving beyond the Haitian context, a significant amount of scholarly attention has been paid to discourses and theorizations of black masculinity. We owe a great debt to scholars like Angela Davis, Hazel Carby, Hortense Spillers and bell hooks for fostering interest in and bringing attention to issues relating to gender and race. Their scholarship and activism bring to light the historical processes that shape the black subject and the intricacies of identity formation and politics within a context of dispossession. The institution of slavery suppressed hierarchical sexual roles, in other words gendered identities, in order to impose the absolute authority of the slavemaster. Therefore, the slaves were stripped of their gender and purely exploited for their labor. As a result of this historic denial of the dominant (white patriarchal) masculinity, postslavery cultures are marked by frustrated gender tensions and often by performances of hypermasculinity that dictate the ways in which black men and women relate to each other and to the rest of society. The implications of being denied a gender and/or gendered subject positions through the institution of slavery is of particular interest to my project as it shares a common origin with Haitians and it demonstrates the ways in which black masculinity has been, is and, perhaps, always will be socially and culturally produced. The precarious condition of subjectivity and identity formation in the black diaspora reflects the historic conditions from which it emerged as black subjects sought to claim their humanity through their gendered subject positions.

While French and Francophone literary criticism has not yet addressed the impact of dictatorship on literary constructions of masculinity<sup>35</sup>, some scholars have addressed the relation between dictatorship and culture in Haiti. The recent anthology entitled, *Ecrire en Pays Assiégé = Writing under Siege: Haïti* (2004), undertakes the task of looking at literature under dictatorship, censorship and domination. This is the most complete work focusing on the effects of the dictatorship on literary production and culture as several articles are devoted to the Duvalier period. In several of the chapters in *Écrire en Pays Assiégé*, authors and scholars alike express the drive to preserve and cultivate artistic and literary expression as a means of coping with the deplorable lived realities and the haunting memories of dictatorship. The emphasis on artistic creation and freedom is of paramount significance as it became a means of surviving, a way to escape and outlast the regime.

Preceding this anthology, Jacques Val's *La dictature de Duvalier* (1972), Gérard Pierre-Charles's *Radiographie d'une dictature : Haïti et Duvalier* (1973), Laënnec Hurbon's *Culture et dictature en Haïti : L'imaginaire sous contrôle* (1979), and Bob Nérée's *Duvalier: Le pouvoir sur les autres de père en fils* (1988) reflect on the rise of the Duvaliers and the rhetoric of Duvalierism. Hurbon examines Duvalierist discourse, not only as a means of self-promotion, but also as a way to silence the masses. In an attempt to reclaim Haitian culture from Duvalierist contamination, Hurbon's study mainly focuses on popular forms like vaudou and oral folktales as the sites of daily resistance to domination. Moreover, Eddy Arnold Jean's *Haïti: La démocratie trahi: L'ère de la*

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<sup>35</sup> In Francophone African scholarship, much attention has been paid to the relationship between dictatorship and literature, such as Dominic Thomas, *Nation-building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2002) and Michael K. Walonen, "Power, Patriarchy, and Postcolonial Nationalism in the African Dictator Novel." *Journal of the African Literature Association* 6.1 (2011): 104-17. Dictatorial literature is a prominent area of research in African and Francophone studies, but the specific problematic of dictatorship, literature and masculinity has yet to be thoroughly explored.

*voyoucratie* investigates the causes and consequences of the Duvalier dictatorship. He elaborates on the *macoutisation* of the state, where the Tontons Macoutes are, “tous ceux qui empêchent le pays de progresser; car la ruine du pays conditionne leur richesse” (61). While these works do not include substantial considerations on masculinity, they confirm the importance of power in the construction and promotion of Duvalierist ideology.

#### IV. Haitian Literature of Dictatorship and Masculinity

In this dissertation, I examine a corpus united by the theme of dictatorship : Marie Vieux Chauvet’s *Amour, Colère, et Folie* (1968), Frankétienne’s *Ultravocal* (1972), George Castera’s *Le Retour à l’arbre* (1974), René Depestre’s *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’occident chrétien* (1966) and *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979), Dany Laferrière’s *La Chair du maître* (1997), and Kettly Mars’s *Saisons sauvages* (2010). While these texts are not yet defined as dictatorial literature, I propose that they be considered within this tradition. In *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature*, Martin Munro calls Depestre’s *Le Mât de cocagne*, “a Haitian 'dictator novel'” (85). Furthermore, though he sketches out a canon of dictatorial and post-dictatorial Haitian novels, he is, ultimately, reticent in naming them as literature of dictatorship. Instead, he calls attention to, “alienated figures in Haitian writing of the Duvalier and post-Duvalier periods” (85). In addition, Sarah Bilodeau begins to develop a canon of postdictatorial literature in, “Un-silencing Resistance: A Trilogy of Dictatorship Novels by Évelyne Trouillot, Kettly Mars, and Marie-Célie Agnant,” though she limits it to three texts: *La Mémoire aux abois* (2010), *Un Alligator nommé Rosa* (2007), and *Saisons Sauvages*. Building on Munro and Bilodeau, I advocate for the expansion of the field of dictatorial literature to include Haitian literary productions. Just to start, I would include works such as Roger Dorsinville’s

*Mourir pour Haïti, ou, Les Croisés d'Esther* (1980) and *Les Vèvès du Créateur*<sup>36</sup> (1989), Lyonel Trouillot's *Les Enfants des héros* (2002), Frankétienne's oeuvre, in particular *Mur à crever* (1968), and Dany Laferrière's body of work, but especially, *Le Goût des jeunes filles* (1992) and *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000). Undoubtedly, there are many more novels and poems, and there are many more to come. Situating these texts within the tradition of dictatorial literature further broadens and enriches our understanding of Haiti, a country that has been plagued by dictatorships and other forms of oppression, thereby enhancing our engagement with Haitian literature.

Though Haitian studies has yet to delineate the genre of dictatorial literature, the dictator novel and the dictatorial literature are already well-established literary traditions in the Hispanophone world. Indeed, Roberto González Echevarria identifies the dictator novel as, "The most clearly indigenous thematic tradition in Latin American literature," which he traces back to the accounts of the conquest of Mexico by infamous *conquistador*, Hernán Cortés (65). He, then, elaborates on the modern tradition of dictatorial literature starting from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Under the umbrella of dictatorial literature, the testimonial novel in Central America seeks, according to Linda J. Craft, "the denunciation of injustice and the defense of society's marginalized or excluded" (5). The dictator novel, while lacking a precise definition, is generally a highly political novel challenging, representing and/or engaging with dictatorship. The dictator novel has also been known to include and reflect on question of masculinity, especially with regard to power and citizenship.

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<sup>36</sup> For a critical examination and English language translation see Max Dorsinville, *The Rule of François ("Papa Doc") Duvalier in Two Novels by Roger Dorsinville: Realism and Magic Realism in Haiti*. (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000).

Latin American scholarship has made significant contributions in the theorization of masculinity and race in relation to dictatorship. Having suffered similar dictatorships in analogous contexts, Latin American studies have brought attention to the need for scholarship on dictatorships and their aftermath for the countries as well as the citizens affected. In particular Rebecca Biron's *Murder and Masculinity : Violent Fictions of Twentieth-century Latin America* presents a thoughtful examination of masculinity and violence in Latin American literature. Her analysis of violent male characters in fictions reveals the erosion of traditional masculinity, in addition, she exposes the precarity of construction a national identity through a conception of a national masculine, which equates citizenship with masculinity. On the other half of the island of Hispaniola, Lauren Derby and Ignacio López-Calvo provide outstanding examinations of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic. In Derby's *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (2009), she emphasizes the everyday and vernacular forms of domination under Trujillo, imposed through the manipulation of popular forms. Of particular interest to my study is Derby's investigation into the symbolic crisis of masculinity in the Dominican Republic and the ways in which Trujillo exploited this crisis in order to present himself as a hypermasculine leader. Their explorations on the figure of the dictator, and by extension his masculinity, and its effect on the populace is relevant to understanding the ways in which certain types of normative masculinities are disseminated through popular forms. For example, the Duvaliers promoted their image through religion (both Christianity and vaudou), media, parades, political rallies, gossip, and rumor.

While Derby's text expands upon ethnographic and archival materials read through a cultural and historical lens, Nestor Rodríguez's *Divergent Dictions: Contemporary Dominican*



*Literature* (2011) and Emilio Bejel's *Gay Cuban Nation* (2001) engage with nationalist discourses on identity through the lens of race and sexuality, respectively. Within each of these works, there stands a menacing figure in the margins with the potential to corrupt normative identity.

In the Southern Cone, Idelber Avelar and Lessie Jo Frazier engage with themes of memory and mourning in post-dictatorial Latin America. More importantly, they find contestatory voices within moments of exclusion and erasure. Avelar's *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999) delves into postdictatorial literature which seeks to work through traumas represented by the violent dictatorships through acts of remembering and forgetting. Similarly, Frazier's *Salt in the Sand: Memory, Violence, and the Nation-state in Chile, 1890 to the Present* (2007) questions the state's role in constructing official national memories of past events and the ways in which popular memory continues to contest officialized versions of memory. Their works illuminate problems that countries, like Haiti, have had to contend with even after the fall of the regime. After all, the fall of the dictatorship does not right all the wrongs. In Haiti, Duvalierism without Duvalier prevailed long after Jean-Claude's departure and violence continued to terrorize the Haitian people. In my last chapter, I examine the extent to which literature and memory offer a space for healing and reflection towards an undetermined future, notably through the works of Kettly Mars and Dany Laferrière. Memory and the act of remembering becomes the vehicle through which both the authors and the texts can confront the atrocious past in order to proceed into the present and the future.

Literature is a cultural space in which various historical, political, and social elements converge. Haitian literary productions have been and still are deeply affected by its environment and history. My project contributes to scholarship on Haitian and Francophone Caribbean literature, and scholarship on dictatorship by offering the first scholarly monograph on the literature of dictatorship, in general, and more specifically, on the representation of masculinity in Haitian literature of the Duvalier era. Literature from the Duvalier dictatorship has received a great deal of attention recently from leading scholars in the field including J. Michael Dash, Martin Munro, Valerie Kaussen, and Anne Marty. Though they do not explicitly claim the works as dictatorial literature, as I do, their findings have important consequences for considering literary productions from this era as, in fact, inseparable from the conditions from which they emerge. The significance of the dictatorship for both Haiti and these texts is a compelling reason to situate literature of and about this period as dictatorial literature.

Moreover, the scholars in question have demonstrated this need by probing the social, political, and transnational context of the works, with special attention to the intersection between the rise of dictatorship within Haiti and developments of U.S. imperialism. For example, J. Michael Dash's *Literature and Ideology in Haiti, 1915-1961* (1981) and *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (1988) investigate the ramifications of the American occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934. By contrast, the title of Martin Munro's book, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrrière, Danticat* (2007) alludes to the fall of Élie Lescot's government in 1946, which was in part due to the efforts of student-worker protests lead by Jacques Stephen Alexis and René Depestre. Though neither Dash nor Munro expressly address the issue of masculinity, their considerations on the inter and

transnational entanglements of history and politics in relation to literature reinforce its role as an active site of resistance.

Valerie Kaussen's *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism* (2008) and Jana Evans Braziel's *Duvalier's Ghosts: Race, Diaspora, and U.S. Imperialism in Haitian Literatures* (2010) urge us to read Haitian cultural productions from a transnational perspective. Like Trouillot and Nicholls, they demonstrate the ways in which both tyranny and resistance are subject to a multitude of transnational forces at play. On the other hand, Braziel contributes to the conversation on the Duvalier dictatorship and its dependence on international structures such as aid organizations and foreign governments. Braziel's chapter on Dany Laferrière and his response to Marie Chauvet's trilogy explores the repercussions of a state that is more interested in catering to the needs of external governments than to its own people. Her intervention into the politics of Duvalierism and post-Duvalierism posits literature as a space within which Haitians can recover the fragments of their identity and nationality. It is a space where the ghosts of Duvalier persist, but so do the voices of those who spoke (up).

Returning to the subject of gender, Marty and Chancy provide insightful studies into feminism and feminine writing in Haiti. Though they do not deliberately engage with masculinity or masculine identity, they address certain elements of masculinity within their analyses on feminine writing. Importantly, sexual difference is relational and progress cannot occur without the participation of both sides of the gender binary. Marty traces the historical and ideological perspectives of Haitian literature while focusing on the multiple representations of the feminine and female characters through Haitian literary history. She also observes that male authors often prefer using female voices to express themselves as the feminine voice frees the author from the

social constraints of masculinity.<sup>37</sup> Her analysis blurs the lines between male and female, while acknowledging that sexual difference is maintained. She further complicates these distinctions in the following analysis on prostitution with regard to Chauvet's novella *Colère*, in which the fearful father sells his daughter's body to the police chief in exchange for his own land,

Cette mentalité veule, lâche, vénale, corrompue que M. Normil partage avec la société (cf. épouses bourgeoises) minée par la dictature est elle-même une attitude de prostitution... La prostitution ne se limite plus aux maisons closes; elle n'est plus un fait féminin, mais cette situation s'applique aux hommes. (90)

She thus extends prostitution, a traditionally feminine condition, to the masculine. The dictatorship turns everyone into prostitutes, thereby emasculating men and robbing them of their agency. Admittedly this traumatic turn of events can be viewed as a crisis in masculinity and its function in society, but it may also engender new and different formulations of masculinity that challenge and disrupt the dominant structures. When the model of masculinity is disturbed, it becomes necessary to revise the concept of masculinity itself and I maintain that this occurs in literature.

While gender has been a central object of concern in considerations of representations of dictatorship by Anne Marty, Joan Dayan, Myriam Chancy, and Valerie Kaussen, masculinity has not yet received adequate critical attention as a relational point on the gender spectrum. As we have seen, these scholars focus on the feminine perspective in Haitian literature and touch on issues of women's marginalization and oppression in the social, political, historical and literary spheres. All of them engage with Marie Chauvet's landmark works either in entirety or in part. Dayan

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<sup>37</sup> She elaborates, "Les représentations féminines mises en relief dans le roman masculin ont tendance à évoluer, à se transformer au fur et à mesure que l'écrivain peut assumer l'expression d'un 'je', indépendamment des pressions sociales ou idéologiques" (93).

primarily focuses on *Fond des Nègres* (1960), although she also includes the rest of Chauvet's corpus in her analysis. Despite the censure that Chauvet's novels experienced while she was alive, much scholarly attention has been paid to *Amour, Colère et Folie*. Recently a collection of essays was devoted to Marie Vieux Chauvet and her oeuvre called *En amour avec Marie* (2016). Kaussen and Dayan examine different aspects of the trilogy's heroines and their relation to local and global contexts. Dayan observes a tendency within male writers, such as Jacques Stéphan Alexis, René Depestre and Jacques Roumain, to sideline women in their novels, who seem to exist only in order to support the male protagonist. In addition, Chauvet's posthumous novel, *Les Rapaces*, is included in Chancy's study on revolutionary women's writing as an example of empowered female consciousness and as an expression of resistance within an apocalyptic climate. The interest in the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and class illustrates the complex realities of Haitian society and life, however it also supports a need to explore the gender spectrum in a more comprehensive manner.

These fruitful examinations of femininity, gender, and sexuality have been crucial to our understanding of the cultural, psychic, and sexual ramifications of power dynamics under Duvalier, yet by focusing primarily on female characters they leave out a consideration of how masculinity has been structured or transformed in response to the violence of the dictatorship, as well as the historical underpinnings of various displays of masculinity as mastery. It is to these issues that my dissertation turns. I investigate the ways in which new manifestations of masculinity coalesce in reaction to the difficult conditions of dictatorship, and whether these masculinities alter, contest or deviate from the standardized practices of Duvalierist masculinity. Within the context of domination, how does masculinity respond to oppression as well as the needs of the

individual and society? What kind of response, if any, is necessary when faced with violent oppression and powerlessness? Further, do reformulations of masculinity disturb and modify traditional and imposed forms of masculinity?

The masculinities portrayed in the works of Georges Castera, Marie Vieux Chauvet, René Depestre, Frankétienne, Dany Laferrière and Kettly Mars are different from the masculinity promoted by Duvalier. The masculine figures and masculinities depicted within these literary texts do not adhere to the masculine ideals endorsed either by the regime or by traditional practices. Often powerless, unlikeable, dastardly and ineffectual, the masculine characters reside at the opposite end of the spectrum of power. They come from the exploited and terrified masses, who have been and continue to suffer under the dictatorship. These texts, on the one hand, willfully refuse the malignant Duvalierist masculinity and instead, offer alternate portrayals of masculinity which critique and deconstruct the dominant discourses. On the other hand, some of the texts even reproduce and magnify Duvalierist masculinity, reflecting back, but also dissecting the violence inherent in its structure. Though the masculine characters in these literary texts can seem negative, they, nonetheless, put forward something different. I contend that these alternate portrayals of masculinity surreptitiously resist, contest and outlast both the Duvalierist masculinity as well as the violence of the regime. The incorporation of and their predilection for diffident and atypical masculine characters is tantamount to a refusal of the Duvalierist brand of masculinity.

## V. Chapter Description

By examining the representations of masculinity in literature, we can gain a wider perspective on gender and social dynamics, the political climate and the historical influences of heroism, religion and inherited ideas of class and race. Like an ethnographer, writers record the

machinations of history, culture and politics, providing a window into a specific historical moment. Novels and poetry explore the unknown terrains of the psyche, and in turn, reveal the complexities of individual and social consciousness, which is menaced and frustrated by the violence, injustice and terror administered by the dictatorship. When faced with a system as corrupt and imperious as the Duvalier dictatorship, one expects a reaction from the people—whether it be through resistance, dissidence, illusory compliance or even the simple act of outlasting and surviving the dictatorship.

So, the question remains: what does Haitian masculinity under dictatorship look like and what cultural, political, and social meanings does it convey? In my first chapter, “Homeland Security: Female Masculinity and Property in *Amour* and *Colère*”, I focus on Chauvet’s trilogy *Amour, Colère et Folie* which directly criticized the dictatorship by portraying the brutality and the horrors of the regime. Written and published during François Duvalier’s tenure, the incendiary text would ultimately result in the author’s exile. Fleeing Haiti for New York, she would die in exile in 1973. Her works would prove to be enormously influential for later writers as she delves in the conscious and unconscious fantasies present within the individual and collective psyches. Through a psychoanalytic narrative privileging the interior spaces of the individual and society, she deconstructs gender by linking sexuality to power and violence. My study concentrates on the first two novellas which evince fruitful and complex portrayals of masculinity under and during the Duvalier dictatorship. In particular, I consider the complicated gendered realities of the novellas’ two female protagonists through Judith’s Halberstam’s concept of female masculinity. In addition, I consider the extent to which Chauvet offers incisive analyses of the impotence of masculinity, for the common man, within the confines of

oppression and domination. She draws attention to the complicated entanglements of desire, violence and sex where one is not experienced without the others. The intertwining of violence, desire and sex directly reflects life under Duvalier, where sexual violence and brutality become the hallmark of the regime.

The virulent masculinity of the Duvalierist state inflicts terror and violence onto the Haitians leaving the men to watch in horror as the violence and corruption enters their homes. The powerlessness displayed through the male, and sometimes female, characters engages with a larger question of masculinity in crisis. However, Chauvet also presents new models of masculinity and agency through unlikely, and female, characters that perform a masculine identity. *Amour's* Claire and *Colère's* Rose are unlikely heroines even within their own stories. Claire is a reclusive spinster who spends her days fantasizing about her French (read: white) brother-in-law and writing in her diary. To the horror of her white mulatto bourgeois family, Claire is the only dark-skinned member of her family which serves as a constant reminder of their black origins. Raised as a boy, Claire is tasked with maintaining the estate. As her town is terrorized by violent officers, specifically the black police commander, Calédu, Claire watches the brutality from her window and eventually takes action by killing the commander.

In the subsequent novella, *Colère*, cowardly father, Louis Normil, trades his daughter's body in order to retain ownership of his land. Rose is to be subjected to sexual violation by the chief of the police, known as the gorilla, for thirty days and during this time, we witness her physical and mental disintegration as she becomes something akin to a *zombi*. Both women effectively become the protector and provider for their families, taking up the role traditionally assigned to the patriarch. By reading Claire and Rose's complicated gender identity as reluctant



performances of female masculinity, new formulations of gendered subjectivities emerge which reflect the deterioration of normative forms of masculinity based on domination. I argue that the masculinities depicted by Chauvet alter and disturb the dominant masculinity and provide a transformative space within which resistance and reformulation can take place.

Within the same period, Frankétienne and Georges Castéra created their masterpiece: *Ultravocal* (1972) and *Le Retour à l'arbre* (1974), respectively. In “Violent Offenders: Masculinity and the Poetics of Violence in Frankétienne’s *Ultravocal* and Georges Castéra’s *Le Retour à l'arbre*,” I examine the ways in which these two texts deconstruct and critique the virulent masculinity of the dictatorship through the male body. Furthermore, I situate the texts within a poetics of violence which the authors use to depict their experience of the dictatorship. Frankétienne’s spiralist novel, *Ultravocal*, can be characterized as an encounter with the many faces of evil and violence. Assuming the form of a spiral, “l’errance sans fin ni finalité,” the novel plunges the reader into a world created and sustained by violence. Through poetic manipulations of language and form, Frankétienne’s spiral intimates the violence and the chaos imposed upon daily life by Papa Doc and the perfidious Tontons Macoutes. The savage depictions of murder and violence along with the brutal, but poetic, language testifies to the overwhelming brutality of the Duvalier dictatorship. The poetic language seamlessly fuses violence to sex and sex to violence, where one cannot be without the other. As Vatel follows in the wake of Mac Abre’s destruction, scenes of carnage evince the realities of the violence inflicted on the Haitian public, where mindless sexual violence and torture prevailed. Through an analysis of sexual violence and the male body, I argue that Mac Abre’s toxic masculinity critiques the violent practices of Duvalierist masculinity. Writing directly under the all-seeing

eyes of Papa Doc, Frankétienne was compelled to develop a style of writing that would not be censored by the government. The obfuscatory quality of both Castera's and Frankétienne's works not only attests to their experimentation with poetic form and language, but also to their amassing need for creative expression under the conditions of extreme oppression and restraint.

In *Le Retour à l'arbre*, Georges Castera takes the reader on an odyssey through the violent lands that lead to subjectivity. Despite his relative obscurity on the American academic scene, he has made a significant contribution to the poetic and literary landscape of Haiti. He is a poet who has been widely read inside Haiti and his presence within the artistic communities has been discussed and noted by several writers and scholars.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Castera's illustrated book of poetry, which I maintain is a visual poem in conversation with the international avant-garde movements, engages a truly visual experience and expression of Haitian poetry. Created in collaboration with Bernard Wah, this graphic poem takes the reader on a surreal adventure through language and subjectivity. *Le Retour à l'arbre* experiments with poetic and visual forms and endeavors to create a unique experience through the chaotic landscape of subjectivity. Privileging subjective experience and poetic violence, Castera explores the unconscious terrain of masculinity in contemplation of a masculine identity and voice. I follow the poetic odyssey in its quest to recover the masculine subject position, notably the poetic "je," and reveal its reconstitution through the textual-visual vocabulary of the avant-garde. Furthermore, I trace the

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<sup>38</sup> See The Public Archive's interview, "DETOURS AND DISTANCE: An Interview with J. Michael Dash." In addition, Martin Munro dedicates two pages to Castera's engagement in Surrealist poetry in *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrrière, Danticat*, 23-4. In the afterword to his interview with Frankétienne, Jean Jonaissant references *Le Retour à l'arbre* as a "travail pionnier" in *Ecrire En Pays Assiégé = Writing under Siege: Haïti*, 282.

poetic subject through the violent lands of dictatorship where that violence is reappropriated into poetry.

In my third chapter, I will delve into the realm of vaudou with René Depestre's *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien, poème mystère vaudou* (1967) and *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979). This chapter, "Poète Mystère Vaudou: Reclaiming Masculinity in René Depestre's *Le Mât de Cocagne* and *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*" posits vaudou as the primary lens through which the critique of Duvalierist masculinity may be read. I argue that it is through vaudou that Depestre reclaims Haitian masculinity from the emasculating effects of the dictatorship. It is also through vaudou that negative associations imposed on the black male body can be eradicated. The vaudou novel, *Le Mât de cocagne*, is set on a fictional tropical island, under the fictional Zoocrate Zacharie dictatorship, where we meet ex-senator Henri Postel who has been banished to a small town called Tête-Boeuf. Though he arrived as a physically fit man, over the years, he has become an overweight and out of shape shopkeeper for a failing business. Regardless of his haggard state, ex-senator Postel's influence is still feared by *le Grand Électrificateur des âmes*, Zoocrate Zacharie, who plans to turn Postel into, what I characterize as a new kind of *zombi*. In this novel, Depestre directly addresses the brutality of the Duvaliers as well as their villainous exploitation of vaudou. When Postel decides to enter a competition that he has no chance of winning, he is, in fact, reclaiming his manhood and his agency, which I contend is recovered through vaudou rather than the competition itself. Though he knows that he cannot survive regardless of the outcome, he is compelled to climb the greasy pole and reclaim his phallic power.

Similarly, *Un Arc-en-ciel* explores a parallel terrain through the use of vaudou and race. In this poem, Depestre (re)possesses the black male body, inhabiting the negative stereotypes and imploding them. The vaudou elements and references in the text do not only serve as a backdrop for events, instead, they actively participate in the narrative. The *lwas* descend and possess a white American southern family, creating a magico-poetic adventure into race, religion, sex and gender. In both works, vaudou plays a central role in the form and narrative, employed as an attitude through which the reader experiences the text emotionally, psychically and spiritually. It becomes the means by which the poet can access a higher plane of consciousness conducive to new understandings of masculine identity. Given the importance and the omnipresence of vaudou in these works, I believe that vaudou becomes a poetic and novelistic instrument which will reveal new formulations of empowered masculine subjectivities and identities. He simultaneously expands on the politics of vaudou while reclaiming the popular forms that were abused and corrupted by the Duvaliers. Denied access to masculine power for too long, the black man must exorcise the demons of oppression and reclaim his right to masculinity. In this regard, Depestre's works are marked by an exploitative attention towards the intertwined themes of violence and sex. The coupling of sex with violence in relation to vaudou results in an implosion of foreign stereotypes and prejudices imposed on Haiti and the black male body, such as the hypersexualized black rapist. Instead of denying the racist fantasies of the white world, his vaudou poetry acts as a violent and destructive force which annihilates the restrictions and fears so ingrained in the Haitian psyche. By demolishing his fear and his biology, he is destroying the understructure of Duvalierist violence, which manifests both externally and internally. I bring together Frantz Fanon, René Depestre and vaudou to demonstrate the ways in

which the vaudou conception of the self exceeds Western paradigms and renders them inadequate.

In my final chapter, I will engage with post-Duvalier literature through Kettly Mars's novel, *Saisons sauvages* (2010) and Dany Laferrière's *La Chair du maître* (1997). Written and published well after the fall of the dictatorship, both texts attest to the persistence of the dictatorship in the Haitian memory and importance of addressing the traumas of the past. *Saisons sauvages* illustrates the severity of the daily and pervasive oppression(s) under the Duvalier administration and his personal police force, the Tonton Macoutes. The story is told through multiple perspectives, although it focuses on the book's heroine, Nirvah Leroy, wife of dissenter and journalist, Daniel Leroy. After the disappearance of her husband, Nirvah turns to the Secretary of State, Raoul Vincent, who manipulates her into being his mistress. The novel presents two very contrasting portraits of Haitian men through the characters of Daniel Leroy and Raoul Vincent. Raoul is the cruel and amoral chief of the Tonton Macoutes and the right-hand man to Duvalier. Daniel Leroy is a husband and a father of two children who is imprisoned for his political views and activities. During his absence, Vincent infiltrates the Leroy family, bringing his toxic presence into the once happy home. Nirvah is caught between two male symbols rather than men: the conformist and the revolutionary. Vincent represents all that Duvalier has inflicted on Haiti and Daniel relates the futility of revolting against a system of absolute control. Furthermore, Vincent's sexual appetite and his fetishization of Nirvah's light skin and her light-skinned children are indicative of deeper social and historical constructions of black masculinity.

Indeed, Mars's representation of masculinity is in dialogue with the changing political and social climate as well as the shifting racial and social hierarchies. Her understanding of masculine identity promoted by Duvalierism is informed by Haiti's historical obsession with the mulatto class and the new formulations of power and identity. Race and skin color play a central role in the text, as well as in Haitian history and politics. The fetishization of white skin and the objectification of light-skinned women attest to the hypocrisies of *noirisme*, while the obsession with obtaining whiteness through sexual conquest and violence directly reflects the practices of Duvalierist masculinity. The *noirisme* advanced by Duvalier's administration displaced the power structure by privileging black Haitians over the mulatto class. However, this racial and political displacement did not apply to the realm of desire as light-skinned women were still preferred as evidenced by Jean-Claude Duvalier's decision to marry a woman of lighter complexion, Michèle Bennet. Hence, the relationships and desires in this text reflect historical and political discourses on race and gender identity. I argue that, similar to Chauvet, Mars exposes the extent to which a totalitarian regime based on terror, oppression and violence operate on the individual and collective psyche. With Mars, we also see the machinations of the *noiriste* politics of Duvalier and its failure to produce a functional model of masculinity. From the rubble of a disintegrated masculine ideal, I uncover new theorizations on gender and masculinity.

Correspondingly, Laferrière's collection of short stories and Mars's *L'heure hybride* engages directly and indirectly with the Duvalier regime and its aftermath. What appears in the background of every part of these texts is an attention to the machinations of desire, which in turn expose the underlying mechanisms that drive social and sexual relations. Highly sexualized, the stories, such as, "Vers le Sud," "Les garçons magiques," and "Le bar de la plage," expose the

intricate webs of desire, power, race and domination within and outside of the Haitian terrain through the figure of the black gigolo. Whereas *L'heure hybride* explores the implications of race and class in the Haitian realm of desire through Rico, a mulatto gigolo. I contend that both kinds of gigolos emerge in post-Duvalier literature as marginal figures that reassemble the fragments of masculinity, adjusting their performance of masculinity to suit their needs.

Writing from a diasporic position, Laferrière's work exposes the ways in which these webs are both interconnected and connected to a larger transnational contexts. Though his depictions of masculinity can seem essentialist, his understanding and representation of masculinity serve as a mirror of inherited cultural and social conventions and stereotypes. I argue that by manipulating stereotypical and commonplace notions, he alters the exchange value in both the Haitian and transnational imagination. His conscious exploitation of preconceived associations and conceptions of black masculinity in the Western imagination offers the possibility of dismantling, revising and adjusting black masculinity, which can lead to new understandings about the intersections of race, sexuality and masculinity.

## 1. Homeland Security: Female Masculinity and Property in *Amour* and *Colère*

The virulent masculinity of the Duvalierist state inflicted terror and violence onto anyone perceived to be against the regime, without exception. Marie Vieux Chauvet, living and writing in Haiti under the Duvalier dictatorship, developed a critique of the dictatorial regime through her depictions of male – and sometimes female—powerlessness across her triad of novellas: *Amour, Colère et Folie*. This masculine powerlessness—within a Haitian context—is often tied to the lack of freedom and property ownership, ideas fundamental to Haitian masculinity. Yet, even as she characterized Haitian masculinity as in crisis, Chauvet also enlivened new models of masculinity and agency through female characters that are forced to take on male characteristics and perform a masculine identity. Applying Judith Halberstam’s conception of female masculinity to *Amour* and *Colère*, I demonstrate how the performance of masculinity through the feminine body troubles gender categories and reveals the fragile state of masculinity under dictatorship.

Marie Vieux Chauvet was born in Port-au-Prince in 1916, just one year into the U.S. military occupation of Haiti that would last until 1934. The majority of her life was circumscribed by the turbulent political conditions in Haiti, above all, the American occupation and the Duvalier dictatorship. The latter forced her into exile after the publication, and subsequent withdrawal, of her most celebrated book, *Amour, Colère et Folie* (1968).<sup>39</sup> Indeed, writer Dany Laferrière has characterized this work as, “le grand roman qui expose les ficelles

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<sup>39</sup> For more on the Marie Vieux Chauvet’s life and the events surrounding the publication of *Amour, Colère, et Folie* see Thomas C. Spear, “Marie Chauvet: The Fortress Still Stands,” *Yale French Studies* 128 (2015): 9-24. See also Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and The Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 119.



pourries de la dictature” (*En Amour* 102). Written under the dictatorship, Chauvet’s novellas in her triptych *Amour, Colère et Folie* engage with themes of confinement and the claustrophobic conditions of both the public and private domain. Scholars have often read Chauvet’s oeuvre in relation to the legacy of colonialism in Haiti; especially concerning the deleterious effects of colonialism on the psyche. For example, in her essay, *Madness and the Mulâtre-Aristocrate Haiti: Decolonization, and Women in Marie Chauvet’s Amour*, Hellen Lee-Keller posits that the trope of madness serves as “an extreme manifestation of the contradictions” in Haitian politics and society (1309). Her intervention highlights the colonialist, patriarchal and elitist structures that not only exist in Haiti, but inform Chauvet’s work.

Though the triad of novellas is not explicitly set in the Duvalierist era, all three narratives expose the appalling violence and way of life under the dictatorship. Through a psychoanalytic narrative privileging the interior spaces of the individual and society, Chauvet deconstructs gender by linking sexuality to power and violence. My study focuses on the first two novellas, *Amour* and *Colère*, which evince fruitful and complex portrayals of masculinity under and during the Duvalier dictatorship. Chauvet offers incisive analyses depicting how the impotence of masculinity, within the confines of oppression and domination, creates a vacuum in society and within the family structure. In the absence of masculine agency, a space opens up in which women are forced to interject and assume traditionally masculine roles. Within this paradigm, *Amour*’s Claire and *Colère*’s Rose become improbable heroines even within their own stories because of their mental and physical instability, and social marginalization. Each must adopt masculine roles, and by extension, a masculine identity. With no one to defend their homes and families, these women effectively become the protector and provider for the family thus taking

up the role traditionally assigned to the patriarch. By reading the performance and actions of Claire and Rose as reluctant performances of female masculinity, I will demonstrate the extent to which Chauvet theorizes new formulations of gendered identities, which destabilize and displace normative and/or dominant forms of masculinity.

As patriarch, Claire and Rose must each contend with the consequences and implications of a traditionally masculine role. Both women come from families that either belong or aspire to a specific social stratum, that of the mulatto aristocracy. The values with which they were raised are reflective of an elite and exclusive social milieu where feminine appearance and conformity to a specific set of codes are paramount. Within this context, any sign of aberrance or abnormality is generally ill-received. For example, Claire's marginalization is due to both her dark skin and her spinsterhood, while Rose is disdained for her sexual indentureship to the police commander. Their marginalization is the result of their deviance from the perceived norm of mulatto femininity within their social milieus. Though not at fault, they are, nevertheless, punished for their inability to conform. Still, in spite of the fact that their unusual gendered positions—their female masculinity—further alienates Claire and Rose from normal society, I argue that they, instead, find a personal power in their roles, which allows them to formulate their own gendered engagements with society.

#### Property Ownership and Masculinity in Haiti

As the product of the only slave rebellion to result in the founding of a country, Haiti has in many ways been defined by a persistent engagement with the ideas freedom. This attention to the values of freedom and liberty has shaped Haitian history, culture, politics and identity. One of the most tangible manifestations of freedom is the right to property ownership, which takes on

a powerful meaning to a people who were once considered property themselves. This preoccupation with property and ownership is reflected in Haiti's 1805 Constitution, which declared that, "[l]a propriété sacrée, sa violation sera rigoureusement poursuivie."<sup>40</sup> Property, here, takes on an almost divine quality, something to be revered and defended. Given their former status as slaves, the right to own, maintain and work their land is paramount to preserving their freedom. Though Haitians had freed themselves from slavery, the conditions they met under the new republic, under Toussaint Louverture, were not significantly better than those under French dominion. As Carolyn Fick writes,

A personal claim to the land upon which one labored and from which to derive and express one's individuality was, for the black laborers, a necessary and an essential element in their vision of freedom. For without this concrete economic and social reality, freedom for the ex-slaves was little more than a legal abstraction. To continue to be forced into laboring for others, bound by property relations that afforded few benefits and no real alternatives for themselves, meant that they were not entirely free. (249)

Thus, owning property and working the land allowed Haitians to comprehend this concept beyond its symbolic value, turning freedom into a real and material reality.

For the newly freed slaves, property ownership was tantamount to freedom itself. This need for a tangible manifestation of freedom could even be said to be one of the driving forces of the revolution. The right to live as a free citizen was contingent on land ownership<sup>41</sup>, as Sheller

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<sup>40</sup> See the 1805 Constitution of Haiti in Janvier, Louis Joseph. *Les Constitutions d'Haïti, 1801-1885*. Paris: C. Marpon et E. Flammarion, libraires-éditeurs, 1886. *Digital Library of the Caribbean*. Web

<sup>41</sup> See also Dubois 88, 106-8 and Trouillot 37-40. Trouillot elaborates on the importance of land on the Haitian concept of freedom, "The former slaves, remembering their pre-1791 garden plots, associated liberty with the possession of land" (73).

explains, “citizenship first took the form of military service, and the army became one of the main avenues of male political participation, as well as a route to land ownership” (247). The circumstances underlying the militarized model of masculinity in post-revolutionary Haiti reinforced the association between manhood and land ownership. The significance of land ownership to the understandings and manifestations of freedom in Haiti is also highlighted by Jean François’s reading of *l’Acte d’Indépendance* (the Declaration of Independence), which he explicates as “leur [les Haïtiens] droit d’habiter la terre,” and as the, “prise de possession de la terre” (119-120). Land ownership, then, was not only an expression of freedom itself, but a manifestation of masculinity and manhood. According to Sheller, “The construction of masculine identities (especially of landowning ‘*grandans*’ or ‘big men’) around positions of authoritarian dominance based on the power to control others originated in Haiti’s anti-slavery and anti-colonial entrance on the world stage” (278). She adds that, “The construction of masculine identities in the aftermath of slavery... seems to hinge on extricating oneself from positions of dependency, insecurity, or liminality” (274). In this reading, Haitian masculinity expresses itself through more prestigious and public functions such as land ownership, the head of the household, leadership positions and politics. In Chauvet’s fiction as well, the public sphere is presented as a masculine endeavor, through which Haitian men asserted and confirmed masculine power, duty and privilege.

As a historically masculine enterprise, the ownership and maintenance of property was usually assigned to the patriarch, the male heads of the household. However, in both *Amour* and *Colère*, this position is either already occupied by or is transferred to a woman. I read Marie Chauvet’s novellas through the lens of property ownership and its importance to constructing

and maintaining a masculine identity. The stories unfold around the issue of the right to property ownership and defending one's own property from invasion and expropriation. Both Rose and Claire find themselves in the position of the patriarch which requires them to adopt a masculine identity through their feminine bodies, in order to defend their property, home and family. In other words, the women inhabit—what Judith Halberstam calls—a female masculinity, which, in turn, exposes the fragility of normative and dominant masculinities, expressly the Duvalierist and elite mulatto masculinities, and endangers the authority of the masculinities of the cisgendered men around them.

Regarding the notion of masculinity, Judith Halberstam candidly writes that “heroic masculinities depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities” (1). He traces female masculinity through 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century literature and contemporary film where “heroic” masculinities—such as that of James Bond—circulate at the expense of marginal and minority masculinities. Indeed, heroic, and/or dominant, masculinities gain power and currency through the suppression and assimilation of non-normative masculinities, chiefly, female masculinity. However, it is precisely these atypical masculinities that resist, contest, and destabilize dominant masculinities. In his book, *Female Masculinity* (1998), Halberstam posits the importance of female masculinity in making visible the determinants of heteronormative masculinity as a recognizable set of codes and performances, thus revealing the constructed nature of masculinity itself. Furthermore, when masculinity is estranged from the male body and performed elsewhere, it problematizes the supposed naturalness of male masculinity. While he does not provide a precise definition of female masculinity, he describes it, in his preface, as “women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine” (xi). That is to say, women

who consciously or unconsciously espouse masculine practices and/or ideals in the expression of the gender and sexuality.

While neither Claire nor Rose feel like men, they are constrained to perform masculinity through their feminine bodies. Extending Halberstam's concept to the context of Duvalierist Haiti, I investigate the ways in which extreme oppression, rather than suppressing, requires the emergence of female masculinity. As the traditional hierarchies and paradigms of power are shifting in this period, Chauvet calls attention to the powerlessness of mulatto men and their inability to execute their masculine duties. This crisis in traditional mulatto masculinity obligates women—such as Claire and Rose—to fill the gap, which, in turn, makes visible the inherent contradictions and vulnerabilities of mulatto men. Diverging from Halberstam's conceptualization of female masculinity, Rose and Claire do not choose their complicated gendered realities, instead, their circumstances demand that they perform female masculinity through the role of the patriarch. Furthermore, their female masculinities reflect back the noxious effects of Duvalierist masculinity on gender roles and relations in Haiti.

In *Amour* and *Colère*, Chauvet focuses on the home and family life, which highlight the insidious effects of the dictatorship as it encroaches into the most intimate of spaces. Moreover, Chauvet's interest in the domestic sphere further exposes the crisis in masculinity as Haiti experiences a political and racial shift under Duvalier. What emerges is a discernable Duvalierist—Macoute—masculinity that curtails the authority of the traditionally elite mulatto masculinity. In the face of such a drastic and violent change, mulatto men find themselves in a position of powerlessness and complicity. While Halberstam primarily addresses the physical and external performances of female masculinity, Chauvet appraises the internal manifestations

of masculinity in the form of duty, responsibility, behavior, and codes of conduct. Furthermore, the examples that Halberstam uses in her development of female masculinity are, in fact, women who choose to adopt a masculine identity and feel more masculine. It is important to note that the Butch, the drag king and even Halberstam himself have chosen to inhabit their identities as such. For Claire and Rose, their masculine identity is imposed onto them and it is done so by the use of force and violence. Their performance of female masculinity reflects the deleterious effects of Duvalierist violence on traditional gender roles, but especially, masculinity.

#### The *Colère* of Rose: The Property and the Patriarch

Chauvet's *Colère* illustrates tribulations of the the Normil family as they seek to reclaim their land from the nefarious men in black. Helpless in the face of corrupt authorities, the grandfather, father, and son watch the men in black expropriate their land with silent rage. In exchange for their land, the father makes a pact with the black police chief, the Gorilla, in exchange for his daughter, Rose. Taking control of the situation and sacrificing herself for the good of the family, Rose submits to a brutal sexual relationship with the Gorilla for thirty days. It is during this time that the reader witnesses her physical and mental degradation, as well as her family's. Given the masculine abdication of traditional duties, Rose performs the role of patriarch and fights to regain possession of their land through her feminine body.

Though *Colère* has not received as much scholarly attention as *Amour*, the second novella in this triptych is riveting and worthy of consideration. Scholars such as Joan Dayan, Madeleine Cottenet-Hage and Ronnie Scharfman have paved the way for my discussion of Chauvet's works. These, and other, scholars have worked extensively on *Amour*, while *Colère* and *Folie* have inspired less concentrated attention. Scholars have long examined the

opportunities for investigating the implications of gender in *Amour* and *Colère*. Doris Garraway's article, "Toward a Literary Psychoanalysis of Postcolonial Haiti: Desire, Violence, and the Mimetic Crisis in Marie Chauvet's *Amour*," continues the conversation on the colonial legacy of cyclical violence in Haiti and Chauvet's work. She, however, challenges earlier readings of Claire as the victim and of the pivotal final scene, in which Claire kills commander Calédu, as an act of vengeance and liberation.<sup>42</sup> In dialogue with Valerie Kaussen, she probes the sadomasochistic relations in *Amour* which blur the lines between dominated and dominator, in that they are mutually constitutive. Garraway further develops the masochistic branch of her analysis on repressed guilt and its relation to the René Girard's cycle of mimetic violence. She observes "an unconscious acceptance of guilt and a willingness to suffer," in Claire and the mulatto class, which "expresses an unconscious anxiety over [their] historic racial and socioeconomic subjugation of the lower classes in Haiti" (217-8). This willingness to suffer is a conspicuous aspect of the weakened masculinity exhibited by the male characters in *Colère*, such as the father, the brother and to a certain extent, the grandfather. The men in the Normil family watch powerlessly as their land is taken and as Rose is subjected to the violence and depredation of the Gorilla, the mercilous chief of police. Furthermore, their masochistic resignation to black social vengeance is constitutive of their own mulatto masculinity that depends on the violation and marginalization of women, especially in the female masculine role of patriarch. Like Claire, the Normil men—and to some extent, Rose—are complicit in perpetuating the sadomasochistic

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<sup>42</sup> See Madeleine Cottenet-Hage's "Violence Libératoire/Violence Mutilatoire dans *Amour* de Marie Chauvet," in which she describes Calédu's death at Claire's hands as an act of liberation.



relations which have made, reinforced, and reproduced the cycle of violence throughout Haitian history.

One of the earliest scholars to work on Chauvet, Ronnie Scharfman<sup>43</sup> interprets Chauvet's triptych as the "psychosexual reality of Haiti under Duvalier" (244). In her treatment of *Colère*, Scharfman reveals Rose's splintered self as a coping mechanism for dealing with rape, divided between the intellectual and the bestial. Extending this line of thought, I add that Rose's self is further divided between the affective dimension and her duty towards her family. While Scharfman's assertion that Rose finds herself entangled within the "impossible tension of the oxymoron when we identify Rose as the virginal whore" is appropriate, she overlooks the other possibilities for Rose's contradictory situation (243). Not only is Rose a virginal whore in the eyes of her family, she has also taken up the mantle of patriarch. Her sacrifice brings to light her role as the protector of the family and their land which, in turn, exposes the failures and incompetence of the men to uphold their masculine duty. Her sacrificial acts put into jeopardy the very masculinity of the men of the house, threatening to undermine their place in the home as well as within Haitian society.

Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw<sup>44</sup> argues that the primary aim of the triptych is to expose the culture of terror in Haiti under Duvalier. She insists that, "the story of the Normil family [is] a collective experience of state terrorization" (43). Importantly, her attention to Louis Normil's complicity in facilitating his daughter's abuse and subsequent demise informs my reading of

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<sup>43</sup> Ronnie Scharfman "Theorizing Terror: The Discourse of Violence in Marie Chauvet's *Amour Colère Folie*." *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women's Writers*. Ed. Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould, Micheline Rice-Maximin, Keith L. Walker, and Jack A. Yeager. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 1996. 229-45. Print

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, "My Love Is Like a Rose: Terror, Territoire, and the Poetics of Marie Chauvet." *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 18 (2005): 40-51.

*Colère*. It is the father who insists on Rose's presence at the meeting with the lawyer which results in the Faustian pact with the Gorilla. Though Walcott-Hackshaw regards the father's complicity exclusively in terms of prostitution and pimping, I argue that Louis does not just sell his daughter's body, he ensures her death and relinquishes his own title as the man of the house. Consequently, Rose is constrained to construct a new masculine identity and role for herself through the violation of her feminine body.

Indeed, the use and violation of Rose's (feminine) body has been discussed by many scholars, most notably by Joan Dayan in her enormously influential book, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*. In her examination of Chauvet's work, she treats Rose as a refiguration of the vaudou<sup>45</sup> diety Ezili and the legendary figure Sor Rose. Instead of creating a nation like Sor Rose, Rose Normil's violation only results in death. Her choice is motivated by the need, desire and duty to protect the family's land. As Dayan observes, "Land becomes the site for the performance of male power, but this fable of dispossession can be enacted only when that land is annexed to a woman's body, the place that *can* be entered" (122 *emphasis in original*). In other words, the site of masculine power is land (property) and in order to access said power, one must pass through the feminine body. The feminine body is the condition upon which masculine power and identity can be exerted and performed, thereby displacing the power and agency associated with masculinity. This observation leads us to interrogate the feminine body's relationship to the construction and exercise of masculinity.

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<sup>45</sup> Though there are several spelling variations for this word, I use the French *vaudou* for consistency. See Chapter 3 for a more detailed explanation of my choice of orthography.

I argue that as Rose's body becomes the site of inscription, contestation and abuse, she inevitably disturbs fixed understandings of gender and dominance. Her ravaged body and disintegrating health draw attention to the vulnerability of dominant structures and ideologies, with particular regard to masculinity and power. As her father, grandfather and brother abdicate the role of defender and protector of the home, Rose is forced to take up the masculine position par excellence, that of the man of the house. She further complicates ideas of masculine duty and power by performing an imposed identity through atypical means; that is to say, through the exploitation of her feminine body while inhabiting the archetypal masculine role of patriarch.

*Colère* opens with the expropriation of the Normil family's land by the *hommes en noir* as the family members watch helpless and afraid. As the grandfather, father and son watch the men staking out a portion of their land, their silent rage, impotence and terror are immediately felt. Fear and terror dominate the narrative as the stifling grip of the corrupt powers in Haiti operate. The men in black are an obvious reference to the Tontons Macoutes, who dress and act in a similar fashion. They induce fear, panic and anxiety by their mere presence, leaving the Normil family (as well as the reader) defenseless and exposed. Though they are the men of the house and have a patriarchal duty to protect their home, they are unable to (re)act. Their predicament is symptomatic of a larger problem concerning masculinity in Haiti under the Duvalier dictatorship.

The Duvalier dictatorship gained power through the subordination and exploitation of the Haitian people. The regime's domination was enforced through the Tontons Macoutes, or the private paramilitary organization officially known as the *Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (VSN), which were an extension of Duvalier's power and influence. The Tontons

Macoutes became the embodiment of the regime and its principles. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot explains, in *Haiti: State against Nation* (1990), "Makout power--that is power without mediation--was the sole guarantee of the chief of state's omnipotence" (175). Armed with violence and terror, the Tontons Macoutes preyed on the fears and weakness of the masses for personal and professional gain. They represented the extent of Duvalier's influence and control in every sphere of Haitian life, ultimately constituting a branch of Duvalierist masculinity. This brand of masculinity subjugated all other forms of masculinity, and in doing so gained more power and currency. Outside the matrix of power, as we see with Rose and Claire, new processes of conceiving of alternative formulations and a different way of understanding masculinity inevitably occurred.

In *Colère*, the Normil family find themselves in the midst of violent political and social changes as the men in black invade their town. Their power and authority appear limitless and absolute, causing the Normil men to recoil from confrontation and fail in their masculine duties. Taking up the role of patriarch instead, Rose defends her family and their land. She exploits her feminine body in order to secure her family's safety and livelihood. I contend that her performance of female masculinity exposes the impossibility of sustaining traditional male gender roles under Duvalier and fragility of these dominant structures, that is their susceptibility to destabilization, and offers to end the cycle of violence that circumscribes dominant masculinity. Hellen Lee-Keller sees in *Amour's* protagonist Claire a fragmented subjectivity engendered by the opposing social, economic, familial, racial and gendered demands in her life. I argue that the same can be said, to a certain extent, about Rose in *Colère* as she struggles with varying and conflicting demands of family, society and the changing racial and political

landscape. Both women are forced into adopting masculine roles and identities in order to provide for or protect the family.

Their situation is further complicated by the models of masculinity currently available to them, as represented by such figures as the police, family members and authority figures. As Lee-Keller states, “masculinity is demonstrated—across national, racial, and cultural lines—through violence. Black violence is represented by Calédu, *mulâtre-aristocrate* by Claire’s father... By characterizing each of these characters, who significantly differ from each other, as sharing violent proclivities—and above all, including Jean Luze in the group—Chauvet suggests that masculinity, being shaped through violence, therefore knows no alternative but to engender more violence” (1302-03). Though this cycle of violence certainly applies to the dominant masculinity, i.e. Duvalierist masculinity, alternative and/or marginal masculinities may express themselves through different terms.

The Normil men are eaten up by rage and indignation, yet demonstrate a willful impotence in their complicity. As the three adult male characters surrender to their circumstances, they show no overt signs of resistance or intention to act. Leading up to and after Rose’s contract with the Gorilla, the men must face and redefine what it means to be a man and the forms of masculinity that they inhabit. I contend that their tacit complicity, resulting in Rose’s ambiguous masculine identity, puts into crisis their own sense of masculinity, as they effectively relinquish their masculine power to Rose. More importantly, their willful impotence represents an abdication of masculine duties creating a void in the way they relate to one another and the world. On the one hand, this void is problematic to existing notions of dominant masculinity. On the other hand, it also presents a space within which the forms and constructions

of masculinity can be reformulated and reconceptualized. Rose's female masculinity disrupts established forms of masculinity, domination and power, which, in turn, contests both mulatto and Duvalierist masculinities.

To begin with, we must examine the circumstances that lead to the infernal pact with the Gorilla. As we have seen, the Normil men wake to find the men in black confiscating a portion of their property. They decide to consult a lawyer about retaining ownership of their property. Although it is not immediately apparent, I argue that the decision was made with the knowledge that Rose would have to be sacrificed. It is Louis Normil, the father, who manipulates and exploits her sexuality. Comparing him to a pimp, Lee-Keller states that, "the father takes Rose as an offering... The exchange is to offer part of his land (Rose) in order to retain the rest—one territory for another" (47). Here, she emphasizes the father's conscious decision to trade his daughter for the land, however, she does not implicate him in Rose's eventual and inevitable death. Nevertheless, the family tacitly consents to his cowardly plan. The father decides to seek legal representation in order to retain ownership of their land, stating that, "Il faut surtout agir avec prudence... Choisir un avocat rusé et puissant qui saura ménager et la chèvre et le chou et surtout suivre ses conseils à la lettre" (167).

Though the decision to hire a lawyer may appear logical, securing an appointment and representation proves more difficult. Without the right connections or an incentive, it seems almost impossible to obtain legal representation. As we see with the numerous failed visits to the lawyer's office, an ordinary man cannot even see the lawyer for a simple consultation. Moreover, the father and grandfather are aware of this fact as they argue about what to do and how to fight for their land. The grandfather explicitly reveals his awareness of the futility of seeking

representation: “Et s'il te déclare comme je le prévois que la cause est perdue d'avance et qu'il nous faut nous résigner?” The father's answer, “Alors, il nous faudra nous résigner,” confirms the unfeasibility of their efforts (167). They have already resigned themselves to the fact that they have lost ownership of their land. Understanding the likelihood of failure, the father knows that he must somehow catch the attention of the lawyer, which he later demonstrates by suggesting that Rose accompany him to the appointment.

As the father is getting ready to leave for his appointment with the lawyer, he grabs his hat and asks Rose to come as well. When asked where Rose is going, the father states that she will accompany him to the lawyer's office. Rose eagerly volunteers for the excursion without entirely understanding the implications and consequences of her participation. However, the father is fully cognizant of the potential dangers and consequences of bringing Rose to his meeting, as are the other members of the family. Around the table, the grandfather is suddenly, “devenu tout à coup hargneux,” and the mother's expression shows, “Une légère moue de dégoût [qui] déforma ses lèvres” (177). Furthermore, when her father is too ashamed to answer why Rose must go with him, Rose naively answers that the presence of a woman may help the lawyer show more consideration towards their father. Recognizing that his father intends to exploit his sister's sexuality and body, her brother warns Rose, “Ne joue pas trop des fesses... ça pourrait te coûter cher” (177). Paul's statement identifies Rose's female sexuality as the currency required in order to negotiate the restitution of their property. Moreover, he expresses himself through monetary terms, “coûter cher,” to further accentuate the value of Rose's female sexuality and the damage incurred when her sexuality becomes the only means by which their father is able to enter into negotiations with men in power.

With regard to the notion of female sexuality as marketplace, Sandra Duvivier claims that, “poor and working-class Haitian women’s definitions allow for female agency and capitalizing of their own bodies” (1108). Examining the Kreyòl saying, “Kom se kawo tèm (my body is my piece of land),” she investigates the way in which Haitian women view their bodies and sexuality as an asset, as a piece of land, from which to profit. However, in Rose’s case, her body is not her piece of land. Instead, it quite literally becomes her family’s piece of land. Walcott-Hackshaw elaborates that, “Not only has he internalized the metaphor of the woman as land, and as such, a possession, but the metaphor has become a metonym; Rose is literally virgin territory” (47). Hence, Rose’s body and sexuality are subsumed into the Normil property. Seen as a possession to be bartered, Louis takes advantage of the exchange value of his daughter’s sexual body.

Indeed, Rose’s sexual capital is exploited by her family so that they may maintain ownership of their land. However, the (mis)appropriation of the Rose’s sexual body is neither simple nor complete. The situation is further complicated by Rose’s consent and her readiness to participate in the fight for their land. She declares that, “papa a raison, il faut les prendre par la douceur. Quant à moi, je mettrai tout en oeuvre pour sauver ces terres, je vous préviens. Nous n'avons pas le sou, elles représentent nos seuls biens. Il nous faut les sauver coûte que coûte” (180). She echoes the economic valuation of her female sexuality and intends to deploy it in order to defend her home and family. Admittedly, she does not seem fully cognizant of the tragic consequences of her choice and consent. Her desire to protect her family is her ultimate concern and her only motivation. Though Paul feels a “frisson d’espoir qui le secoua,” when he sees his sister and father returning from the lawyer’s office, he sardonically laughs at their failure. When



he remarks that Rose's presence was ineffectual, Rose "glissa vers son père un regard étrange et si mystérieux que son frère ne put l'interpréter" (179). She later asks him, "As-tu envie de gaspiller ton temps, ta jeunesse en attendant d'endosser leur uniforme? Car pour vivre en paix désormais, il te faudra quand même leur emboîter le pas" (180). The strange and mysterious look that she gives her father suggests their collusion and her consent. Yet, she is blinded by her devotion to her family, especially to her brother, and is incapable of weighing the potential dangers and consequences of her participation.

Moreover, Rose's comments reveal the all-encompassing nature of the dictatorship's power as well as the Duvalierist brand of masculinity. In order to live in peace, Paul (as well as the other men) will eventually have to align himself with the men in black and forfeit his own personal identity. Indeed, the imperative to join the Macoutes is intimated as the Gorilla asks Rose, "Et ton frère? qu'attend-il pour entrer dans nos rangs? Il n'est pas contre nous, au moins?" (253). If one was not with Duvalier, one was against him and thus the state. Given Paul's precarious position, it is only Rose's female masculine intervention that can spare Paul from having to assume the dominant and oppressive masculinity of the dictatorship.

Rose and her father are finally able to meet with the lawyer on their third visit, where her naiveté is revealed. After a two hour wait, "un judas creusé très haut dans la cloison s'ouvrit et un regard s'y encadra que personne n'aperçut, à part Louis Normil," and the two are invited into the office (198). At that moment, Louis struggles with his conscience, knowing what awaits his daughter. Just as he was the only person to notice the peephole through which the lawyer spies on his clients, Louis is the only one of the two that fully understands the implications of Rose's involvement. Rose "attendait un moment son père qui hésitait comme si, brusquement, l'idée lui

était venue de s'enfuir" (198). Louis could have taken his daughter out of harm's way and left the lawyer's office, but he does not. However, he stands there, conflicted about sacrificing his daughter to save his land, nevertheless, he takes Rose's hand and follows her into the office.

Thus, Rose's fate is sealed in that moment before they enter the lawyer's office. Though they both make the decision to enter the lawyer's office and pursue their legal claim, Rose's guileless character and her sheltered upbringing prevent her from understanding the implications of this visit. She only realizes the danger that she is in when the Gorilla enters into the office and offers them a deal. As the Gorilla leaves the room, he brushes his hand against Rose's leg and she is ready to leave before finalizing the negotiations. Feeling suffocated, Rose asks her father to leave, but her father seizes this opportunity and continues with the meeting. By ignoring his daughter's urgent request to leave, Louis effectively authorizes Rose's violation, thereby compromising the very practice of his masculinity and manhood. Furthermore, as they leave the office, "Elle flageola sur ses jambes et agrippa le bras de son père" (202). Holding onto her father's arm, Rose not only seek support but she is also looking for protection. Her strong, visceral reaction to the realization of the terms of the deal confirms Rose's naïve understanding of her role. Her unsuspecting disposition is exploited by her father for the family's gain. His willful complicity is further demonstrated in his response to Rose's distraught behavior in front of the family as he explains, "Ça a marché. L'avocat pense que nous avons toutes les chances de rentrer dans nos biens" (202). Naturally, he does not elaborate on the terms of deal the struck with the lawyer and the Gorilla, but everyone understands the situation and they make no move to intervene. For their own survival, they assent to the arrangement.

However, no one is prepared for the consequences of their complicity as each and every member of the family is faced with their own cowardice and inaction. The Normil men confer their masculine duty and power over to Rose. During the thirty days of Rose's violation, we witness the degradation of the Normil family. Her sacrifice provokes a deep reflection on masculinity and masculine duties towards the family and property. In light of Rose's new masculine role, the masculinity of the male men is called into question. Her effect on traditional conceptions of masculinity is underlined in an internal monologue while she is being violated by the Gorilla,

J'ai hâte de mourir. Morte ! J'oubliais que je l'étais déjà. Morte assassinée, martyre et sainte. Je n'aurai pas souffert en vain. La révolte stérile de grand-père, le désespoir muet de Paul, la terreur de ma mère, l'horrible, l'humiliante situation de mon père sont autant de raisons de lutter. De nous tous, c'est mon père qui souffre le plus. Le chef de famille, l'homme encore vert responsable de l'honneur et l'avenir de ses enfants, contraint de baisser la tête, de s'agenouiller, de baiser les pieds de ses bourreaux. Comme il sait se taire et souffrir ! Jamais je ne lui aurais cru le courage d'affronter le gorille. Je l'ai vu agoniser cent fois sous le regard méprisant de grand-père. Cent fois par jour giflé. Cent fois par jour torturé. Visage souillé de crachats et toujours serein. (256)

Here, Rose underlines the failures of masculinity through her grandfather, brother, and father. She is full of admiration and understanding towards her father, however, she recognizes his complicity and cowardice.

It is precisely her understanding of her father that incriminates him. Her father, the "chef de famille," suffers most as he is responsible for the honor and future of his children. As the head

of the family, it is his masculine duty to protect his family, yet he cedes that position to Rose. As Chelsey Kivland explains, one of the ways in which Haitian men meet the norms of respectable manhood is by being a respectable father.<sup>46</sup> Indeed Louis fails to protect his family, and his biggest failure as a father, and as the head of the family, is his willingness to use his own daughter as a bargaining chip. To put it another way, he ignominiously trades his daughter's honor, future and life for his land. Though he writhes under the "regard méprisant" of his father, Louis is "toujours serein." As long as Rose fulfills the masculine duties that were once his, he can continue living and thriving under the powers of domination.

With regard to Haitian masculinity, Mimi Sheller writes that, historically, "a fundamental aspect of the Haitian nation-building project was the elevation of the black man out of the depths of slavery into his rightful place as father, leader, and protector of his own people. Familial imagery was closely allied with a masculine call to arms and a depiction of women as grateful recipients of male protection" (241-2). Chauvet inverts this image of the Haitian man by making Rose the protector of the family and the men as the (un)grateful recipients. While I agree with readings of Rose as victim, such as that of Dayan and Lee-Keller, I insist that Rose's agency is demonstrated through her role as protector of the family and the land. Rose's female masculine position of patriarch can be better understood through Sheller's elaboration on the components of masculinity through Article Nine of the first constitution in which, "No one is worthy of being a Haitian if he is not a good father, a good son, a good husband, *and above all a good soldier...* foreshadowing the militarization of the state, the marginalization of women, and the depiction of

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<sup>46</sup> Chelsey Kivland, "BECOMING A FORCE IN THE ZONE: Hedonopolitics, Masculinity, and The Quest For Respect On Haiti's Streets." *Cultural Anthropology (Society for Cultural Anthropology)* 29.4 (2014): 672-698. *Social Sciences Abstracts (H.W. Wilson)*.

citizens as male protectors of family and nation” (244 emphasis in original). According to this definition, Rose’s father fails as a Haitian citizen and as a man. Due to his masculine failure, Rose must perform the identity of male warrior and patriarch.

To regain possession of their land, Rose fights using her feminine body. And as she is being violated and abused, the thought of the desperate faces of her family members keeps her going. Comparing herself to a martyr or a saint she is willing to die for them, she tells herself, “Encore quelques jours, rien que quelques jours et tout sera dit. Dès que nous rentrerons en possession de nos terres tout danger sera écarté pour Paul. Quant à moi le danger ne m'effraye plus. J'ai passé le cap. Je fais plus que l'affronter, je nage là-dedans avec résignation, avec plénitude” (254). As long as her family is safe and able to reclaim ownership of their land, she knows that her sacrifice will not have been made in vain. She later reveals, “Dès le début j'ai su ce qui m'attendait. Dès l'arrivée de ces hommes sur nos terres, j'ai su que j'en arriverais là. Suis-je douée d'un sixième sens?” (256). From the beginning, Rose was aware that she would have to be called upon to perform her duty. However, by executing the patriarchal duties that once belonged to her father she exposes the dissolution of traditional masculine values and the men’s failure to perform their masculinity in the face of oppression and corruption. She bitterly reflects on her father’s failure as a patriarch, “Comme il sait se taire et souffrir!” Though the thought is directed at her father, it also implicates the other men in her family who remain silent and inactive. Her sardonic tone and her ruminations over her father’s quandary betray her bitterness at her father’s complicity.

The consequences of the Normil men’s tacit complicity are far reaching as each man must face and redefine what it means to be a man. Each of the men define their masculinity in

different ways. The grandfather (and the grandson) accede to the idea of a heroic masculinity understood through the figure of the great-grandfather. The father, Louis, defines his masculinity in relation to his sexual prowess and the son, Paul, subscribes to an intellectual and ideological vision of masculinity. All these masculinities are put into crisis by their inability to perform and execute the most fundamental masculine duty, defending the home and the family. Instead, they condemn Rose's actions out of a misplaced sense of guilt for having failed in their own practices of masculinity. When faced with Rose's female masculinity, they find their own practices of masculinity compromised and eroded. Cognizant of their failures, they must, then, reformulate their own identity and their place in the world.

Unsurprisingly, Louis Normil's submissive complicity results in professional and social advancement. No longer an ancillary office worker, "En compagnie du directeur toujours entouré d'hommes en uniforme, il fréquentait les bars et les lieux publics" (269). Louis benefits socially as well as economically from his association with the Gorilla, therefore with the Tontons Macoutes. As Trouillot demonstrates, "every sign of political allegiance to the regime had economic consequences for the person who showed that allegiance" (154). However, Louis is disgusted with the personal costs of such a gain and internally plots his revenge against the man responsible for disrupting his life as well as his manhood. Within circumstances that render resistance nearly impossible, the Normil men must contend with the consequences of their inaction and evaluate whether submission and complicity can be a form of resistance under a totalitarian system. While overt resistance does not seem possible under the dictatorship, passivity and resignation become key to survival. While, in reality, the Normil men adopt a sort

of defensive passivity in relation to their oppressors, they fantasize about revenge. However, they must appear to be submissive if they wish to survive.

Indeed, Rose's female masculinity, which is acquired through her feminine body, disturbs the practice of masculinity on many levels and contexts. Her presence troubles the dominance of hegemonic masculinity; that is to say, both Duvalierist masculinity and traditional elite masculinity. As an agent of the current state, the Gorilla represents and embodies the new formulation of masculinity under the Duvalier dictatorship. He is a stereotypical representation of the Tonton Macoute in that he comes from the lowest rung of society and acquired his power and position through the use of violence, coercion and exploitation. As Trouillot explains, Macoutes were often recruited from the poor, black, peasant masses—thugs and goons—with promises of power and prestige.<sup>47</sup> Echoing the postcolonial traumas that the black man had to suffer through Haitian history, the Gorilla carries with him the legacy of colonialism and has internalized the social and racial hierarchies established under slavery. He uniquely desires rich, light-skinned women who submit to him wholly. In fact, he cannot function sexually if he senses any sign of resistance. He threatens Rose and her family continuously in order to secure Rose's total submission. He says to her, "si tu me résistes, je ne pourrai rien faire. Il faut obéir sans hésiter, autrement tout est fichu, tu comprends ? Je ne peux être un homme qu'avec les belles têtes de sainte de ton espèce, les belles têtes de martyre vaincue" (251). Indeed, his masculinity is entirely dependent upon Duvalierist practices of power, coercion and absolute control.

The Tontons Macoute were known for their violent tactics, repressing dissent and securing public consensus. Their efficacy in the public sphere was vital to their livelihood as they

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<sup>47</sup> See Trouillot 190

could easily be replaced by the multitude of eager volunteers. Those who did not competently perform their duties—by extension, their masculinity—were dispensable. Chauvet confirms the interchangeability through the Gorilla as he explains, “Je me méfie toujours des mécontents car il y en a beaucoup autour de moi. Notre organisation pourtant a tout prévu pour les satisfaire, mais ils sont insatiables” (272). There are so many desperate individuals eager to join the ranks of the president’s own personal militia. The Gorilla adds, “Celui qui nous commande est aussi invisible et aussi puissant que Dieu. Nous recevons ses ordres et nous les exécutons. C'est tout. Nous ignorons souvent le mobile des actes qu'il réclame de nous et lui obéissons seulement aveuglément” (273). Their social and political positions granted them access to almost limitless power and privileges. As agents of the regime, their primary objective was the generation of terror and the eradication of opposition in order to maintain and augment the dictator’s power and influence.

The Duvalier dictatorship drew much of its power from the vast and faithful network of the Tontons Macoute. The Duvalierists avidly recruited devotees and supporters from every walk of life, making it a remarkably inclusionary organization. "More important, poor people were allowed. And many among the urban and rural poor joined that institution not just because it was a 'genuine [economic] elevation', but also because for the first time they were becoming citizens-acknowledged members of the nation" (Trouillot 191). To put it another way, the people who were once excluded from the political sphere now had access to not only a political subjectivity, but also to economic and social advancement. The only real requirement was continuously proving their allegiance, which would ensure that they continue to profit from their association and work.



It is interesting to note that the Macoutes, through their affiliation with the dictatorship, gained power, prestige and privilege; the very axes of masculinity. So then, along with a new political subjectivity developed a new masculine consciousness. Under Duvalier a new social order emerged allowing someone like the Gorilla to take part in this new masculine identity and consciousness. Coming from a context of destitution and powerlessness, he gains unlimited power and privilege, which he uses to further secure his position in the changing social landscape. As sociologist Carolle Charles reports, the dictatorship would “restructure and redefine gender roles and representations” (140). While she credits the dictatorship with the emergence of a new feminine consciousness, she overlooks the other side of the gender spectrum. If the Duvalier state does indeed restructure gender roles, then it would stand to reason that both sides of the gender binary would be affected. Moreover, the manipulation of *noiriste* ideology and the ever expanding influence of the dictatorship upended traditional models of power and authority, especially with regard to skin color and gender. The Duvalier dictatorship created a certain kind of masculinity that would disrupt and eventually replace traditional conceptions and constructions of masculinity. This is not to say that all traditional values and concepts were overthrown, just that certain aspects of traditional—elitist and mulatto—masculinity were altered. As the authority of the mulatto class declined, so did their ideologies and values in mainstream society. As we see with the Normil family, who inhabit the interstice between mulatto and black ideologies, their crisis is reflective of the drastic shift in the social (and racial) order. The masculinity of the Normil men is compromised by oppressive forces, the Duvalierist masculinity, and they, as a consequence, must confer their masculinity onto Rose.

With the power and authority of the state now in the hands of the primarily black Duvalierists, the mulatto class's hold on Haitian politics and economy experience a forceful decline. Nowhere do we see a more alarming example than the month-long rape of Rose by the Gorilla. Though Rose consents to the deal, whether she consents to the sexual violence and torture is questionable. As Régine Jean-Charles indicates, the conditions of Rose's consent—that of terror and coercion—render her consent impossible. She continues, “Rose is an example of how seizure by the state also extends to the female body” (7). Admittedly, it is difficult to reach a conclusion on whether Rose's act was truly consensual or entirely coerced. While the nature of her consent may be unclear, the brutality of her physical and sexual abuse is not in question. Rose is subjected to sexual torture daily for a full month and the horrific descriptions of her experience only confirm the Gorilla's sadistic need for power. Committing rape is an act that is indubitably enmeshed in matrix of power and violence. It asserts a manhood that is circumscribed by a presumption of violence and is enabled by the need to dominate. In Haiti, especially under Duvalier, rape was used as a weapon of torture, retribution and oppression. It was used to not only limit the agency and subjectivities of women, but also those of the men with whom they were associated.<sup>48</sup> Put another way, rape becomes a brutal instrument to curtail the power and agency of other men.

More importantly, rape is the vehicle through which the Gorilla feels most powerful asserting his masculinity. Considering his origins as a beggar, it is clear that the Gorilla has worked very hard to become a powerful man. He proudly describes himself to Rose as,

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<sup>48</sup> See Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo's “‘Fanm Se Poto Mitan: Haitian Woman, the Pillar of Society,’” *Feminist Review* 59 (1998): 118-142. *JSTOR*. Web. Citing the Human Rights Watch report *Rape in Haiti: A Weapon of Terror*, she examines rape and importance of virginity in Haitian society and culture.

“l'autorité qui étend sur ta tête sa main puissante pour te protéger” (253). He embraces his new found masculine power and asserts his manhood on the town and on Rose. However, it is Rose who is able to expose his vulnerabilities and ineptitude. Ironically, it is in violating Rose's body that his masculinity is comprised. In Chapter XIV, we are finally privy to Rose's perspective and voice. As she describes the horrors of her sexual torture, we also see the degradation of the Gorilla from man to beast to, finally, a dog. She observes, “On le prendrait aisément pour un gorille mais c'est faux. Ce sont ses mains qui trompent parce qu'elles sont longues et velues, mais ce n'est qu'un chien... Ce n'est qu'un chien qui mord pour se défendre, un pauvre chien habitué aux coups de pied et qui aboie et qui mord pour prouver qu'il est autre chose qu'un chien” (260). She deconstructs his identity as the Gorilla, the powerful Macoute who viciously imposes his will on the town, and reduces him down to a pathetic dog starved of affection and fearful of the world. Driven by fear, the dog is desperately trying to prove that he is something else, something more. He yearns to be important and in asserting his dominance, he is shown to be a fragile creature unable to get what he really wants.

What he desires most is acknowledgement and power over everyone, especially Rose. He, however, cannot obtain total domination over Rose. Though he conquers and violates her body, she denies him access to her pleasure and love. During her violation, she thinks, “Il doit exister en moi quelque chose d'inquiétant et d'innocemment pervers et seule l'idée de la contrainte m'empêche de peut-être de jouir dans les bras de cet homme. Si je m'en libérais, il trouverait sûrement en moi une partenaire digne de lui” (257). It is important, here, to comment on her use of the word “contrainte,” as it has multiple meanings in English. Though it could simply be translated as coercion or constraint, it also implies intimidation, subjugation, force and

oppression. Due to the fact that Rose's first sexual experience is circumscribed by "la contrainte," she cannot allow herself to take pleasure from it. Furthermore, as the month unfolds, the Gorilla begins to care for Rose and wants desperately to please her. He asks her over and over again, how he could please her and even brings up the possibility of marriage. However, Rose refuses to engage or participate. She submits to him through her body, yet she refuses to submit her will to him. She denies him her pleasure, ultimately denying that which he needs over all else: affection and validation. He cannot force her to enjoy their encounters nor can he please her physically.

In these moments, it is difficult to discern which party truly holds the power. Following Garraway's analysis of *Amour*, the line between domination and submission are blurred by the sadomachistic relations in the narrative. Rose occupies the most complicated position with regard to power and domination. At first glance, she appears to be the helpless victim in a deplorable situation. Yet, she identifies within herself "quelque chose d'inquiétant et d'innocemment pervers," which evinces an awareness of her own potentiality. She realizes that she is capable of closing the cycle of violence that persists in Haiti and circumscribes masculinity, at least on the local level. Reflecting on her family's iniquitous history with the property, Rose thinks, "Je lutte mais avec la conviction que la justice n'est pas de notre côté" (259). As her great grandfather acquired the land under dubious circumstances, Rose believes that the family is cursed and deserves what is happening to them. She wonders,

De quel droit possédons-nous des biens ? De quel droit sommes-nous des privilégiés alors que d'autres pataugent dans la misère ? La misère de ceux que mon payson de bisaïeul a bien dû exploiter, la misère des pauvres qui pillaient son jardin et qu'il faisait

fouetter sans pitié, la misère des mendiants qui ont endossé l'uniforme, la misère de celui qui se venge sur moi d'avoir toute sa vie été repoussé par les femmes qu'il désirait. (259)

Rumored to have murdered the original owner of the property, Rose assumes the guilt of her family's exploitation of the lower classes. Her family's social aspirations—to be included in the elite society of the mulattoes—essentially sustain social and racial inequities and perpetuate the cycle of violence in Haiti. By marrying mulatto women and appropriating not only the land, but the values as well, the Normils are preserving and giving strength to the old social and racial order which oppressed and excluded the very people who are now in power. So Chauvet uses the Normils to illustrate the ways in which elite Haitians have contributed to and are complicit in the rise of someone like Duvalier. They created the conditions of possibility for his rise and now they must face the consequences. Indeed, Rose is prepared to deal with her repressed guilt through sacrifice. While Garraway contends that, in reference to *Amour*, “Claire's masochism and that of her class serve only to further the cycle of violence,” Rose demonstrates the intent to bring an end to the violence in order to absolve their guilt and start anew (211). In becoming the patriarch, she understands that violence only (re)produces more violence and that it can end with her.

Chauvet skillfully depicts life under the dictatorship as a harrowing experience of oppression, fear and brutality. However, she realizes that the Duvalier dictatorship was able to come into power because of the intricate web of social, political and racial conflicts that have plagued Haiti since independence. She not only criticizes the dictatorship, she also chides the upper class for their indifference towards and exploitation of the lower classes. It is through Rose that Chauvet is able to voice her disapproval and through her that she finds resolution. And it is

interesting that she would put Rose, a woman, in the shoes of the patriarch. Perhaps, in the absence of male agency, only a woman can have a disconcerting effect on domination. By exposing the fragility of dominant masculinities, Rose's female masculinity allows for a redefinition and reconfiguration masculinity itself. Though her effect may be impermanent, she, nonetheless, troubles fixed notions of authority, power and masculinity.

#### *Amour* Manly Endeavor: Constructing Female Masculinity Under Dictatorship

The first novella in Marie Chauvet's triptych, *Amour*, has captivated both scholarly and leisurely readers alike since its publication in 1968. In particular, the protagonist, Claire, has captured the most attention from the public. Written as the personal diary of Claire Clamont, she records her life: her frustrated sexuality, her conflicted consciousness as well as her ambiguous identity in relation to race, class and gender. Set in the small Haitian town of X in 1939, Chauvet depicts life under terror and oppression. Published under the dictatorship, though set 18 years before François Duvalier takes office, the novel explores the harrowing experience of living under dictatorship. Narrated by Claire, a black mulâtresse, the journal exposes the atrocities and the extent of the abuse and the power of the dictatorship. Claire thus provides a unique insight into the racial, sexual, political, social and economic tensions in Haiti during the first half of the twentieth century. She bears witness to the machinations of history, especially with regard to Duvalier and the rise of black nationalism, *noirisme*. Her unique and contradictory position in Haitian society allows Claire to observe, analyze and affect her local environment, especially with regard to race, gender and sexuality.

By examining the portraits of Haitian masculinity in the novella, I will consider Claire as a female masculine character who reveals the ways in which her particular practice of female

masculinity is shaped and informed by traditional and dominant forms of masculinity, while at the same time responding to and altering masculinity itself. Expanding Judith Halberstam's concept, I read Claire as a female masculine figure inasmuch as she acts as the de facto patriarch of the family, assuming masculine duties, responsibilities and way of life. From slavery to the Revolution and through the multitude of oppressive regimes, Haitian masculinity has always been circumscribed by a history of violence. Within this context, Claire formulates her own kind of female masculinity which allows her to navigate the treacherous waters of subjectivity as well as the complex and varying systems of power. In exercising her female masculinity, she reveals the fissures in traditional and dominant forms of masculinity, thus endangering its hegemony and power. Ultimately, her practice of female masculinity exposes the extent to which hegemonic masculinities have the power to engender alternative masculinities. Furthermore, Claire's position in both the margin and the center—as female masculine, as black mulâtresse, as servant and master and as a lascivious virgin—confuses fixed understandings of race, gender and class.

Belonging to the upper crust of society, Claire's dark skin is a surprise to her white mulatto family. Her complexion, "cette couleur acajou héritée d'une lointaine aïeule et qui détonnait dans le cercle étroit des Blancs et des mulâtres-blancs que [s]es parents fréquentaient," serves an unwanted reminder of the family's slave origins (10). Her blackness taints the family's standing in a closely-knit community of rich white mulattos and disturbs both sides of the color line. Furthermore, her pigmentation complicates her position in society as she is the embodiment of a social and racial oxymoron: a black mulâtresse. Without a son, Henri Clamont appoints Claire, the eldest of three daughters, as the heir to the estate. Although she is sent to a convent school, like her sisters, she is "élevée comme un homme" and subjected to an entirely different

education within the family (100). I argue that Henri's decision to raise Claire be a man is based on colonial legacies of violence and racism, thereby reenacting the master-slave relationship. In his absence, it is her responsibility to manage his estate and run his business. In Henri's mind, this is the only way to ensure that the property, estate and family will be cared for while he is away. However, Claire's masculine upbringing constantly collides with her French Catholic education which has taught her to be a lady.

The eldest of three sisters, Claire Clamont lives in her family in X. At thirty-nine years of age, she is a self-proclaimed spinster which stands in sharp contrast to her married sister, Félicia, and her promiscuous youngest sister, Annette. Claire lives vicariously through Annette while secretly hating Félicia because of her infatuation with Félicia's white French husband, Jean Luze. Claire spends the majority of her time locked in her room writing in her journal or fantasizing about her brother-in-law Jean Luze. Though she lives a sheltered life, she witnesses the brutality of the black police commander Calédu from her window. Watching everything "derrière les persiennes," Claire writes her story of violence and its presence in every corner of Haitian life.

#### White Privilege? : A Racial History of Land Ownership in Haiti

*Amour, Colère et Folie* not only touch on life under domination and tyranny, they also reflect the deep historical, racial, political and economic tensions that have plagued Haiti since before Independence. A country divided between the mulatto elite and the black masses, *Amour* complicates stables notions of class, race, gender and power. Chauvet explicates the historical divisions in Haiti as well as the structures that maintain them, especially with regard to the question and problem of property ownership. Given the Clamont family's economic and social



status, it is necessary to examine the historical and social implications of their entitlement.

Furthermore, within the new system, the traditional mulatto position is put into jeopardy as the balance of power shifts.

As *mulâtres-blancs*, the Clamonts take pride in their elite status in society which has been secured and maintained through domination and oppression. Chauvet's attention and portrayal of the mulatto elite is significant, alluding to the historical tensions that have divided Haiti since the days of colonial Saint Domingue. As noted earlier, property ownership was considered the material representation of freedom and fundamental to the construction of a masculine identity in Haiti; to a certain extent, it defined Haitian citizenship and nationhood. However, the ownership of property before and after the Revolution was largely held by the mulattoes who either inherited property from their French fathers or procured it through military or economic means. As David Nicholls remarks, "Most of the leading *anciens libres* were mulattoes and the vast majority of the former slaves were black. The *anciens libres* were property owners, and had retained their property through the revolutionary period" (38, *italics in original*). The *anciens libres*, previously known as the *affranchis*, were so called because they were free before Independence, endowed with certain privileges as the sons and daughters of plantation owners. As Carolyn Fick states, "By 1789, the *affranchis* owned one-third of the plantation property, one quarter of the slaves, and one quarter of the real estate property in Saint Domingue" (19). Their status as landowners distinguished them from their slave brethren who were considered property. It was of such great importance to the mulattoes that Nicholls identifies the issue of property ownership as the reason for the assassination of Jean-Jacques Dessalines. He argues, "What was clear to his hearers was the emperor's intention of confiscating some of the recently acquired

land from the *anciens libres*, and this is certainly one of the reasons for his assassination in October 1806” (38). In order to achieve his dream of a Haiti without color divisions and class stratification, a massive redistribution of land would be required. However, the question of property ownership was too deeply embedded within the discourse of freedom and agency, which made Dessalines’s good intentions more of a threat to their way of life than a promise of future development and prosperity.

Succeeding Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion intensified the class tensions and color divisions. In need of troops in his war against Henri Christophe, he offered land to the troops in place of wages. However, as Laurent Dubois indicates, “The distribution process was not egalitarian: officers got more than rank-and-file soldiers, and the state retained some control over the properties.” The officers came predominantly from the mulatto class, while the foot soldiers came from the former slave class. He continues, “Seeking to stall the fragmentation of plantations into small plots, Pétion outlawed the sale of parcels smaller than about 30 acres, which effectively excluded many of the poorer members of society from purchasing plots of land. His policy thus tried to steer a middle course between keeping land exclusively in the hands of a small elite and allowing the masses to take it over outright” (59-60). Though his aim was to find a balance between the two, he created a system in which the mulatto elite continued to thrive and prosper at the expense of the black masses.

The mulatto class would maintain positions of power and privilege until the rise of François Duvalier who would manipulate *noiriste* ideology in order to take office. It is in this moment that Chauvet writes, presenting an old mulatto family who see themselves as the descendants of the *anciens libres*. They feel themselves to be historically entitled to their

property as well as justified in their exploitation of the poor black peasants. Coming from a history of privilege, they find themselves under a new system that threatens their very way of life. As the Macoutes invade their town and brutalize the townspeople, the mulatto class finds themselves the target of the police commandant Calédu's rage. It is within this precarious moment that Claire pens her journal, reflecting on Haiti's past, present and future through her own contentious existence.

#### Clamont Man!: Claire As the Female Masculine Patriarch

The agonizing experience of being the only dark-skinned member of her family and the only daughter to be raised as a man leads Claire to retreat back into herself and become a profound introvert, locking herself in her bedroom to write in her journal and fantasize about a life that could never be hers. Though her complexion hinders relations and mobility within her own social milieu, Claire's complicated masculine education proves to be an even greater obstacle to social integration and a normative identity. As a result, she becomes a bitterly reclusive spinster who spies on the town and lives vicariously through her younger sister, Annette.

Due to the heritage that she received from her father, Claire must live as a female man while executing the duties of the patriarch such as maintaining the estate and providing for her family. She laments, "À moi, comme toujours, ont été confiés les plus fastidieux travaux... Et ils me laissent les rênes de la maison et le contrôle de la caisse. Je suis à la fois domestique et maîtresse ; une sorte de gouvernante sur les épaules de qui repose le train-train journalier de leur vie" (11). Though she aptly characterizes herself as both mistress and servant, alluding to her unique locus in the social and familial matrix, we come to understand that Claire always

occupies opposing positions as a black woman born to a white family raised to be a man. She is the de facto “man of the house,” dealing with the business and legal aspects of their estate as well as performing domestic duties. Her appointment as the head of the household is a burden, preventing her from fully participating in social or romantic endeavors, as well as serving as the root cause of her conflicting and fragmented subjectivity.

Accordingly, Claire is forced to adopt a masculine identity based on the values and codes inherited from the mulatto elite. Her father subjects her to a brutal and abusive masculine education in order to make a man out of her. While he understands that Claire is a female, he imposes a masculine identity with masculine duties and codes onto her, resulting in Claire’s split subjectivity. In order to cope with her situation, Claire completely separates her private life from her public persona. It is in the act of writing, of recounting her story, that she is able to reconcile the opposing sides of her subjectivity through the unconscious construction and practice of a female masculinity. Her imposed female masculinity exposes the contradictions of upper class society and social relations, but most importantly, it destabilizes the supremacy of mulatto masculinity. When her father’s masculinity is imposed on her feminine body, the hypocrisies and vulnerabilities of his mulatto masculinity are almost parodied back. In her consideration of the butch lesbian, Athena Nguyen demonstrates that, “In her display of masculinity on a woman’s body, she demonstrates that masculinity is not the exclusive domain of men and reveals that the naturalized connection between masculinity and men’s bodies to be up for renegotiation” (676). Female masculinity, then, dislocates masculinity from maleness, allowing for the recontextualization of manhood. In this way, it takes authority away from the male body, which, in turn, creates the space to renegotiate and reinterpret the practice of masculinity.

While Halberstam and Nguyen favor an outward expression of masculinity, Claire's female masculinity is expounded through the interior, internal and domestic terrain. Neither butch nor a bull dyke, Claire, on the contrary, publicly performs the role of virgin spinster. Yet, it is in her interior life that we see the other side of Claire, where she performs her masculinity. Her actions, thoughts and duties are traditionally masculine, and require her to perform a masculine identity. Expanding on Halberstam's use and characterization of female masculinity, I examine the unseen and intangible practices of female masculinity in *Amour*. I argue that Claire's female masculinity is constructed both in relation and in opposition to the models of Haitian masculinity available to her, yet, her practice of female masculinity disturbs fixed notions of racial, class and sexual identity.

While Claire writes her story in the years following the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Haiti, Chauvet writes directly under the eyes of François Duvalier. Nevertheless, the backdrop for *Amour* is one of social, political and civil upheaval. *Amour* reflects the changing political and social landscape, as well as the tensions created by such dramatic transitions. Valerie Kaussen, in *Migrant Revolutions* (2008), contends that *Amour*, "works by positing a fragmented 'irrational' subject as an agent of history" (150). Her analysis reveals a fragmented and decentered female subjectivity that is enmeshed in global politics capable of enunciating multiple histories and identities, while repudiating any essentialist notions or tendencies.

Importantly, Kaussen reveals the ways in which Claire's sadomasochism allows her to inhabit multiple subject positions informed by the histories of colonialism and domination. It is precisely through sadomasochistic fantasies that Claire is able to relate to both the collective and history. Kaussen's compelling interpretation of *Amour* has greatly informed my own

understanding of the text and Claire, however, she ignores Claire's contentious gender position as a woman who was raised to be a man. The internal conflict that Claire experiences on a daily basis due to her ambiguous upbringing is pervasive in the text, one which deserves more consideration. Thus leaving her unable to remediate the incongruities within herself; that is to say, her masculine education and her feminine body. Raised as the male successor to the Clamont estate, Claire was subject to a brutal education at the hands of her father which haunts her into the present and plagues her sensibilities as an aristocratic woman.

Similarly, Doris Garraway continues the investigation of the complexities of sadomasochistic relations in *Amour*. She expands on Kaussen's observations on Claire's split subjectivity through a Freudian perspective, locating the origin of the schism in the ruthless education she received under her father. She argues that Claire's subjection under her father produced a weakened ego, splintering her subjectivity. While making a notable point, she overlooks the implications of a masculine education on Claire's subjectivity and, as a result, her ambiguous performance of masculinity. She, however, reexamines the relationship between sadist and masochist as mutually reinforcing and dependent, while emphasizing Claire's unusual position as both master and subject. Although Claire publicly upholds all the statutes of her class, she searches privately, within the pages of her journal, for a way to disentangle herself from the societal restrictions, circumscribed by race, class and gender. Garraway astutely argues that Claire's psyche embodies "both a heightened drive for rebellion against social conformity, political oppression, and repressive sexual mores and the continued ability to suppress those desires, particularly as they relate to the social and political spheres" (209). Her analysis opens up the possibility of reading *Amour* and Claire through a different perspective, one that allows

the reader to understand that the sadomasochistic relations in the text not only shape the story, but Haitian history as well.

In earlier scholarship on Chauvet's triptych, Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, Lucienne Serrano, and Ronnie Scharfman engage with the themes of revolt and liberation. Although their celebratory regard towards violent liberation is debatable, their discussions of violence shed light on the role of violence in subjectivity and desire. In "Theorizing Terror: The Discourse of Violence in Marie Chauvet's *Amour Colère Folie*," Scharfman identifies the killing of Calédu as a liberatory act which results in the constitution of an autonomous identity for Claire. Furthermore, her attention to the relationship between Claire and her father are particularly interesting as she exposes the complex relationships between class, race, sexuality, gender and violence; all colliding and waging war on and through Claire's body. Her body becomes the locus where the conflicts in the novella play out, leaving Claire with a confused and divided subjectivity. In order to shed her self-hatred, instilled in her by her father, and arrive at a reconciliation with her self, Claire must revolt against the paternal figure. Scharfman also emphasizes the machinations of race and sexuality in the narrative through the father-daughter relationship, which manifest in a different form with Calédu. The problem of Claire's blackness and her ambiguous gender identity are pervasive throughout the text, which, in turn, reflect the intricate historical and social processes that have shaped and effected identity formation in Haiti.

In a different view of the body, Julie Nack Ngue's *Critical Conditions: Illness and Disability in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Writing* investigates the sociocultural readings of illness and disability and its significance in literary texts. In her examination of *Amour*, she, "reveals how [Claire's] father's abuse is always bound up in her

imagined bodily, sexual *and* psychic contaminations—as well as the desire to exorcize them” (29). In other words, Claire’s female masculinity threatens to contaminate normative bodies. Furthermore, Ngué demonstrates that “normalcy” is determined as much by legacies of colonial ideology as by new nationalist political, and that, “[d]iscriminations and abuse based on race, the body, and gender are thus linked to changing ideas of what is—or should be—the *right* kind of citizen or community member” (24 *emphasis in original*). Thus, female masculinity has the potential to pollute society at large, meaning, even social constructions such as gender.

In the novella, Marie Chauvet offers four compelling portraits of Haitian masculinity through the characters of Dr. Audier, Henri Clamont, tonton Mathurin, and Calédu. All of these men have touched Claire’s life in a meaningful way and they represent models of Haitian masculinity available to Claire. Through them she constructs and relates to her own performance of gender. As Halberstam affirms, “female masculinity is actually a multiplicity of masculinities, indeed, a proliferation of masculinities” (46). Thus, Claire’s female masculinity is both an integration and proliferation of masculinities. The principal masculine figure in her life is her father, Henri Clamont, who intentionally raises Claire in a masculine way. His friend, Dr. Audier, participates in Claire’s personal and social development as a family friend and local doctor. Tonton Mathurin and Calédu are also key characters in relation to Claire’s split subjectivity and ambiguous gender identity. Both figures deviate from the established norms and practices of the mulatto class, their practices of masculinity are regarded as a danger to their way of life. While they both express their masculinity and masculine values through disparate means, they share the status as an outsider and danger to the community.



Despite Jean Luze's central role in Claire's interior life, in addition to presenting yet another model of masculinity, he, nonetheless, is a Frenchman and an object of desire. His masculinity is circumscribed by French values and codes rather than those specific to Haiti. Moreover, his relationship to the Clamont sisters is more analogous to that of white colonialist and slave or *affranchi*, the implications of which resonate heavily with Claire. With this in mind, I keep my examination limited to the representations of Haitian masculinity with particular attention to the men who shape and inform Claire's own abstruse identity. It is precisely through these men that Claire is able to construct and understand different manifestations of Haitian masculine performance and identity.

To begin with, we must examine Henri's friend and physician, Dr. Audier, who is a permanent fixture in the Clamonts' life and household. In fact, when Jean Luze and Félicia decide to baptize their child, they choose Dr. Audier to act as sponsor and godfather to their son Jean-Claude. In addition to being their doctor and a family friend, he is chosen for this role because of his exemplary masculinity. As Claire explains, "Il est à peu de choses près le témoin de tous les mariages et le parrain de tous les gosses qui naissent dans nos belles familles... Un brave homme de docteur qui, malgré son séjour à Paris, est resté cent pour cent le type du provincial haïtien" (59-60). As a good and reputable man, the doctor represents the ideal model of masculinity for the mulatto aristocracy which is evidenced by the numerous requests for his participation in important religious and social events such as baptisms and weddings. This is the community's way of recognizing and affirming his masculine value. Even Claire acknowledges his integrity as she "cherche encore en vain les traces du surhomme" (10). Dr. Audier represents,

for Claire and the community, an idealistic Haitian masculinity which would later be suppressed by Duvalierist violence.

After finishing his studies in France, he returned to Haiti full of hope, optimism and a desire to enact change in his local and national milieu. The values he upholds are informed by his class, race and national context. However, a life under domination, both foreign and domestic, has made him a cautious and jaded man. Claire derisively observes that, "Il est déjà suffisamment courageux de soigner une suppliciée, doit se dire le docteur Audier. La terreur a brisé ses élans. Le politicien, grand partisan de la liberté et des droits de l'homme qu'il fut du vivant de mon père est mort en lui. Il sourit même à Calédu en lui serrant la main" (23). While Claire understands the reasons for his resignation, she is disgusted with his complicity which she interprets as cowardice. Not only has he abandoned his ideals and values, he grovels in front of the depraved police commandant responsible for the torture and suffering of the very patients he treats. In a moment of frustration, Claire thinks to herself, "Et qu'espérer d'un tel homme? Malgré tout le respect que je lui dois, je donne raison à Jean Luze de le rabrouer comme il le fait. Il trace aux jeunes l'exemple de la prudence, de la résignation et de la lâcheté." (73) While Claire acknowledges his decorum, she greatly disapproves of his cowardice, rejecting this specific aspect of his practice of masculinity. This new violence, in the form of Calédu, compromises his honor and respectability, both tantamount to masculinity itself.

In direct opposition to the figure of Dr. Audier, as well as Henri Clamont, is the neighborhood pariah, tonton Mathurin. He is seen as an outsider who violates all the codes of the mulatto aristocracy. Though a minor character in the novel, he is one of the few men whom Claire truly admires for his practice of masculinity. He is described as the only person who could

incite fear in her father and who publicly chastises her father as well as the rest of their class. Immortalized in Claire's memory as the man who would spit at her father's callous attitude towards the poor and social injustice, he is the face of moral and ethical responsibility even if it means going against accepted practices and behaviors. Claire envisions him wearing a *houpland*, a traditional tunic, while berating her father, "Impitoyable! lui criaient alors tonton Mathurin, impitoyable! Ah! ce brave tonton Mathurin qu'on nous avait appris à craindre comme s'il était le diable en personne!" (13).

Seen as a dangerous outcast in their community, tonton Mathurin's reputation has been besmirched as a pedophile and pervert. Claire is forbidden from associating with him and is even beaten for speaking to Agnès Grandupré who has been seen in his company. Though the rumors are later proven to be untrue, Claire maintains her distance from tonton Mathurin, fearing him as if he were Satan himself. His sequestration is a result of his deviance from the established norms of their community, his masculinity is seen as an affront to the traditional values of their class. However, he is shown to be a caring and conscientious man, as he saves Agnès from her abusive family only to watch her die in the arms of her fiancé. Indeed, within this close-knit mulatto community, the myth of an ideal—or "heroic"—masculinity seeks to suppress others, such as that exemplified by tonton Mathurin. Going against convention, he plans and carries out Agnès funeral, excluding her own parents, and leaves his entire fortune to her fiancé, Georges Soubiran, upon his death.

Tonton Mathurin's actions defy the established codes of conduct and propriety. As a preventative measure, for fear of exposing themselves to his extraneous masculinity, the mulattoes ostracize tonton Mathurin from their community and their lives. He is seen a

dangerous figure capable of contaminating their way of life. For example, “Tonton Mathurin qui vivait seul dans une grande et belle maison comme la nôtre fut toléré a une certain époque par la société de notre petite ville. Accusé brusquement de fréquenter la racaille et d’attirer chez lui les petites bonnes du quartier à des fins malhonnêtes, il avait été tout bonnement mis *en quarantaine*” (94, *emphasis mine*). The fear of contagion is so great that tonton Mathurin is effectively placed in social quarantine as well as anyone who associates with him such as Agnès and Claire.

Importantly, the nature of the rumors and the motivations for his quarantine are gendered. It is his masculinity that needs to be quarantined in order to keep little girls and by extension the community safe. By divesting him of his respectability and reputation, the community’s intends to eradicate his masculinity from the matrix of power and influence. As Chelsey Kivland notes, reputation and respectability are the nodes through which Haitian masculinity is constructed and practiced,

Respectability, according to Peter Wilson, referred to the system of social distinction imposed by the old colonial order and exemplified by proper bourgeois women, whereas reputation designated the black, populist value system that found expression in men’s quests to win peers’ acclaim. The duality expressed the gendered ordering of space, with respectability pursued at home and in church, and reputation on the street and in watering holes. Mainly concerned with lower-class men, Wilson showed that the pursuit of manly reputations was not just a response to the scarcity of respectability; it also mobilized seemingly deviant acts as mediums for resistance and agency. (680)

The rumors discredit him and render him a devious and menacing figure, meant to be avoided at all costs. The fact that the rumors directly address the safety of young women's virtues reveals the public's concern with the way in which he asserts and executes his manhood. Due to his resistance against the cruelty and insensitivity of the elites, his performance of masculinity is designated as deviant, which in turn, results in his exclusion. Moreover, he embraces his blackness and sympathizes with the lower classes, offering aid when required to those who ask. He even asks for Agnès's hand in marriage on behalf of Georges when they are unable to face her parents. He is indomitably unafraid of gossip and public opinion, conducting himself in a manner that he views to be right and just.

In order to better understand the extent of tonton Mathurin's influence on Claire's personal formation, it is necessary to reflect on his relationship to Claire's father, Henri Clamont. In 1915, Henri Clamont is determined to win the presidential elections with the hopes of becoming the most powerful man in the country, the President of Haiti. After several failed campaigns, his wife begs him to stop, "Sa ruine, il l'avait due plutôt à l'idée fixe de devenir un jour chef d'État. L'une après l'autre avaient été vendues nos terres pour payer pendant dix ans sa campagne électorale. Et ma mère qui voyait filer nos dots entre les mains de ses partisans pleurait en protestant faiblement." (42). However, her cries are ignored because, for Henri, it is a matter of masculine pride. Engaging in politics is the way in which Henri's need for validation and public acknowledgement is met. In other words, his ambition operates through the nodes of respectability and reputation. It is a way for Henri to assert his manhood in the public sphere, in

other words, to be a *gwo nèg*<sup>49</sup>. Henri's mulatto masculinity exceeds the domestic space to the socio-political realm, where his masculinity can serve as an example for others.

Indeed, politics in Haiti are traditionally a masculine domain in which men exhibit their manhood with relation to power and influence. It is the ultimate masculine endeavor. While men tend to inhabit the public sphere, women work and live in the private sphere, even as they engage in commercial activities. All this to say, that Henri Clamont is resolute on his goals and must become a *gwo nèg* at all costs. He desires the fear and the respect associated with positions of power, thereby compromising the paternal practice of masculinity for the political. Henri's masculinity is so embedded within the matrix of power that when his last hopes are definitively extinguished, he literally drops dead. When Claire is fifteen, "Nous étions au 27 julliet de l'année 1915, date terrible qui devait à jamais détruire les ambitions politiques de mon père, détraquer sa robuste santé et le mener tout droit à la tombe" (113). That is to say, his entire existence hinges on his masculine prowess, his reputation and respectability, when that is lost, he ceases to exist. The political situation proves to be too volatile and complex for Henri to navigate, proving his incompetency and his inability to adhere to patriarchal masculine ideals. Furthermore, by continuing to advance his political ambitions, he is dispossessing his family of their inheritance, thereby eschewing his masculine duties as father and husband. At the time of his death, with the

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<sup>49</sup> See Jana Evans Braziel and Robert Fatton Jr. In Braziel's, *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora*, she defines the *gwo nèg* as "a powerful man, one who commands respect, social stature and, above all, authority" (1). She continues, "To be a *gwo nèg* in Haiti is to register one's place geographically and historically in order to become a big man in the neighborhood or even on the national level" (2) Developing the politics of big-manism, Braziel offers an insightful analysis on the politics of Haitian black masculinity in Haiti as well as the diaspora. However, Fatton situates the *gwo nèg* within the context of a *politique du ventre*, "a politics of the belly, whereby different factions of Haitian political class have traditionally vied with each other to 'eat' the limited fruits of power" (32). He, instead, likens the *gwo nèg* to the *grands mangeurs*, "a rapacious species of office holders who devour public resources for their exclusive private gains" (32). In other words, the *gwo nèg* gains power and legitimacy by 'eating' his way up the social and economic ladder, becoming fat (*gwo*) with power.

arrival of American troops on Haitian soil, he has proven himself to be a failure. Unable to achieve even a failed version of masculinity, Henri dies and leaves Claire to take his place as the patriarch.

In a pivotal scene, tonton Mathurin interrupts a rally organized in support of Henri's electoral campaign. He makes his way through the cheering crowd in order to castigate him publicly for his wrongdoings. Calling him, "un piteux ignorant, un mulâtre borné et prétentieux," tonton Mathurin criticizes Henri and their narrow-minded society (106). It is through this encounter that Claire starts to understand the implications of color prejudice and class privilege. What is more, she sees her father in a different light, one that complicates her perception of the patriarch. Tonton Mathurin adds that the mulattoes are, "gens bornés qui comme vous se vantent d'être blancs et ferment la porte de leur salon au nez des nègres de valeur" (107). Moreover, he reminds the Clamonts of their black heritage. When Henri denies it, tonton Mathurin calls attention to Claire's complexion saying, "Votre fille aînée est là pour vous rafraîchir la mémoire" (107). His audacity to defy her father stimulates Claire's sensibilities as she realizes that, "De ce jour mourut ma crainte de lui. Il avait rougi sous mes yeux, tremblé, battu en retraite. Une vague prémonition m'avertissait de la fausseté de notre situation et je m'étonnais de donner raison, en mon for intérieur, à tonton Mathurin" (107). Realizing, for the first time, that her father's authority and judgement are not absolute, allows Claire to renegotiate and reorient her relationship to herself as well as her father.

This confrontation reveals the fissures and fractures in her father's masculine façade, weakening his hold on her and compromising his own masculinity. As if to confirm Claire's realization, her father hires thugs to drag tonton Mathurin into the forest and beat him severely.

Recalling Halberstam's claim about heroic masculinity and the way it gains currency, Henri's elitist masculinity is constructed and reinforced through the suppression of alternative masculinities, especially those that are marginalized or powerless. This gives him license to persecute resistant men such as tonton Mathurin. However, in suppressing tonton Mathurin's divergent masculinity, Henri not only compromises his own manhood, he gives rise to another unorthodox masculinity in the form of Claire's female masculinity. Indeed, Claire becomes aware through her father's oppressive masculinity and her female masculinity emerges in the context of her violent education. In addition to her unusual education, the changing political climate exacerbates gender relations that lead to the emergence of Claire's female masculinity. Unsurprisingly, tonton Mathurin comes back to confront Henri, spitting in his face as he accuses him of cowardice.

While cowardice may prevail in the rest of X, tonton Mathurin falls prey to neither cowardice nor resignation. Like a hero from a bygone era, he remains fearless and bold. Despite his death, he remains a brave and vivacious masculine figure in Claire's memory. Her admiration for tonton Mathurin refutes Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken's reading of Chauvet's other works, which, through Hannah Arendt, she claims that, "As the movement from *Madness* to the *Raptors* demonstrates, resistance or non-resistance is a futile debate, for all will end up in the totalitarian logic that render the notion of moral responsibility completely inconsequential" (Origins 71). In tonton Mathurin, Claire sees a man willing to stand his moral ground and resist the totalitarian logic of injustice. Indeed, as a child, Claire feared him as she feared the devil himself, even making the sign of the cross when happening upon him in the street. If we were to follow this analogy, with tonton Mathurin as the devil, then that would make Henri Clamont God in Claire's



universe. Tonton Mathurin is the antithesis of her father, jeopardizing Henri's masculinity and his control over his family and domain. For someone like Claire, imprisoned by social convention and expectations, tonton Mathurin offers an alternative to the antiquated, as well as classist and racist, form of masculinity that is inculcated into her. Like the devil, tonton Mathurin presents the possibility for a wider understanding of the world, the capacity to distinguish between good and evil.

It is without doubt that Henri Clamont has been the most significant influence in Claire's life and formation. As her father, he is directly responsible for her education and development, as well as serving as a prescriptive model. Henri plays a vital role in the construction and formation of Claire's subjectivity and consciousness. Claire is deeply affected by her relationship with her father as he serves as her primary educator and keeper. Indeed, Claire's split psyche and self-loathing stem from the harsh education she received under her father. Early in Claire's life, he decides to raise Claire as a boy, "Dieu m'a refusé un fils, mais ma fille aînée se chargera de veiller à la bonne marche de mes affaires. Telle est ma volonté" (98). Subject to frequent beatings and constant scrutiny, Claire spends her formative years in a claustrophobic and fearful environment.

The purpose of Claire's austere upbringing is to prepare her to take over her father's paternal responsibilities when he enters into the world of politics. Henri represents a pre-Duvalierist masculinity predicated on masculine supremacy and domination. Given Henri's need to dominate—thus exercising his masculinity—he intends to become the President of Haiti and needs Claire to take his place as the patriarch of the family and estate. He explains,

Je l'ai élevée comme un homme, lui répondit mon père, elle est en âge à présent de tenir mes engagements... Le lion est encore fort, papa Cousineau, fort comme un roc. Mais tu oublies que je m'absente souvent. Je commence sous peu ma campagne électorale et j'ai toutes les chances de devenir président de la République. J'ai renoncé à l'expédier en France, je lui ai appris à monter à cheval, je lui ai enseigné les mathématiques rien que pour l'avoir à la tête de mes terres. Il faut qu'elle serve aussi les loas. (100)

Instead of raising Claire to be a wife and mother, he raises her to be a landowner and businessman. Within his explanation, he reveals the qualities that, for him, are necessary for a successful execution of masculinity and masculine power. Above all, Henri prizes power and influence as he is willing to renounce his familial and economic duties in favor of politics. Second, he indicates physical strength and ability as demonstrated by his vaunting his own strength and the fact that he has forced Claire to learn to ride horseback. Third, he mentions mathematics, that is to say, analytical and computative skills which are necessary for managing a business and the estate. Lastly, he indicates religion, serving the vaudou spirits, or the *lwas*.<sup>50</sup> Though Catholicism is the designated religion for the upper class, Henri continues to serve the *lwas* as part of his heritage. It is incumbent upon Claire to continue this tradition, but, due to her Catholic education, she refuses. As Claire explains, "Le vodou qui, jusqu'ici m'apparaissait comme une religion honteuse que seul le pauvre peuple pratiquait, prenait corps à mes yeux, m'engageait dans une lutte où j'avais peu de changé de gagner : je craignais mon père et redoutais de lui tenir tête" (102). And for her insubordination, she is whipped by her father.

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<sup>50</sup> There are several spellings, but for consistency, I will use "lwa" and "vaudou" unless citing directly from a text.

As several scholars have observed, Claire's beatings at the hands of her father evoke the relationship between slave and master. Garraway, Kaussen, and Scharfman have located the splintering of Claire's psyche, and troubled subjectivity, within the context of her brutal education. Garraway asserts that, "Claire's embodiment of the father's law is the consequence of his having beaten it into her, suppressing through brute force her disobedience, her blackness and her femininity" (207). Her analysis suggests that the cause of Claire's disobedience is her blackness, which, in turn, justifies the effacement of her femininity. It is unsurprising, then, that Claire would be so drastically affected by her violent education. Claire confesses that,

Mes premiers souvenirs datent de cette époque. Avant je n'existais pas. C'est avec la révélation de la souffrance qu'on prend conscience de soi. Cet âge devait avoir pour mes parents une importance extraordinaire car ils devinrent envers moi subitement sévères et soupçonneux. J'étais réprimandée pour rien, épiée odieusement... Pour m'endurcir et me faire payer sans doute ses espérances paternelles déçues, il décida brusquement de m'élever comme un garçon. Chaque matin, il réclamait son cheval et me mettait en selle.  
(90)

What is interesting about this anecdote is that Claire became self-aware as a result of the violence and surveillance under her parents. By being subjected to violence and suffering, Claire's consciousness emerges through and by way of her masculine education. Though the cause of this shift remains unclear to Claire, her parents alter their parenting style in accordance with Canon law. Claire has reached the age of reason, allowing her to participate in the moral and religious aspects of life. It is assumed that, at this point, one becomes responsible for one's

own actions and cognizant of the mandates of society. The age of reason represents the child's entry into adult life, into subjectivity.

Turning to the slave-master dynamic between Claire and her father, their interactions expose the complex history of Haiti and the persistence of color prejudice. The echoes of slavery reverberate throughout the narrative, bleeding into the fabric of life. These problems intensify with regard to Claire because she occupies an ambiguous position as a black mulâtresse. Her pigmentation compromises the established social and racial classifications. Forasmuch as the mulatto class take pride in their whiteness and their affinity for and proximity to French history and culture, Claire disturbs the perceived purity of their class. For example, after a particularly severe beating, Dr. Audier is called to treat Claire's wounds. Henri asks his friend, "croirez-vous, si vous ne me connaissez pas de longue date, que j'ai du sang noir dans les veines ?" (96). His question implicates the legacy of colonialism and slavery within which whiteness was tantamount to power and personhood.

Henri is the product of a tumultuous history of color prejudice and class stratification, within which he has always occupied the position of power and privilege. Understanding and participating in social relations through the use and abuse of power, Henri remains tethered to the old colonial order, taking up the mantle of the slave master. For instance, when confronted with Dr. Audier's reproachful glare, Henri defends his actions in the following manner, "Que voulez-vous, mon cher ami, j'inculque des principes j'entends être obéi, lui dit celui-ci. C'est une race indisciplinée que la nôtre, et notre sang d'anciens esclaves réclame le fouet." To which Dr. Audier responds, "Est-ce le colon qui parle en vous?" Revealing his deep-seated fears and insecurities, he answers, "Cela signifie que mon sang noir à moi est en voie de régression et que

j'ai hérité certaines qualités qui vont lui faire défaut à elle, si je ne la corrige pas" (96). Fearing regression, he beats his daughter to prevent their (shared) blackness from manifesting. As Walcott-Hackshaw notes, "Claire represents everything he would like to suppress; her dark color is a symbol of contamination and regression... a symbol of his own self-hatred and an inheritance he does not want to accept" (48). His fear implicates the abject subject position of slaves and their status as chattel or as object. He fears a return to nothingness, a state within which he would be dispossessed of agency and power.

While Henri, like many Haitians, has subconsciously repressed the haunting legacy of slavery, his dark-skinned daughter reanimates old fears and prejudices. Not only does Claire remind him of his African slave heritage, she embodies the historical violence inscribed onto the Haitian body and identity. By taking up the position of slave master, he reenacts, thereby making real, the experience of slavery. Mirroring historical circumstances, Henri is both father and slave owner, making Claire the mixed-race slave. Importantly, as Hortense Spillers and Angela Davis have expounded in their scholarly work on black feminism, the institution of slavery degendered slaves. As Davis illustrates, the "slave system defined Black people as chattel. Since women, no less than men, were viewed as profitable labor-units, they might as well have been genderless as far as the slaveholders were concerned" (8). Under slavery, both men and women were equally subject to the "absolute authority" of the slave master, entirely deprived of subjectivity, agency or power (10). That is to say, they were sexed but not gendered, much like livestock, which Spillers identifies as,

*a theft of the body*—a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose

at least *gender* difference *in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific... the captive body translates into a potential or pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into more general 'powerlessness,' resonating through various centers of human and social meaning. (67 *emphasis in original*)

Repeating the legacy of colonialism, Henri singles Claire out for her blackness. He imposes a strict masculine education, which is reinforced by physical and psychological violence. In her father's eyes, her blackness seemingly negates her femininity, subjecting her to physical abuse from which women are normally exempt. Furthermore, his decision to raise Claire to be a man inadvertently abrogates any possibility for the formation of a normative gender identity. The means by which he chooses to educate Claire reinterpret and rewrite the relationship between master and slave, father and daughter.

Chauvet consciously implements the whip as Henri's disciplinary tool of choice, which inevitably conjures up images of slavery. She draws attention to the inescapable legacy of slavery and the ways in which Haitian masculinity has always been circumscribed by violence. Inasmuch as Claire's consciousness emerges within the context of violence, Haitian masculinity first materialized under the conditions of slavery and through bloodshed. Consequently, Henri's attempt at masculinization removes Claire from the heterosexual matrix only to reinscribe the violence that defines his own masculinity. By stripping Claire of a normative gender identity, he places her in a state reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection. Indeed, the abject lies outside the borders of the subject, however, it also lies between the subject and the object disintegrating the boundaries between the two. Abjection occupies an ambiguous territory which

threatens encroachment while constituting the subject and meaning. As she maintains, “Frontière sans doute, l’abjection est surtout ambiguïté,” especially with regards to negative and positive implications of abjection (17). Abjection is a radical exclusion and the collapse and dissolution of meaning, much like Claire. She represents a total collapse of meaning as a black mulâtresse, a masculine female and as both master and servant. Expanding on Walcott-Hackshaw’s assertion that, “in Chauvet’s poetics she [Claire] is a mixed metaphor, an oxymoron, a metonym that contains its own antithesis,” she also simultaneously inhabits and personifies the abject (48).

Returning to Henri’s practice of masculinity, it is important to consider the extent to which slavery and colonialism have shaped and informed his masculine identity. When Claire is thirteen years old, Henri decides to introduce Claire to the peasant laborers who work on his coffee farm. As master and landowner, he is determined to present his successor under the right circumstances, that of authority and grandeur. He does so by dress, choosing the most absurdly extravagant costumes for them both. As Claire recounts,

Le jour de mes treize ans, mon père intima l'ordre à Démosthène de seller nos chevaux et nous partîmes au grand galop pour ses plantations. Moi, dans une tenue d'amazone qu'il avait fait venir tout exprès de France, et lui en pantalon d'équitation, le chef coiffé de son casque de colon. Ma longue jupe, ma blouse blanche à jabot, mon chapeau garni d'une plume d'oie me donnaient l'air prétentieux d'une aristocrate-snob du XVIIIe siècle. J'avais supplié en vain que l'on ôtât la plume du chapeau, invoquant mon jeune âge et la gêne que j'éprouverais à m'exhiber dans un tel accoutrement. (97)

Dressed in clothing more appropriate to the eighteenth century, Henri makes a spectacle of the wealth and privilege that was gained through violence and exploitation. His pith helmet and

Claire's sidesaddle riding habit evoke a different era, one in which domination was the way of life. Indeed, the eighteenth century was the height of the Atlantic slave trade and of slavery itself. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, Saint-Domingue imported more than 40,000 slaves annually.<sup>51</sup> By wearing such clothes, it is his intention to play the part of the slave master and "une aristocrate-snob," in order to confer authority as well as a legacy of violence and subjugation onto Claire. His position as master is further cemented by the feudal conditions of the laborers that resemble a serfdom rather than employment. His outdated views on class and gender are fundamentally predicated on violence, which Claire tries to refuse as she does the ridiculous feather in her hat.

While Henri's masculinity is informed and shaped by the legacy of slavery, his practice of masculinity is much more ambivalent. The complexity of his identity is illustrated in Claire's description of her father, "ce mulâtre-parisien [qui] servait ses loas régulièrement" (16). Though he identifies as a white mulâtre, practically a Frenchman, he is, nonetheless, a Haitian man. He cannot deny his Haitian heritage, nor can he gain the prominence and prestige he desires without acknowledging and engaging in his local and national environment. And as a Haitian, he has inherited a spiritual and religious legacy, vaudou, from his grandmother to whom he had promised to pass on their religion. In order to keep his promise, he tries to impose vaudou onto Claire who resists due to her Catholic education. He tells Claire, "J'ai promis, tu comprends, j'ai promis que toi, l'aînée, tu recevrais l'héritage. Mais c'était avant ta naissance. Pouvais-je prévoir que tu serais une fille?" (102). This heritage was intended for a male primogeniture, however, in the absence of a son, he chooses to pass it on to Claire who he is shaping into a man. Though he

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<sup>51</sup> See C.L.R James's *The Black Jacobins*. New York: Vintage Books, 1963 [1938], 55.



claims that it is her duty as the first-born, it is likely that he chose Claire because of her dark skin. As mentioned above, vaudou is the religion of the black peasantry, not the mulatto elite. His other two, light-skinned, daughters are spared this legacy. In contrast to Claire's brutal masculine education, her sisters are raised in accordance with the values and codes of their social class as well as their gender. They are firmly rooted in their gender and class identity, never doubting their status as women or mulattoes. They are not exposed to vaudou, and educated entirely within the Catholic tradition. For Henri, his black daughter must continue to serve the *lwas* to ensure the continued prosperity of their family.

A deeply superstitious man, he is torn between a white colonialist heritage and his own *haïtienneté*. When Claire refuses to serve the *lwas*, she is beaten severely. She confirms, “ Je résistai et je fus fouettée. Le temps passa. Mon père ne fut pas élu. Il me reprocha d'attirer sur lui la malchance et me jura qu'il me ferait céder” (102). In other words, his masculinity is contingent on Claire's subjugation. He believes that unless Claire submits to him, he cannot win the elections. In resisting, Claire is asserting her own masculinity, the one that she has been inculcated into her. She is standing her ground, like tonton Mathurin, defying her father's orders. Indeed, Scharfman observes that, “As a constant reminder to him of what he is repressing, Claire must be victimized, violated, by the paternal whip, which would effect both a symbolic genocide and gynocide” (236). In doing so, he inadvertently empowers her which, in turn, pushes her to encroach on to her father's domain, that is the say, his masculinity. Her resistance, her courage, disturbs her father, compromising his own practice of masculinity. The result of his enfeebled masculinity is a loss of power and influence, thus losing the confidence of his supporters and losing the elections. In order to restore his masculine power, he attempts to dominate and

subsume his daughter's power by breaking her will with beatings and threats. Yet she does not yield. While she normally obeys her father, she has decided to exercise her female masculine power, thereby endangering the authority and control that her father seeks to impose. Perhaps her only open act of defiance, her repudiation of vaudou foreshadows Claire's future position with respect to *noirisme* and the dictatorship. Given vaudou's centrality to *noiriste* ideology, her rejection of vaudou is equivalent to her rejection of Duvalier.

In the absence of her father, she is hesitant to take up the position of slave master, she, nonetheless, must assume the role of landowner and patriarch. Her father has bestowed upon her the responsibilities and duties of the patriarch, which in turn, limits her life and mobility. He has left her with the responsibility of maintaining an ever-diminishing estate as he sells it off to further his political career as well as raising her sisters. Unlike her sisters, Claire is denied the freedom and ease of participating in society as an aristocratic mulâtresse, instead, she must occupy the position of patriarch. Her unusual upbringing has made Claire into an anomaly; she has no place in society. Lee-Keller describes Claire as "doubly displaced," indicating her skin pigmentation as the reason for her inclusive exclusion (1303). However, she overlooks the implications and complications of Claire's masculine upbringing and identity. She does not belong to any one gender, race or even class. Her situation is precarious at best as she is neither woman nor man, neither servant nor master, yet she bears the burdens of both. While it may appear that Claire dwells within an unachieved masculinity, or even a failed femininity, she is, in fact, creating her own understanding of gendered subjectivity on her own terms.

Indeed, her practice of female masculinity is informed and shaped by her relationship to her family, social milieu and history. Claire formulates a different engagement with gender and

subjectivity within a moment of social, political and racial upheaval. The sadistic black police commander, Calédu, has been terrorizing X for nearly a decade as he casually kidnaps, tortures, rapes and kills the townspeople with little to no regard to actual wrongdoing or even justice.

Calédu, “a la réputation d’un sadique. Il adore cravacher les femmes et en fait arrêter, comme ça, pour son plaisir, une ou deux de temps à autre,” and he, “aime qu’on le craigne et qu’on le lui montre” (20). To boot, even his name means one who beats or hits hard.<sup>52</sup> This is further reinforced as we are introduced to Calédu as “un nègre féroce qui nous terrorise depuis tantôt huit ans” and that, “Il a droit de vie et de mort sur nous et il en abuse” (14). Only two days after arriving in X, Commander Calédu executes a search and seizure of the entire town, confiscating any and all weapons of resistance.

Enjoying almost limitless power and authority, Calédu exemplifies Duvalierist masculinity—more specifically Macoute masculinity—as well as the regime itself. Duvalier’s rise to power was facilitated by the manipulation of *noiriste* ideology which inverted the former power structure, ultimately reconfiguring the systems of power.<sup>53</sup> Hence Calédu not only represents another manifestation of Haitian masculinity, he also represents black masculinity fostered through the distortion of *noirisme* by the dictatorship. As Dubois explains, “His [Duvalier’s] regime, he insisted, was the fulfillment of the powerful demands made during and after the occupation for a more authentic, indigenous form of governance” (330). Moreover, Martin Munro explains that, “Evoking and manipulating the memory of 1804, Duvalier and the

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<sup>52</sup> Doris Garraway diverges from Joan Dayan’s translation of Calédu’s name as “one who hits hard,” to “one who beats hard” (200).

<sup>53</sup> David Nicholls observes, “His avowed aim throughout his period of office was to achieve what he called ‘a new equilibrium’ in the country, by which he meant a major shift in power from the established predominantly mulatto elite, to a new black middle class which was said to act in the interests of the mass of peasants and workers from which its members had emerged” (212)

other *noiristes* presented themselves as the mythical inheritors of the revolutionary legacy” (25). And Calédu is a product of the regime, an embodiment of dictatorship. As a representative of Duvalier, he expertly performs the dominant composition of masculinity to the townspeople and more importantly, to Claire.

He represents a new formulation of Haitian masculinity defined by violence, blackness and an ever-increasing thirst for power. Like the Gorilla, Calédu enjoys unlimited power as the chief of police. He can take whatever he wants, yet he yearns for Claire’s love. In fact, I will demonstrate that his love for Claire complicates his image of terror as well as eroding his practice of masculinity. Doris Garraway has read the relationship between Claire and Calédu as that of doubles or mirror images, referring to Calédu as, “her rival and twin” (219). After all, it was Claire’s arrogance and inexperience in business which resulted in the deaths of innocent farmers on her land, requiring an investigation and Calédu’s assignment in X. Seeing himself in her, he is instantly drawn to her. He sees in her a chance to connect with someone who understands him, sees him for who he is and wants to be. In his own way, he loves the black mulâtresse who refuses him at every occasion.

His patience and understanding are reserved for Claire alone, which is demonstrated through his disdain for the white mulatto women in X. For example, when, “Dora Soubiran traite de haut avec lui,” she returns two days later, “hagarde, méconnaissable, poursuivie par les railleries des mendiants qui s’esclaffaient de la voir marcher les jambes ouvertes, comme une infirme” (20). She is abducted and sexually brutalized for her refusal to acquiesce to Calédu’s ego. Dora is not the first, she is one of countless women that Calédu has victimized for varying degrees of real or imaginary crimes. As Dr. Audier illuminates, “Eh bien, tout simplement que

notre commandant a dû être souvent humilié par nos belles bourgeoises et qu'il se venge d'elles à sa manière ” (123).

However, he is different with Claire and openly courts her. He secretly visits her window at night and watches over her, he even asks her to dance at the party like a gentleman, risking rejection and public humiliation. He seizes the opportunity and tries to get closer to Claire by sharing an intimate secret with her. He says, “ J'ai entendu dire, Miss Clamont, me chuchota-t-il méchamment, qu'il s'était passé dans le temps un drame sanglant sur vos terres là-haut, au 'morne au lion'. Vous et moi avons donc des morts sur la conscience. Les miens me tracassent peu. Et vous?” (54). Though Claire interprets his comments as a wicked provocation, it is clear that Calédu seeks to establish a bond between them. He wants to forge a relation between them based on similitude. They share a history of violence and bloodshed, which, in his eyes, connects them. After all, the event to which he is referring is the reason that he was stationed in X in the first place. It was Claire who called him, who brought him into existence. His attachment and fondness for her has left him conflicted over how to obtain her sincere affection as well as his practice of masculinity. His masochistic desire for Claire, in effect, endangers his masculinity and authority. Desperate for her approval, he woos her from the traditionally feminine position of lack and subordination.

This is not to say that Calédu is not motivated by other, more opportunistic and materialistic, reasons; his initial attraction to Claire was based on his desire for social ascension. Through Claire, Calédu could gain the possibility of entering the upper echelons of society, becoming a member of the nearly cloistral elite. His desire for inclusion is evidenced by his hatred for the mulatto class with particular regard to the mulatto women who do not accept him

and cannot understand him. However, Claire is different and his desire for her is narcissistic in nature as his love is self-serving in addition to the fact that he loves her in the same manner in which he loves himself, as an extension of himself. He relates to Claire as the other half of his twinned soul, similar to the figures of the Marassa in vaudou. As Maya Deren elaborates, “Since twins are, essentially, one, that which affects one part affects the other and whatever disease or accident may beset one twin is understood to threaten the other; and their violent separation may lead to disaster” (39). Therefore, harming Claire is tantamount to harming himself. For this reason, she is the only mulatto whom he treats with a modicum of respect, never daring to capture and torture her. He must win her affection, her love, which will validate him and make him whole. Furthermore, as a representative of the *noiriste* dictatorship, Calédu cannot justify a marriage to a mulatto. He is expected to uphold the *noiriste* ideals and principals which are rooted in Africanist theory and equates blackness to Haitianess. Though he aspires to social advancement and inclusion, he is somewhat limited by the color based ideology of the dictatorship. However, in Claire he sees a way to enter into the aristocratic society of the mulattoes while staying true to the Duvalierist version of *noirisme*. It is their blackness and their shared history of violence that connect them, through which Calédu perceives a unique understanding of himself and of Claire. He believes that Claire understands him and sees him for what he is and strives to be. In contrast, Claire abhors his very presence as he is a reminder of her own wrongdoings as well as a threat to her community.

While he desires Claire, she, nevertheless, disturbs him. Acting like a mirror, she reflects back an image of himself that he cannot grasp. When he engages with Claire, he is faced with a distorted image of a failing and depraved masculinity. Having built his entire identity in relation

to the violent and power hungry Duvalierist machine, Calédu can never be satisfied and can never achieve the kind of masculinity he so desires. As bell hooks claims, “Whereas an unconventional perspective on masculinity had given black males alternative grounds on which to build healthy self-esteem, the embrace of patriarchal masculinity meant that most black men measuring against the norm would also be less than a man, failures, unable to realize the ideal”(*We Real Cool*, 14). While the unattainability of Duvalierist masculinity taunts Calédu, Claire unconsciously constructs and adjusts her own engagement with the world via her female masculinity. Her disgust for dominant masculinities prompts her to create and explore alternative avenues to gendered identities. That is to say, her female masculinity exposes the fragility of Calédu’s, and by extension Duvalierist, masculinity. She reverses the image, revealing his weaknesses and his inadequacies as a man. She offers an alternative portrait of masculinity, while neither better nor worse, it offers different possibilities for understanding the concept of masculinity itself.

In revealing the true form of Calédu’s pathetic masculinity, she opens up new possibilities for the reconfiguration and reformulation manhood. While unable to break away from the cycle of violence which circumscribes all Haitian masculinity, female masculinity allows for new expression of masculinity by unhinging it from the male body. Her portrayal of Calédu is parodic, a man who can only assert his manhood through violence and terror. A man so desperate for approval and inclusion that he forces his way into society and inserts himself into the lives of people who loathe him. A man whose only power is that of his position as police commander, but who possesses no real power of his own. A man who can never achieve the kind

of masculine power and authority that he desires, ultimately revealing a man who could never measure up.

Like any love-hate relationship, the intensity of their encounters suggests a reciprocity of emotion and desire. Perhaps Claire's extreme reaction to Calédu stems from an allusive resemblance to Claire's father, Henri Clamont. Chauvet creates—whether by accident or on purpose—a parallel between Henri Clamont and Calédu through the image of the whip. Evoking the slavemaster, both men choose the whip to execute and reinforce their masculine power. The whip in Chauvet's narrative becomes a sort of leitmotif of dominant masculinity and masculine power. It is this weapon of patriarchy that provokes Claire's *prise de conscience* and arouses her indignation. What is more, Claire shares a sadomasochistic relationship with both men. Indeed, Garraway locates the origin of Claire's sadomasochism in "a profound lack of love," though I would also add that her sadomasochism is fueled by the desire to love (215). The object of her desire is herself, she must love herself in order to achieve and realize an authentic subjectivity. The dearth of functioning and acceptable models of masculinity necessitates Claire's response, which is to formulate and practice her own female masculinity. Moreover, her female masculinity is shaped and informed by her sadomasochistic tendencies and fantasies. As Kaussen asserts,

In Claire's fantasies, she inhabits multiple subject positions—torturer, tortured, master, slave—and sadomasochism becomes both a historical discourse and a way of imagining the postcolonial subject's relationship to the collective, to the totality, one that is not ideal but based in concrete histories of colonialism, enslavement and revolution. (169)



Building on Kaussen's insights, these sadomasochistic fantasies open up the realm in which Claire can choose her subject position and express her polyvalence. She is not limited to fixed categories, instead, she can fashion her own identity as she sees fit. She writes, " Je suis la seule lucide, la seule dangereuse et personne autour de moi ne le soupçonne. La vieille fille ! Celle qui n'a pas trouvé de mari, qui ne connaît pas l'amour, qui n'a jamais vécu dans le bon sens du terme" (9). Given her unique position, she is the only person capable of enacting change, of disrupting tradition, thus making her a danger to dominant masculinity. She takes masculinity beyond its limits, challenging fixed ideas of gender, sexuality, race and class.

At this point, I would like to address Claire's deep-seated need for freedom. As we have seen, Claire lives in a prison partially of her own making. Too concerned with appearance and terrified of scandal, she is still a virgin and rarely socializes outside of church and her family. Yet she yearns for something more, as illustrated below:

Une certaine audace est en train de se développer en moi. Je la sens émerger lentement. Est-ce cela la maturité ? Je passe la main sur mon visage pour suivre sur mes traits les premières métamorphoses. Oui, j'ai changé. Mes lèvres humides sont entrouvertes sur je ne sais quelle décision naissante. Je prends conscience de ma valeur. Tout ce qui a fermenté pendant près de quarante ans dans mon imagination : mes désirs inassouvis, mes appels sans écho, l'extase stérile des plaisirs solitaires se soulèvent en moi. C'est une révolution. Je me sens prête à répondre aux exigences de mon être. (70)

Answering to herself, she seeks the freedom to live life on her own terms and to construct her identity in a way that allows her to engage with herself and the world.

Living a life of restriction, deprivation and solitude has turned Claire into a bitter and duplicitous old maid. She resents other women, especially her sister Félicia. She angrily writes, “Elle a tout, moi, rien. Je ne crois pas l'envier cependant. L'envie est insuffisante pour expliquer l'épouvantable haine que je ressens pour elle. Cette femme est mon ennemie” (153). In addition to being married to Claire’s object of desire, Jean Luze, Félicia is also fair skinned and blonde. She is the model of mulatto femininity, fitting perfectly into the mold that society has laid out. In Claire’s view, she is too perfect, that is to say, too stereotypical and cliché. Unequivocally mulatto, woman, wife, mother and sister, Félicia represents that which Claire could never be nor have. This hatred culminates in a plan to murder her sister and steal her husband, Jean Luze.

Though she imagines herself plunging the dagger that Jean Luze gave her into Félicia’s chest without hesitation, the reality proves different as she is seized by panic. Instead, she decides to turn the dagger on herself, which is tantamount to killing her own femininity. Indeed, her intention is to kill the epitome of femininity and whiteness in the Clamont household and when she fails to do so, she seeks a surrogate. In a frenzy, she tries to kill herself—her femininity—when she hears the commotion outside and stumbles onto Calédu. In that moment, she chooses not to kill herself, that is to say, she decides to keep her femininity alive. She, instead, turns her dagger to the toxic masculinity of Calédu. Ironically, “Il a peur, seul, dans le noir, traqué par les mendiants qu’il a lui-même armés” (160). Cornered and afraid, Calédu finds himself in a similar position to his victims. Taking advantage of this moment, Claire recounts, “je lui plonge le poignard dans le dos une fois, deux fois, trois fois. Le sang gicle” (160). The repeated plunging of the dagger (three times) and the image of penetrating blade parallel the sexual violence inflicted on the women of X by Calédu. Further cementing this gendered role

reversal, Claire wonders immediately after if Dora Soubiran—one of Calédu's victims—witnessed the scene. Though Calédu clearly occupies a femininized position of victim, it remains unclear what position Claire holds. As usual, Claire is an ambiguous character, but if Calédu is in the feminine position, then, Claire would most likely be in the masculine.

This scene has been passionately investigated, analyzed and debated by nearly every scholar and critic of *Amour*, often read as an act of revolt, liberation, and agency. While convincing, these readings overstate the revolutionary aspect of Claire killing Calédu. After all, she kills him almost by accident; it is a crime of opportunity. Originally, she wanted to kill her sister; an act that is not politically motivated. Then, she wants to kill herself, but lacks the resolve. In that moment, a vulnerable and disarmed Calédu stumbles into her courtyard and she turns her murderous desire into an act of revolt. Whether her action is truly one of revolt, opportunity or homicidal desire is a tenable question, but what interests me is her reaction to this final act. After obsessing and lusting over Jean Luze for the entirety of the novella, she finally receives his attention and possibly his affection. However, she rejects his embrace and shuts herself in her room. In rejecting Jean Luze, she is accepting and favoring herself. It is upon obtaining his interest that she realizes that Jean Luze was just a conduit for her misplaced desire for self-acceptance and freedom. Finally understanding that her female masculine identity is neither aberrant nor repugnant, she is free to live her life as she pleases. She chooses to return to her room—her sanctuary—and calmly reflects on her situation and environment. No longer conflicted over her existence and her female masculinity, she stops writing. She is no longer “spectatrice étonné de ma propre vie,” she is an active agent of history (123).

Earlier in the text, Claire states that, “La liberté est un pouvoir intime. C'est pourquoi la société y a tracé une limite” (74). Society has tried to restrict something that cannot be controlled or taken away. Freedom for Claire, and perhaps for Chauvet as well, resides within the soul, in the interior of our psyches. Not even a dictator as omnipotent as Duvalier can curtail our individual and personal freedom. For this reason, both Claire and Chauvet are perceived as threats to the Duvalier regime, they can neither be suppressed nor controlled. Claire’s female masculinity is actualized the moment she understands that her freedom belongs to no one else but her. Her female masculinity destabilizes the hegemony of dominant masculinities circumscribed by and entrenched in discourses, practices and histories of violence. In this moment when traditional masculinity is put into crisis, her female masculinity emerges, challenging and reformulating masculinity.

Freedom, as we have seen, is the foundation of Haitian identity. This is especially true for Chauvet as she exercises her freedom to write the dictatorship. In *Amour, Colère, et Folie*, she offers an incredibly intimate experience of dictatorship, especially through her female masculine heroines, Claire and Rose. Building on Judith Halberstam’s concept of female masculinity through the importance of property ownership in Haitian masculinity, I have shown Claire and Rose to be female patriarchs. Their practice of female masculinity reflects back the state of masculinity under tyranny and oppression, thereby troubling the authority of masculinity practiced by men. In the absence of male resistance and protection in the mulatto class, Rose and Claire are coerced into adopting female masculine identities. In *Colère*, the Normil men are faced with a violent totalitarianism that denies men the very axes of masculine praxis—power and privilege—and find themselves in positions of helplessness and/or complicity. In order to

retain their land, therefore their freedom, they must sacrifice Rose. In *Amour*, Claire's masculine education and ambiguous positionality condition her social marginalization. However, her practice of female masculinity redefines manhood, allowing her to, finally, love herself.

2. Violent Offenders: Masculinity and the Poetics of Violence in Frankétienne's  
*Ultravocal* and Georges Castera's *Le Retour à l'arbre*

Frankétienne and Georges Castera published their seminal literary works at a time of great upheaval in Haiti, with the transition of rule from François Duvalier to the even more brutal rule of his son, Jean-Claude. François Duvalier had been elected President of Haiti on September 22, 1957, and cemented his power through a dubious election in 1964 which named him President for Life. The indiscriminate deployment of violence, torture, and terror marked his rule. On François Duvalier's death in 1971, his nineteen-year-old son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, took over this brutal legacy of oppression only to exacerbate the country's dire situation with more corruption and violence. Under Duvalier *fils*, Haiti experienced one of its darkest periods marked by extreme poverty and hunger, brutality, terror and abuse. It is at this juncture of transition between the two regimes, that Frankétienne's *Ultravocal* (1972) and Castera's *Le Retour à l'arbre* (1974) were produced. The harsh experiences and realities of the regime are at the heart of these texts. They not only provide the backdrop, but constitute the very language through which the experience of the dictatorship is articulated. Frankétienne's poetic prose and Castera's poetry not only reflect the violence of the dictatorship, they make that violence manifest through poetic form, style, and language. In this chapter, I show how these two works examine and deconstruct formulations of masculine subjectivity through a poetics of violence.

I contend that the authors created their prodigious texts so that they may be experienced as journeys rather than simple acts of reading. Frankétienne's *Ultravocal* and Castera's *Le Retour à l'arbre* take the reader on an odyssey through the violent lands of fractured

subjectivities in order to formulate their own engagements with masculinity within a context of domination and deprivation. Furthermore, the violence and brutality of the dictatorship are woven into the very fabric of their poetry and prose, into the images and the language of their works. That violence is the language of the Duvalier dictatorship that both authors reappropriate for their own creative uses. In the case of Frankétienne, he writes a Spiralist masterpiece that attests to the horrors of living in Duvalier's Haiti. Though "[l]'enfer continue ses ravages," Frankétienne writes that, "Le poète declare la guerre à la peur et à la mort. Branle-bas de combat. Au point où nous en sommes, le refus est impossible" (304). The poet points to language as his weapon of choice to fight the dictatorship, which I argue that he does by espousing the violence of the dictatorship as the language of his poetics; and through which he offers a critique of the violence of Duvalierist masculinity. He engages the reader and subtly implores her/him to piece together the fragments of the text, as Vatel does, and to make meaning from chaos and destruction. Regarding Georges Castera, I examine, through a Surrealist lens, the recovery and reconstruction of a masculine poetic subjectivity within the context of the violent Duvalier dictatorship. Starting with the absence of the poetic "je," I trace the ways in which the poet manipulates the language of violence to salvage and reassert his masculine subjectivity.

#### Mac Abre Masculinity: A Readerly Critique of Duvalierist Manhood

In the first section, I focus on Frankétienne's text. I first consider the ways in which the violence of Frankétienne's lived experience translates into his writing. I, moreover, argue that a more gendered understanding of these works can illuminate much about gendered landscapes of dictatorial violence. Next, I develop a Sadean analysis of writing violence which reflects the ways in which Frankétienne—and to a certain extent, Castera—appropriates violence to write his

experience of the dictatorship and to create his poetry. I, then, explore the importance of the reader by placing *Ultravocal* into conversation with two other works in which the reader is addressed directly and led through a world of violence and mayhem: Dante's *Inferno* and the Comte de Lautréamont's *Les Chants de Maldoror*. In comparing these works, I show how Frankétienne privileges readership and relation over power or authorial possession. This intertextual investigation reveals that Frankétienne embeds his text into a genealogy of writing violence beyond Haiti. I use this insight to interrogate Frankétienne's text, focusing on the two figures of Mac Abre and Vatel. Finally, I examine the depiction of sexual violence in *Ultravocal* through Mac Abre.

A protean master of literature and art, Frankétienne has always lived and created in Haiti. Born in 1936, just two years after the end of the U.S. occupation of Haiti he has endured the rise and fall of many troubled and erratic governments. Most notably, he lived and wrote under one of the most repressive and violent regimes in the nation's history, the Duvalier dictatorship. Deeply engaged with his environment, his oeuvre spans from poetry and novels to theater and even painting. Constantly feeling the need to express himself through diverse forms and genres, he creates in order to survive. Due to, or possibly in spite of, his circumstances, his works, particularly *Ultravocal*, are always articulated through the language of violence and chaos. Perhaps this is because of his own life under dictatorship and, more importantly, as the product of violence. As the artist himself has illustrated through his work and interviews, he was conceived as the result of a rape.<sup>54</sup> His mother was only thirteen when she was raped by an older, white American industrialist. Conceived in an act of violence, Frankétienne was born a light

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<sup>54</sup> See Jean Jonassaint, "Frankétienne," *Île en île* (<http://ile-en-ile.org/Frankétienne/>), N.p., 17 October 1999.



skinned child in a predominantly black area of Haiti. Furthermore, he knew nothing of his father beyond the circumstances of his conception.

As a direct product of sexual violence, it is plausible that Frankétienne is more sensitive to the effects of sexual violence committed by the masculine body. Images of rape and other forms of sexual violence permeate the text and appear frequently throughout the narrative. For example, Mac Abre—"l'incarnation du mal" (11) and the practitioner of "violence majusculaire" (50)—takes great pleasure in rape, along with mutilation and murder. Not only is he an agent of evil, he takes pleasure in violating women's bodies, which parallels the Duvalier dictatorship's practices of sexual torture and violence.<sup>55</sup>

Published in 1972, *Ultravocal* appeared in the wake of Francois Duvalier's death in the year prior. Its publication came at the transition point between the two rulers; when Jean-Claude Duvalier had just inherited the presidency. As scholars have suggested, given the conditions of its genesis, *Ultravocal* was directly produced by and under the violence and oppression of the dictatorship. Kaiama Glover confirms, "Determined to engage absolutely with the quotidian violence that plagued Haiti during the Duvalier régimes, the Spiralists have spent much of their creative energies figuring out how to survive while writing within and about their country" (20). Like the poetic group *Haiti Littéraire*, which preceded *Spiralisme*, the poets and writers had to adopt an oblique and opaque style in order to escape censorship and more importantly, capture and death. Since the regime eradicated all signs of dissent or defiance by killing and torturing,

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<sup>55</sup> Rachel Douglas draws a parallel between eating and sex in the text where the lines become blurred and sexual violence becomes a cannibalistic act. See *Frankétienne and Rewriting a Work in Progress* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2009): 117. For more on rape as a weapon of state violence under the Duvaliers see Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminism (1980-1990)." *Feminist Studies* 21.1 (1995): 135-64 and Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo's "'Fanm Se Poto Mitan: Haitian Woman, the Pillar of Society,'" *Feminist Review* 59 (1998): 118-142.

writing became a particularly perilous endeavor. She states that, “[Frankétienne, René Philoctète, and Jean-Claude Fignolé] have avoided taking any plainly political stance—a position that undoubtedly reflects the many dangers faced by intellectuals in Haiti during the period of the Duvalier dictatorships” (ix). Hence, writing under the dictatorship necessitated a style which was capable of artistic expression without being too explicit. The *Spiralistes* perfected an almost cryptographic style of writing, which Glover characterizes as “a position of purposeful chaos” (xiv).

In *Ultravocal*, the subject is in crisis. He, like Vatel, is wandering, looking for meaning. Piecing together slivers and fragments of information, Vatel and the poet seek meaning as they seek themselves. Following in the wake of Mac Abre’s destruction, they engage with the aftermath in order to reconstruct something significant. They cannot allow the baneful masculinity of the dictatorship—in other words, Mac Abre’s masculinity—to prevail, they want to forge their own subject position in a context of violence and devastation. Frankétienne writes his experience of violent oppression under dictatorship, fabricating poetry with that very violence in order to process and eventually refuse it. He, along with his characters, seek to make sense of the violence, ultimately in the hopes of surviving it.

To better understand this imperative, I turn to one of the most infamous writers of violence, Donatien Alphonse François de Sade, better known as the Marquis de Sade. Specifically, he wrote violence as intertwined with desire and domination and his approach may provide a useful frame through which to examine the poetry of Frankétienne and Castera. Sade’s violent texts reflect his propensity for finding pleasure in pain. Michèle Vallentini, in “Violence in history and the rise of the historical novel: The case of the Marquis de Sade,” views Sade as a

traumatized victim of history, trying to make sense of the chaos of the revolutionary era.

Reacting to his own historical moment, Frankétienne, like Sade, writes the violence of his life into text. On the other hand, Thomas Wynn's Butlerean reading of Sade's texts reveals that the Sadean self is, in fact, constituted through extreme violence. Furthermore, Wynn posits that, "violence exerts a creative as well as a destructive force upon its object, in that it brings the recognizable subject into being" (142). Indeed, the generative potential of violence is also expressed throughout both *Ultravocal* and *Le Retour à l'arbre* as the authors transform chaos and violence into poetry. Within such violent contexts, however, the individual is particularly vulnerable to subjective annihilation, thus the imperative to create.

Wynn's analysis of the Sadean subject provides further insight into the workings of violence and subjectivity. He argues that the subject is actually constituted through extreme violence, and investigates the subject's vulnerability through Judith Butler's theory of subjection. He states that,

[t]he Sadean subject emerges precisely by recoiling from external power, by denying its own instantiating subordination, and by then claiming that the self is immune and immutable... With this comforting fiction of plenitude in place, the subject sustains itself by denying its own vulnerability and dependency, and by exploiting those same features in others, thereby making such features other to itself. (158)

Here, Wynn indicates the annihilation of the other is vital to the maintenance of the self. This Sadean convention, though, is contrary to the poetic practices of Frankétienne and Castera. They do not rebuke their own vulnerabilities. They, instead, live their vulnerabilities and through that experience, they have the possibility of finding and rebuilding their masculine subject positions.

Whereas the Sadean self, according to Wynn, is comparable to the poets' depiction of Duvalierist masculinity, rebuking weakness and reinforcing its power through the destruction and subordination of others.

Bringing the Marquis de Sade into conversation with Haiti, Joan Dayan and Doris Garraway reveal the impact of colonial practices on both Sade and Enlightenment thinking. For Dayan, the foundation for Sade's literary imagination was the *Code Noir*, bringing the plantation to Enlightenment Europe.<sup>56</sup> Garraway, on the other hand, redefines *libertinage* as, "a libidinal economy undergirding exploitative power relations" (26). Importantly, she diverges from Sade's tendency towards objectification by including considerations of race and gender in relation to *libertinage*, especially with regard to the mulatto women. Working against the colonial view of mulatto women as reduced to excessively erotic objects, she locates a relative agency in their amorous connections. For both Dayan and Garraway, Sade brings into conversation contrary philosophies and experiences through the writing of violence.

On the implications of violence in the workings of reason, Marcel Hénaff, in "La terreur nue. Violence dans l'histoire, violence dans la fiction," traces the emergence of a new kind of violence, *la terreur*, which, in turn, engenders libertine terror. Using the Marquis de Sade's texts as an example, he posits the term, "c'est la terreur nue: une terreur sans fondement politique, sans légitimité historique, pure violence d'un désir qui récuse toute médiation, tout délai, toute prohibition. En somme, l'absolu du plaisir...fonde un nihilisme de la raison" (114). For Hénaff, the Sadean text is only concerned with gratification through violence, and Sade's terror is a form of power and control over discourse. Moreover, in a later chapter, Hénaff defines the concept of

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<sup>56</sup> Dayan 212-19

cruelty through Nietzsche and Artaud as an intensification of violence that seeks the annihilation of the other. He states, “La cruauté indique une passion de détruire l’humanité de l’autre ; plus encore : de nier la frontière de l’humanité même ; de proclamer que l’autre homme n’est pas mon semblable ; de produire l’autre comme non humain” (168). Perhaps the way to counteract this cruelty is to represent it as Frankétienne does. As the dictatorship inflicts cruelty upon the entire country, writers claim their humanity by writing violence. Their texts not only attest to their humanity, they combat subjective annihilation. Left with little choice, the appropriation of violence is a matter of survival.

In the first pages of *La Nouvelle Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu* (1797), Sade declares his mission against the exaltation of virtue and sets out to prove its immateriality through the eponymous character, Justine. He writes,

Tels sont les sentiments qui vont diriger nos travaux ; et c'est en raison de ces motifs, qu'unissant le langage le plus cynique aux systèmes les plus forts et les plus hardis, aux idées les plus immorales et les plus impies, nous allons, avec une courageuse audace, peindre le crime comme il est, c'est-à-dire, toujours triomphant et sublime, toujours content et fortuné, et la vertu comme on la voit également, toujours maussade et toujours triste, toujours pédante et toujours malheureuse. (4)

In this citation, he lays out his objective quite clearly. He aims to dismantle virtue through the use of language, which he will do by exploiting the worst of humanity. Promoting, instead the strength and ubiquity of vice, the Marquis de Sade depicts, “les malheurs effrayans dont le ciel accable la femme douce et sensible qui respect le mieux le vertu” (3). Turning Justine into the object of the worst cruelties and violence, he, as Will McMorran argues, implicates the reader in

a strange complicity, especially the male reader.<sup>57</sup> Sade writes violence in order to destroy and to create something different; to oppose traditional conventions and thought.

Frankétienne, however, has a different purpose in writing violence. He does not seek to gratuitously reproduce violence for pleasure or prove the relativity of morals. Knowing that he cannot change history, he, instead, desires understanding and meaning. Thomas Wynn, in his introduction to *Representing Violence in France 1760-1820*, argues that, “violence cannot be understood, in fact, it will not be understood or even seriously contemplated; it is unthinkable” (4). Unwilling to accept assessments such as Wynn’s, Frankétienne creates a narrative for violence in order to process it, ultimately, to make sense of it. He reproduces hell so that, in knowing it, he can refuse it. Though their objectives and messages are different, at their core, Sade and Frankétienne represent historical and political violence through a textual medium. Hence, as I will argue later, Frankétienne effectively inserts himself into a genealogy of writing violence.

On Frankétienne, scholars such as Kaiama Glover and Rachel Douglas have explored the political and aesthetic tensions in Frankétienne’s work, especially in conjunction with Édouard Glissant’s theories of Relation and *antillanité*. In her book, Douglas considers the processes of rewriting in Glissant and Chamoiseau’s theorizations and literary works. She draws on the openness and repetition of the figure of the Spiral, implicating this structure as an operative piece in the Caribbean literary practice of rewriting. Glover, on the other hand, employs Glissant’s theorization of *antillanité* as a lens to read Frankétienne’s *oeuvre* where she asserts that the

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<sup>57</sup> Will McMorran, “The sound of violence: listening to rape in Sade,” *Representing violence in France 1760-1820*, edited by Thomas Wynn, (Voltaire Foundation: Oxford, 2013): 229-49.

theories posited by Glissant in his essays are actually realized in Frankétienne's prose.<sup>58</sup>

Depicting the narrative and the characters as fragmented and schizophrenic, she insists that, "the majority of his [Frankétienne's] characters maintain a fundamental impermeability—a desired Glissantian opacity, one might even say—both with respect to the reader and, it seems, to the author himself" (95). While they present paradoxical points of view, both the openness and the opacity of the text inform the reading process, implicating the reader in the processes of meaning making.

Though I identify masculinity as the central theme of *Ultravocal*, the question of gender is not widely addressed in examinations of Frankétienne's creative productions. Often gender issues are obscured by the political, social, historical and geopolitical critiques present in his works. However, Marie-Denise Shelton's essay, "Frankétienne au féminin," offers a much-needed feminine perspective. She criticizes the painter-author for his depiction of women as, "un être étrange et résolument 'autre'" (27). Her analysis reveals that women, in Frankétienne's fiction, are either accessories or maternal bodies that remain undeveloped as real characters. Her concerns over the representation of women in Haitian literature is completely legitimate, however, by focusing on the silencing of women by masculine discourse she ignores that same discourse's power to silence other men. It at this juncture, between masculine domination and feminine resistance, that Frankétienne formulates his critique of masculine discourse as promoted by the dictatorship.

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<sup>58</sup> Kaiama L. Glover "Showing vs. Telling: Spiralisme in the Light of Antillanité." *Journal of Haitian Studies* 14.1 (2008): 91-117.

Shelton's study appears within a larger collection of essays dedicated to Frankétienne's works. Edited by Jean Jonassaint, *Typo/Topo/Poétique sur Frankétienne* (2008), brings together an exhaustive study on Frankétienne's creative and artistic productions as well as their reception around the world. Along with Douglas and Glover, Jonassaint contributes another volume dedicated to Frankétienne studies. Although Phillippe Bernard's *Rêve et littérature romanesque en Haïti: De Jacques Roumain au mouvement Spiraliste* (2003) is not entirely devoted to the author, he includes an extensive meditation on Frankétienne's *oeuvre* in his fourth chapter, "Haïti dans la Spirale." Concentrating on the oniric qualities of *Spiralisme*, he calls Mac Abre, "le Marassa-absolu de Maldoror, le maître des rêves, la chair des cauchemars," in Duvalier's nightmarish rule over Haiti (231). While Bernard interprets Mac Abre as "un produit d'importation états-unien" (220) and "le frère américain de la créature de Ducasse [Maldoror]" (231), I contend that Mac Abre, in the present moment of *Ultravocal*, is a Haitian manifestation of evil. More precisely, he is the physical incarnation of the evil of the Duvalier dictatorship and the violence of the masculinity that it promotes.

Furthermore, Kaiama Glover's seminal book, *Haiti Unbound: A Spiralist Challenge to the Postcolonial Canon* (2010), demonstrates the ways in which the *Spiralistes* works are a direct product of their environment, that is to say, the dictatorship. Their refusal to leave their country and their determination to not only endure the dictatorship, but to create and to flourish artistically indicate an unbreakable connection to their terrain and a commitment to their craft. The *Spiraliste* movement was characterized by its deployment of ambiguity, an exquisite implementation of opacity and, of course, by the shape of the spiral itself. *Spiralisme* is the manifestation of chaos; chaos made into language. In an interview with Yves Chemla and Daniel



Pujol, Frankétienne relates, “J’ai pris conscience de l’importance du phénomène du chaos dans tous les aspects de la vie, que le chaos était une constante et non une exception, que les lueurs de rationalité étaient des exceptions” (114). Moreover, he consciously rejects the notion and form of the novel in favor of the spiral, which he characterizes as “un genre total” and “une oeuvre ouverte” (115). The spiral implies openness, chaos and the infinite. As Glover elucidates, the spiral is, “the interplay of repetition and deviation at work,” (viii) and it “represented a formal testament to the possibility of the infinite” (viii). Winding around an axis, the spiral offers a way to revisit without getting stuck in repetition. It allows for the possibility of creative expression under the strictest censure. In his essay defining *Spiralisme*, Philippe Bernard describes the spiral as, “une sorte de rebellion totale contre toute tentation d’enfermement, une folie revendiquée ‘sans alexitère connu,’ un cri poussé par une voix multiple, chœur schizophonique né sous le fer rouge de l’angoisse sous Duvalier” (109). As a matter of fact, Glover demonstrates that Frankétienne started to etch out a definition of *Spiralisme* in *Mur à crever* (1968), which would become fully realized in his later work, *Ultravocal*. It is this impossibly tenebrous text that becomes the manifestation of *Spiralisme* through a poetics of violence and chaos.

While previous scholarship has emphasized the stylistic, schizophrenic, linguistic, polyphonic and/or political aspects of *Ultravocal*, I propose a new direction by examining Frankétienne’s critique of the violence of Duvalierist masculinity. In my examination of the text, I proceed with a close reading of Frankétienne’s address to the reader which is put into conversation with Dante’s and Lautréamont’s addresses to the reader. The addresses serve to highlight the importance of the reader of the literary text to the task of meaning making. Furthermore, I consider not only the attention brought to the maleness of the bodies of the two

main characters, but also, the highly sexualized figurations of masculinity through the character of Mac Abre. Moreover, I argue that Mac Abre represents more than a universal evil, he embodies both the dictatorship and the terror that the regime sought to inflict in its most extreme form. His is the absolute power of death and sex, weaponized against the people and the land. In contrast, Vatel is the wandering reader who seeks meaning and relation through the piecing together of textual fragments. Moreover, Vatel's reading practices draw the reader into process of meaning making itself. Finally, I will examine the ways in which Frankétienne espouses the very violence of the dictatorship as the language of his poetics, which, in turn, bestows generative properties to the reappropriated violence. In Frankétienne's work, violence becomes a creative force.

*Ultravocal* is a masterpiece of *Spiralisme*. Neither poetry nor prose, it engages with conventions of both genres to articulate the chaos and violence of life in Haiti under siege. It has no real narrative nor a true protagonist, it is an opaque text comprised of fragments and episodes. Barely even a story, the reader follows a wanderer named Vatel who, in turn, is pursuing the transhistorical incarnation of evil, Mac Abre. As his very name suggests, Mac Abre cultivates and disseminates death along with destruction and chaos. The most violent and deadly events in history are attributed to Mac Abre, from the inquisition to transatlantic slavery to the bombing of Hiroshima. He is the personification of death, the very manifestation of evil. He is, "Mac Abre, souverain roi des abîmes infinis, [qui] jubile en plein chaos" (96). Moreover, as Bernard describes, "Mac Abre travaille la pâte du pouvoir occulte, c'est un être toute de violence et cynisme" (*Ultravocal* 8). Mac Abre's association with the occult, already brings to mind the

President-for-life, François Duvalier, who manipulated vaudou for his own aggrandizement.<sup>59</sup>

Not only is Mac Abre evil incarnate, he is also Vatel's *raison d'être*. Condemned to walk the earth in search of his nemesis, Vatel journeys through the hellish landscape of death and carnage in the hopes of confronting Mac Abre face to face. Like Dante in hell, Vatel wanders through unimaginable landscapes of violence, mutilation, and brutality.

While Frankétienne does not make explicit intertextual references in *Ultravocal*, I believe that reading it in relation to some classic works of Western literature—with which it may be thematically and formally linked—uncover and resituate the reader's role in the creative processes of reading. As Vatel follows Mac Abre, he pieces together textual fragments in order to create meaning. Hence, the act of reading takes on special precedence in this work. Indeed, Frankétienne directly addresses the reader in his book, as do Dante Alighieri in *Inferno* and Comte de Lautréamont in *Les Chants de Maldoror* (1868). Though it may seem strange to read these three works in relation to each other, they are all surprisingly similar in content and form. All three works explore evil and hellish landscapes through poetic language and allegory. They also engage with themes of violence, subjectivity and oppression. In examining the addresses to the reader, I insert *Ultravocal* into a tradition of writing violence and establish a genealogy of writers and texts that explore the reconstruction of subjectivity through the terrains of evil.

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<sup>59</sup> François Duvalier's manipulation of vaudou imagery and iconography has been observed and commented on by many scholars, journalists and writers. I address Duvalier's manipulation of vaudou and vaudou iconography more in depth in Chapter 3. His tendency to fashion himself after Baron Samedi, the *lwa* of the dead, has been of particular interest to scholarly discussions. See Myriam J. A. Chancy. *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997): 26. See also, Laurent Dubois. *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*. (New York: Picador, 2013): 331-2 and James Ferguson. *Papa Doc, Baby Doc: Haiti and the Duvaliers*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989): 52.

Furthermore, I believe that the evolution of the role of the reader and their relationship to the text is essentially a practice of meaning making in which the author and reader are equals.

A perennial object of analysis and exemplar of its genre, Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* is the first canticle of the 14<sup>th</sup>-century epic poem, *Divina Commedia*. As the title evinces, we follow the pilgrim and his guide, Virgil, on his journey through Hell in search of his lost love, Beatrice. Canto by canto, circle by circle, the reader follows the pilgrim into the very depths of Hell. We explore, through Dante, the various sins and punishments—or *contrapassi*—of men. In other words, we explore the very nature of evil. As Lino Pertile claims, Dante's main objective in the *Inferno*, "is to find words adequate to his experience" (67). In a way, Frankétienne is doing the same thing. He seeks a way to translate his life under the Duvalier dictatorship into words that effectively bear witness to his experience of hell. Both Dante and Frankétienne find poetry to be the best language through which to document and relate their experiences.

Beyond the superficial similarities between the works lies a curious interaction between the author/narrator and the reader. In all three of the poetic works, the author/narrator directly addresses the reader on multiple occasions. Each address has a different objective and function, yet they all seek to establish a reciprocal and dependent relationship between the reader, the poet or author and the text. While this relation resembles that of Reader-Response theories, it differs in that neither the text, nor the experience of reading, nor the author is more important than the others.<sup>60</sup> Both *Ultravocal* and *Les Chants de Maldoror* open with an address to the reader, while

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<sup>60</sup> See Jane P. Tomkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980) for a more extensive survey of Reader-Response theories. While I draw upon these theories, I see an inherent hierarchy between text and reader or reader and author that I do not believe applies to Frankétienne's work.

Dante's first entreaty appears one third of the way into the text. In Canto IX, Dante and Virgil find themselves at an impasse before the gates of the City of Dis. Surrounded by harpies who threaten to call down the horrifying figure of Medusa, Dante the poet urges, "O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani,/ mirate la dottrina che s'asconde/ sotto 'l velame de li versi strani" (O you who have sound intellects, gaze on the teaching that is hidden beneath the veil of the strange verses) (61-3).<sup>61</sup> This is Dante's first direct address to the reader. Here, the poet implores the readers to use their healthy intellects (li 'ntelletti sani) to see past the strangeness of the language (li versi strani) to explore and derive deeper meanings from the text.

By acknowledging the reader, he thereby cements a relationality between reader and poet. This gesture reveals the intricate relationship between Dante and his readers, one in which his poetic authority and textual livelihood are dependent on the participation of the reader. Yet, in his groundbreaking essay, "Dante's Addresses to the Reader," Erich Auerbach notes that, "the reader of the poem never becomes an actual companion in the journey" (45). Instead, he argues, "[t]he reader, as envisioned by Dante (and in point of fact, Dante creates his reader), is a disciple. He is not expected to discuss or judge but to follow" (46). On the one hand, the very existence and power of Dante's poetry are contingent on active and intelligent readers. On the other, the poet never compromises his position with regard to the reader. He alone has been entrusted with the divine responsibility of revealing God's truth.

Many centuries later, *Les Chants de Maldoror* parallels the violent poetic exploration of power and subjectivity through the character of Maldoror. Written by the fictional Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror* was published between 1868 and 1869. In reality, Comte

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<sup>61</sup> Translations done by Robert M. Durling in the facing translation of the verses.

de Lautréamont was the *nom de plume* of Isidore-Lucien Ducasse, a Uruguay-born French writer who would later become a major influence on the Surrealist movement. Having witnessed the Argentine-Uruguayan war as a child, his life and works are marked by violence and destruction. Much like *Ultravocal*, *Les Chants de Maldoror* features a figure of absolute evil, Maldoror, who relishes in killing, raping and torturing. He particularly enjoys drinking of the blood of children and copulating with sharks. Written as a poetic novel, Maldoror's final memoir comprises six cantos from his deathbed. Like Frankétienne, Lautréamont questions the power of language, the function of poetry and its relation to violence.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, Lautréamont opens his poetic novel with an ominous address to the reader. The very first line of the poem calls out to the reader. Maldoror writes,

Plût au ciel que *le lecteur*, enhardi et devenu momentanément féroce comme ce qu'il lit, trouve, sans se désorienter, son chemin abrupt et sauvage, à travers les marécages désolés de ces pages sombres et pleines de poison ; car, à moins qu'il n'apporte dans sa lecture une logique rigoureuse et une tension d'esprit égale au moins à sa défiance, les émanations mortelles de ce livre imbiberont son âme comme l'eau le sucre. (123, *emphasis mine*)

As Dante incited our healthy intellect, Maldoror appeals to the reader's rigorous logic (une logique rigoureuse) to get them safely through the text. He warns us that a bad or failed reading of the text could literally corrupt our souls. As Alex de Jonge argues, "He shatters the complacent acceptance of the reality proposed by their cultural traditions" (1). He adds that, "[Lautréamont] uses language as a model to build patterns that clarify and articulate the issues at

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<sup>62</sup> Phillippe Bernard, *Rêve et littérature romanesque en Haïti: De Jacques Roumain au mouvement Spiraliste* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006). He considers Mac Abre to be, "le Marassa-absolu de Maldoror" (231). He compares the two figures quite substantially in his fourth chapter.

stake. The models are not designed to provide answers, but to *explicate* the questions, taking that word in its etymological sense of *explicare*—to unfold” (2 *italics in original*). Poetic language, therefore, takes on a pedagogical function which seeks to destroy our understanding of the world so that we may finally see it for what is really is. Like Dante, Lautréamont’s addresses reinforce the relationship between the reader, the poet and the text.

While Dante and Lautréamont address their reader within the body of their texts, Frankétienne addresses his reader in a paratextual note before the story actually begins. In this note, he demands a productive reading of his text, emphasizing the reader’s role in the creation of literature itself. He states, “Le poète, prisonnier de son délire. Et surtout, *vous lecteur*, complice du jeu terrible de l’écriture ; vous dont la participation conditionne l’existence du livre.” He continues that, “La production littéraire ne vaut que par la lecture créatrice, celle qui a pour tâche d’agencer, à travers une relative ambiguïté, les divers éléments structuraux de l’ouvrage (11 *emphasis mine*). He implicates the reader in the writing process itself. Acknowledging the opacity of his poetry, he encourages creative reading practices, to which he attributes the very existence of books. He goes even further than Dante and Lautréamont by putting writer and reader on the same level, reiterating the interdependence of the two sides. Indeed, Frankétienne privileges the reading experience and meaning over power or authorial possession. The text is an experience forged through the sharing of language. Furthermore, the reader has the added responsibility of the future and fate of the writing. Writing—i.e., the text—can only exist as long as there is a public to read it.

In acknowledging the role of the reader in the creation of the text, Frankétienne builds a reciprocal relationship, through which he shares his experience of the dictatorship. This

redefinition of readers' responsibilities is both empowering and troubling as the relationship can easily shift from cooperation to collusion. In "The sound of violence: listening to rape in Sade," Will McMorran insists that the reader's reception of Sadean violence actually renders him complicit. Examining the aural effects of reading, he stresses the importance of gender in the reading of sexual violence. Depending on the gender of the reader, their reaction to the description of Justine's rape can vary drastically, he states, "It may alternatively, however, create anxieties of its own for the male reader in particular: hearing oneself performing a Sadean script in one's own voice may reinforce the uncomfortable sense of gendered complicity in the violence being represented" (241). Here, he points to the sharing of guilt through the act of reading which renders the reader complicit in acts of violence, particularly sexual violence. The danger of writing violence is transferring that violence to the reader who, then, becomes participant.

With this in mind, we return to the reading practices of the character of Vatel as he gathers the pieces and fragments of text while following Mac Abre's trail of destruction. Throughout the journey, Vatel gleans bits of information and tries to reconstruct some form of meaning. As Bernard notes, "Vatel ne peut acquérir qu'une perception reconstruite du monde extérieur, créée à coups de lambeaux d'articles de journaux glanés dans les caniveaux. Images parcellaires d'un danger latent auquel Mac Abre est loin d'être étranger, mais images difficiles à décoder" (221). Not only must Vatel decipher the textual fragments, he must make them mean something. His quest is one of understanding, a quest for meaning making. For example, when Vatel finds a piece of a newspaper, he is compelled to fill in the blanks. He thinks,



Il s'agissait pour lui de reconstituer ce qui avait été publié dans le journal, en ajoutant les éléments absents. Les hypothèses abondèrent. Vendre. Mais vendre quoi? Vendredi. Vendre la mèche. Vendre le chat. Vendre les. Non. Vendredi sans aucun doute. Les fortes décl. Déclivites. Déclarations. Déclamations. Déclinaisons. De quelqu'un. D'un certain Mac. Donc déclarations de Mac au moment de son investiture ide. Aide. Laide. Vide. Impavide. Froide. Bolide. Régicide. Suicide. Je m'y perds, se dit-il. (124-5)

While the meanings that he makes may not be those originally intended, they mean something to him and, more importantly, to us. Notably, the possibility of meanings proliferates under Vatel's scrutiny. He fills in missing letters by approximation; his thoughts stray, build and multiply. By filling in the blanks, Vatel reveals his innermost thoughts through an accidental play of word association. For instance, his train of thought ends with "Régicide. Suicide." Following the appearance of "Mac ," which the reader automatically fills in as Mac Abre, Vatel's thoughts veer toward the macabre as he thinks of the killing of a monarch or even himself. Though Duvalier was not a king, his status as President for Life and the dynastic structure of his regime resembled a monarchy. In thinking of killing the king, Vatel—and perhaps even Frankétienne—is briefly contemplating the assassination of the head of state.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of regicide with suicide reveals another layer of meaning when considered together and in relation to the dictatorship. On the one hand, regicide might necessitate a suicide. On the other hand, the alternative to regicide might be suicide. The only way to escape living under an evil dictator may be suicide, whether voluntary or involuntary. The thousands of people who escaped Haiti faced that choice as they crossed the seas to a new

life.<sup>63</sup> The unknown numbers of political prisoners who were tortured, imprisoned, executed or simply disappeared were also committing a kind of assisted suicide. It could be said that just the act of living was tantamount to suicide as the threat of death lurked in every corner of life, and any action could result in one's own death.

On the very same page, Frankétienne writes, “Nos fictions se révèlent plus vraies que la réalité” (125). Our fictions—our creativity and our ability to interpret—are what give meaning to reality. It is through fiction that Frankétienne can relate his experience of the dictatorship and present his critique of Duvalierist masculinity. It is the reader, however, that will extract and construct meaning from the opacity of his prose. We are invested with the task of meaning making and the future of this text. It is up to the reader to not only understand and analyze the lines of the text, but to imagine something new. While his prose may seem chaotic, Frankétienne revels in chaos and its generative potential. His chaos is not chaotic. Moreover, the chaotic nature of his writing demonstrates that it cannot be constrained by order. It is, by nature, resistant to oppression and enclosure. Furthermore, it obliterates hierarchies.

Neither dictator, nor author can exist in the chaotic spiral in which Frankétienne uses the very language of the dictatorship to critique it. His poetry and his prose, make real the dictatorship. In writing that evil, he appropriates the violence of the dictatorship to communicate his experience to a reading public, sharing his trauma with others. The poet relates, “L'enfer brûle dans ma tête. Ne pouvant ni oublier ni dormir en paix, j'écris comme un forçat... Je supplie mon âme de m'inspirer les mots capables de rompre le charme maléfique de la mise en scène”

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<sup>63</sup> For a more complete examination on exile and Haiti after 1946, see Martin Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrrière, Danticat*. (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007). See also, Dubois *Haiti* 229-30.

(40). The only way to break free from the catatonic state induced by Duvalierism is to write. The poet writes in order to survive. In this relational sharing of trauma, Frankétienne encourages the reader to share and to expand upon the experience of the text. The reading process, for Frankétienne, is a reciprocal and mutually constructive activity where the text cannot exist without the reader, nor does the reader exist without the text. It is this relation that constitutes the experience of the text, and thus of the dictatorship. Furthermore, this relationship allows the poet to imagine greater, offering a way to leave to the stifling environment of Duvalierist Haiti.

Returning to the figure of Mac Abre, he is the incarnation of the Duvalierist dictatorship and the evil it disseminates. His very presence heralds destruction and death, as Vatel intimates : “Où passe Mac Abre, le mal le précède, l’accompagne et le suit. D’un côté, la sécheresse, les halliers, les cactus, les ronces. De l’autre, la boue, les reptiles visqueux, l’eau morte des stagnances noirâtres, le sommeil des trous” (211). His evil transforms the very landscape into an injurious and barren environment, where life cannot sustain itself, let alone flourish. He is associated with the absence of life, with either putrefaction or its extreme, barrenness. It seems as if he is nourished by the very destruction that he brings, especially as he credits his longevity to his practice of terror. Calling himself, “scieur de jambes,” he professes that, “je pratique un métier passionnant enrichi d’une gamme infinie de cris je suis Mac Abre docteur en male incontournable!” (83). When Mac Abre calls himself the inescapable doctor immersed in evil, this conjures up an image of the country doctor turned President-for-life, Dr. François Duvalier, and his regime’s love of torture and dismemberment. Unlike, as Valerie Kaussen has described,

Claire's perturbed reaction to the screams of the victims in a nearby prison<sup>64</sup>, Mac Abre is animated by the infinite cries of his victims. Cries that inevitably evoke those heard in Fort-Dimanche prison, characterized as, "[r]ecette corsées d'horreurs en un corps de cauchemars dans la malédiction du terrible Fort-Dimanche" (171). It is here at the prison that the Tontons Macoutes tortured and executed the regime's many political prisoners. These allusions in conjunction with his pure enjoyment of evil imply that the cries of Mac Abre's victims are exactly what fuel his life, his drive for death and destruction.

Mac Abre's association with the Duvalier dictatorship is further cemented by obvious references to the violations committed by the dictatorial machine and its agents. He is characterized as someone who, "adore ces sombres époques de l'histoire où la folie fait bon ménage avec la peur. La machine à broyer n'a nul besoin de preuves. Arrestations arbitraires. Interrogatoires absurdes. Crimes échafaudés avec l'assurance de l'impunité. Le chaos absolu" (112). Here, he lists exactly the nodes through which the Duvalier dictatorship operated; the transgressions that would become synonymous with the regime itself. In fact, the gross human rights violations would become a distinctive feature of governance, requiring the intervention of foreign and international human rights organizations.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, in calling the impetus behind these events a machine, Frankétienne alludes to the unfeeling and indifferent apparatus which only seeks power to carry on its mission of acquiring more power. This machine creates absolute chaos, a condition that energizes the

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<sup>64</sup> Kaussen argues, "Claire, here, tries to assign the negated subject who is 'unmade' and effaced by torture, a presence" (172). She insists that the screams are "fragments of history" from bodies that have had their histories effaced as a result of transnational capitalist exploitation.

<sup>65</sup> See Dubois 351

nefarious Mac Abre. Indeed, chaos is precisely what activates and sustains the dictatorial machine, however, it is also that which empowers Frankétienne's poetic prose. Indeed, Marie-Édith Lenoble observes that, for Haitian poets like Frankétienne, "Le chaos n'est pas le vide ou le néant, le chaos, c'est cette masse informe et bouillonnante où sont contenus en puissance tous les éléments de la vie" (2). It becomes evident that chaos is the necessary condition for creation. Frankétienne, himself, has claimed to be inspired by chaos theory and the theory of relativity. In an interview with Yves Chemla and Daniel Pujol, he asserts "J'ai pris conscience de l'importance du phénomène du chaos dans tous les aspects de la vie, que le chaos était une constante et non une exception, que les lueurs de rationalité étaient des exceptions" (114). Chaos is, therefore, a necessary force which cannot be governed or dominated.

In addition to the devastation and chaos that he sows, Mac Abre represents the regime in yet another way, through his penchant for sexual violence. The Duvalier dictatorship was not the only Haitian government which permitted and instrumentalized sexual violence, however, it reached new heights under the regime.<sup>66</sup> As Michel Rolph-Trouillot expounds, Duvalierism changed the rules of the application of violence. Traditionally protected groups like women, children, the elderly or the handicapped were no longer exempted from acts of violence. Women endured the worst of this change as they frequently became targets for sexual violence. He relates that, "The Duvalierist preference for the sexual 'conquest' of females associated with the political opposition, from torture-rape to acquaintance-rape to marriage, infused the politicization of gender with violence" (167). Under this new system, women (and men) too

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<sup>66</sup> See Lindsey Scott, "'A rose by any other name,' Amplifying Marie Chauvet's *Colère* in Kettly Mars's *Saisons sauvages*," *FrancoSphères* 4.1 (2015), 59. For more detailed treatment on sexual violence in Haitian literature, see Régine Jean-Charles, "They Never Call It Rape: Critical Reception and Representation of Sexual Violence in Marie Vieux-Chauvet's *Amour, Colère et Folie*," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 12.2 (2006), 4-21.

often became targets of lateral retribution by the state for the perceived crimes or ills of their family members, friends or lovers. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that sexual violence was at the heart of the regime and at the disposition of the militia, the Tontons Macoutes. It became the weapon of the Macoutes in exercising their power and crushing dissent. Mac Abre mirrors this grotesque love of sexual violence as he abuses women across his journey.

On an overnight train on his way to Mégaflöre, Mac Abre sees a woman on her way to the toilet. He notes that, “La femme est excitante et belle sous les reflets bleutés de la nuit.” While this description, on its own, is relatively innocuous, it quickly turns into a scene of horror. At first, he describes an alluring woman against the blue-black night. Then the scene quickly devolves as, “Il suit la femme et l’êtreint brutalement.” Surprised by this unexpected assault, the woman fights back. In return, “Il la gifle. Il déchire son corsage violemment... [mais] elle lui mord le pouce de toute la force de ses mâchoires et de ses dents. C’est alors que Mac Abre la projette dans le gouffre” (109). Without any provocation or encouragement, he attempts to rape and eventually murders an innocent stranger on a train. She disappears into the abyss like so many Haitians who dared to oppose or were thought to have resisted the omnipotent forces of the dictatorship. What is most horrifying—is not his nonchalance—it is the fact that he is satisfied with either violent potentiality, a rape or a murder. Perhaps he would have enjoyed raping this woman, but the act of killing her produces a similarly satisfying result. He consumes destruction, he savors violence in all of its manifestations.

Mac Abre’s predilection for sexual violence is again evident in his rape and impregnation of Bénita, who, after a speedy pregnancy, gives birth to thirteen monsters. Passing through the village, Vatel bears witness to the scene, “Bénita donna naissance à une portée de treize petits

monstres qui, à midi sonnant, réclamèrent d’une voix rauque des plats de filet saignant. À la sauce piquante ! À la sauce piquante ! répétèrent-ils en chœur” (138). Mac Abre later rapes a virgin who gives birth to a poisonous snake; in a truly sickening account, he, “écarta la fente pubienne avec sauvagerie, puis d’un rire cynique introduisait son poignard jusqu’à la racine du sexe. Le sang coula abondamment” (126). Though disturbing, this quote is necessary to show Mac Abre’s enjoyment in conducting acts of sexual violence. He laughs as he stabs a dagger into the virgin’s genitals. He is energized by the blood and violence, inciting him to stab deeper into her. This scene evokes images of sexual torture that the Tontons Macoutes would have carried out in the prisons of Fort-Dimanche or elsewhere. It also brings to mind the rape of Rose in Marie Vieux Chauvet’s *Amour, Colère et Folie* (1968), in which Rose recounts her sexual violation at the hands of the head of the local militia, called the Gorilla. In the only chapter Rose narrates, she relates one of the times that she is raped, “Ce soir, il était comme un fou...il m’enfonçait son poing dans le corps et regardait couler mon sang en râlant de volupté. Vampire ! Vampire ! Je l’ai vu voir mon sang et s’en griser comme de vin” (256). This juxtaposition reveals many similarities, but most striking of all is the vampiric tendencies of the men. Both the Gorilla and Mac Abre are empowered by the consumption of blood. As representatives of the regime, they play into the autophagic reflex of the dictatorial machine which seeks to inflict violence on the bodies of women, simultaneously feeding and driving the machine, creating further violence and chaos.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> I elaborate on the autophagic reflex of the dictatorial machine more in depth in Chapter 4. The autophagic dictatorial machine simultaneously consumes and produces its own agents and resources. It is a voracious machine that eats itself in order to power itself, a self-annihilating mechanism which will ultimately lead to its own destruction.

In addition to sexual violence, Frankétienne showcases the toxic masculinity of the Duvalier dictatorship through the maleness of Mac Abre's body. Already, we have seen his male body at work through the act of rape and subsequent impregnations. However, his sexual acts do not result in normal human pregnancies, instead, they engender monsters. Frankétienne seems here to be telling an inverse version of the legend of *Sor Rose*. As Joan Dayan elaborates, "In this story, the Haitian nation began in the loins of a black woman. The ancestress must be ravished for the state to be born" (48). However, instead of a nation, the women birth monstrosities. Further highlighting that Mac Abre's male body is irrevocably damaged, incapable of producing children.

In fact, his body may not even be capable of producing sperm. For instance, while masturbating in the mud, "il éjacule avec douleur ses dernières gouttes de sang" (84). The ejaculation of blood returns in the table of horrors in his breviary:

***"Éjaculer du sang..... 22"***

It is the last item on the list, followed by the François Duvalier's fetish number, 22. Both Philippe Bernard and Rachel Douglas have investigated this number in relation to the *Borlette*, or the Haitian lottery. Douglas, in particular, interprets the numbers in the *Borlette* to have a sinister association with the dictatorship. While the correlation between François Duvalier's fetish number 22 is pertinent, I insist that this last line also evokes the violent sexualized masculinity of the dictatorship. Frankétienne plants clues and reminders in the text that call forth images of sexualized violence vis-à-vis the masculinity of the dictatorship. Here, the violence is inflicted onto the male organ itself, causing it to ejaculate blood instead of semen, evoking a wounded, unhealthy, or even a pathological masculinity. By juxtaposing Papa Doc's infamous fetish



number, 22, with the ejaculation of blood, we are further reminded of the cancerous effect of the dictatorship on the practice of masculinity. What should produce life instead, produces injury and death.

The connection between a pathological male body and the practice of Duvalierist masculinity is reiterated throughout *Ultravocal*, particularly through scenes of sexual violence and the decomposition of living matter. While Vatel follows Mac Abre's trail of destruction, he attempts to make sense of the violence by reading the textual fragments that he finds. His exercises in meaning making reveal the importance of the relationship between the reader, the author, and the text, where hierarchies are eradicated in favor of experiential sharing. It is through this porous reciprocity that alternative avenues through power and masculinity can be explored and altered. It is here that the violence of the dictatorship is transformed into text so that it can be shared and transformed through writing and reading. Indeed, on the penultimate page of *Ultravocal*, Frankétienne writes, "Je bénis la violence de l'amour. La violence de la vie. Non point celle de la mort" (306). Violence can be transformed, used to create life instead of destroying it.

#### Saving Face: In Search of Lost Subjectivity

While Frankétienne wrote from inside the dictatorship, Georges Castera composed his visual poem from exile. *Le Retour à l'arbre* is a unique poetic experience which explores the fractured and damaged subjectivities resulting from the dictatorship. Published in 1974, barely three years after Jean-Claude Duvalier assumed the presidency, Georges Castera's poetics takes the reader on a visual-textual journey to reconstruct and reclaim the poet's masculine subject position through a careful deployment of the first-person pronoun, "je." As the poet confesses

“car tout le moi est foutre/ dans un trou à coup de massue” (29). Beaten and battered, the first-person subject position (le moi) is lost in a hole and needs to be made whole again. Furthermore, his poetics are articulated through the negotiation and reappropriation of the language of violence, that is to say, the very language of the dictatorship. It is through poetry that the violence of the dictatorship is adapted and reinvested with creative properties rather than being solely destructive. In other words, the poet seeks the “dénouement/ de phrases recluses” (4).

In this section, I concentrate on the exploration and recovery of the masculine subject position through the poetic odyssey presented by Georges Castera and Bernard Wah in *Le Retour à l'arbre*. I begin my investigation by examining Castera's decision to write in French over Kreyòl in conjunction with his status as an exile during the years of the dictatorship. Next, I situate the poem within the vocabulary and aesthetics of the international avant-garde movements, where I argue that reading *Le Retour à l'arbre* as a visual poem blurs the lines between reading and viewing. I, then, explore the surrealist influence on the composition of the poem, especially with regard to the importance of liberating the subject from the damaging constraints of acculturation. Lastly, I follow the poetic odyssey through the violent landscapes of dictatorship in order to recover the masculine subject position through the reconstruction of the poetic “je.”

Georges Castera *fils* was born in 1936 in Port-au-Prince to a renowned doctor of the same name. As a young man, he demonstrated a deep passion for literature and circulated amongst other writers and artists such as Jacques Stephen Alexis, Paul Laraque and Bernard Wah, with whom he would create his poetic masterpiece, *Le Retour à l'arbre*. In 1956, months before François Duvalier became President, Castera left Haiti for Europe to advance his studies. Instead

of continuing in the footsteps of his father, he would abandon his medical studies in favor of his true passion, poetry. Finding himself stranded outside of Haiti due to the brutal Duvalier dictatorship, Castera remained in exile for thirty years, returning to his native land only days after the fall of the dictatorship in 1986.

Born in 1939, Bernard Wah was best known for his introspective paintings. Like his good friend, Villard Denis, and Georges Castera, he was both painter and poet.<sup>68</sup> However, he is remembered primarily for his evocative paintings, gaining recognition both inside and outside of Haiti. His style has been characterized as, “résolument moderne” and “toute introspection,” by Haitian journalist, Gérald Alexis. In 1965, he left Haiti for Paris through a scholarship, where he would circulate amongst other artists. It is here that he decided to abandon more traditional Haitian themes, opening himself up to a more subjective expression of his art. Just a few years later, he would settle, albeit unhappily, in New York and remain there until his death in 1981. During his time in exile, he and Castera composed and published *Le Retour à l'arbre*. This masterpiece is both visual and textual, where one cannot be read without the other.

Returning to the textual side, Georges Castera was known first for writing poetry in Kreyòl<sup>69</sup>, he is one of Haiti's most loved and respected poets. For instance, renowned Haitian writer, Lyonel Trouillot compiled a collection of Castera's poetry called *L'encre est ma demeure* (2006), in which he describes Castera as, “le plus politique des grands poètes haïtiens et l'un des initiateurs de la modernité poétique,” (9). Indeed, Castera's politically charged and passionate poetry has earned the admiration of many writers, poets and the Haitian public, even earning the

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<sup>68</sup> See Gérald Alexis, “Les artistes haïtiens en exil: Bernard Wah.” *Le Nouvelliste*. (Le Nouvelliste, 31 May 2016), for more on Bernard Wah's work and life.

<sup>69</sup> I use this spelling to indicate Haitian Creole specifically and to distinguish it from other Creoles.

distinction of Officer in the Ordre National Honneur et Mérite in 2007. Moreover, his poetry, in French and Kreyòl, has been featured in poetry anthologies and collections such as *Poésie vivante d'Haïti* (1978), *Open Gate: An Anthology of Haitian Creole Poetry* (2001), *Figures Haïti: 35 poètes pour notre temps* (2005), and, as previously mentioned, *L'encre est ma demeure*. While he has been widely recognized and celebrated in his homeland and by his fellow writers, his work has yet to receive much academic attention.<sup>70</sup> In fact, the only scholarly treatment to date is Jean Durosier Desrivières's overview of Castera's poetry, "Un langage à double canon pour une traversée à fleur de sens et de sang ou le cas Castera" in the anthology, *Écrits d'Haïti: Perspectives sur la littérature haïtienne contemporaine (1986-2006)*. Having previously published books and collections of poetry only in Kreyòl, *Le Retour à l'arbre* is Castera's first poetry book in French.<sup>71</sup> Written by Georges Castera and illustrated by Bernard Wah in 1974, the timing along with the decision to write in French is, I believe, significant. His decision to switch from Kreyòl to French indicates a desire to reach a wider audience as well as, perhaps, a more politically charged tone. Indeed, he has expressed that, "Le Français a un vocabulaire abstrait plus étendu que celui que l'on trouve en créole" (Ménard 402). Furthermore, in an interview with Rodney Saint-Éloi, Castera states that, "La poétique créole est liée à la tradition populaire haïtienne," and that, "La littérature créole est un choix conscient" (100). In other words, the choice of language is always a political choice. By choosing to write in French, Castera has decided to address different readers and deliver a different message. Not only does

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<sup>70</sup> There are fleeting mentions of Georges Castera's poetry in academic works such as Martin Munro, *Writing on the Fault Line: Haitian Literature and the Earthquake of 2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2014) pp. 19, 220, 227, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Eloge de la Créolité: Édition Bilingue français/anglais*. Trans. M.B. Taleb-Khyar (1989. Paris: Gallimard, 1993) p. 45.

<sup>71</sup> See Nadève Ménard and Bonel Auguste's interview with Castera, "Georges Castera: De la solidarité poétique." *Écrits d'Haïti: Perspectives sur la littérature haïtienne contemporaine (1986 - 2006)*, (Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2011) 402.

the French language allow a more abstract expression, but it also enables the writer to reach a larger global audience.

During this time, though Castera was living in exile, he remained active in Haitian communities outside of the island. He participated in Haitian theatrical groups and political organizations from abroad, keeping himself engaged with Haitian political and social struggles.<sup>72</sup> Unlike Frankétienne, who has expressed feeling an internal exile while remaining in Haiti<sup>73</sup>, Castera felt as he had never left<sup>74</sup>. He explains,

Je ne pouvais plus retourner en Haïti sous peine d'être arrêté et fusillé. De fait, j'étais en exil, mais sans les problèmes de l'exilé qui se morfond d'être en dehors de son pays. En réalité, je n'ai jamais laissé Haïti pendant ces moments de dictature sanglante, obscurantiste. J'étais présent par la pensée en Haïti. L'exil fut pour moi une école politique, artistique et littéraire. (398)

In this interview, with Nadève Ménard and Bonel Auguste, Castera emphasizes his emotional, psychological and artistic connection to Haiti while he was physically in exile. His feelings present a paradoxical state which can only be described as an external *enracinement*.

Furthermore, he reiterates this position by stating that he, in fact, never left Haiti during the dictatorship. He felt present through his political and artistic engagement. He, moreover, felt the very real threat of injury or death (d'être arrêté et fusillé) if he were ever to return to Haiti. Thus, it is conceivable that Castera felt as if he had lived through and experienced the dictatorship in a

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<sup>72</sup> See Georges Castera's page, Saint-Éloi, Rodney. "Georges Castera." *Île en île*. (N.p., 2015).

<sup>73</sup> See Jean Jonassaint's interview with Castera, "D'un exemplaire créateur souterrain : un entretien avec Frankétienne." *Écrire en pays assiégé = Writing Under Siege : Haiti* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 257-283.

<sup>74</sup> Ménard and Auguste 397-405.

way similar to that of the children of the survivors of the Holocaust who live the trauma of their parents or grandparents.

While transgenerational trauma may not be an entirely accurate comparison, perhaps, it can be useful in understanding Castera's indirect, but direct experience of the trauma of the dictatorship. Scholars such as Naomi Mandel and Gabriele Schwab have shown that trauma can indeed be experienced indirectly.<sup>75</sup> As Schwab asserts, in *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010), "The legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations" (1). In Castera's case, the legacy was passed *down* as well as *across* within the same generation. His encounters and relationships with those that fled Duvalier's Haiti informed his experience of its violence and brutality. So much so that, he felt a direct relationship with the traumatic experience of the dictatorship.

Accordingly, violence inhabits every line, page and image in *Le Retour à l'arbre*, which opens with a haunting but beautiful image drawn by Bernard Wah (see fig. 1). The artist was well-known for his evocative representations of hardship and poverty in his paintings. As Gérald Alexis elaborates, "il [Wah] traduit les horreurs de la faim, les tourments de la soif, toutes les faims, toutes les soifs" (*Le Nouvelliste*). In keeping with that style, he presents a figure that resembles a grotesque profile of an old man with a sorrowful expression.

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<sup>75</sup> For more on transgenerational trauma, see Yaeli Danieli, *International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma* (New York: Plenum, 2010), Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable: Complicity, the Holocaust, and Slavery in America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), and Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic, 1992).



Figure 1 A face, Bernard Wah

Upon closer examination, we see that the “face” is comprised of many different elements, but mainly, a river of bodies flowing out from a bare tree. Within this “face,” we can discern many other faces and body parts. The attention to fragmentation of the face(s) alongside the barrenness of the plants paint a morose picture in which the troubled subjectivity of the poet comes to light. The attention to the face coupled with the poet’s revelation that, “car tout le moi est foutre/ dans un trou à coup de massue,” emphasizes the urgency of recovering and reconstituting the subject that has been beaten and crushed under the violence of the dictatorship (29). Furthermore, this ghastly portrait evokes a problem also raised by surrealist Joan Mirò’s *Self-Portrait I* (see fig. 2), which David Lomas examines in a Lacanian inflected psychoanalytic viewpoint as a site where, “that intimacy with one’s self that the term ‘identity’ presupposes has irretrievably broken down, and along with the boundedness of the self-image” (191).



**Figure 2 Mirò, Joan. *Self-Portrait I* (1937)**

Both portraits deny facile interpretations of the subject, rather they trouble boundaries of representation and identity. Given that the face is our primary site of identification, the illegibility of this face draws attention to the crisis of the subject during this time of dictatorship. The face is deconstructed and fragmented, reflecting the state of subjectivity under Duvalierism. Furthermore, this disturbing image is the first page of the book, preceding any text or signs. It sets the scene for this odyssey towards a new subjectivity.

Like with visual poetry, the lines between text and image are blurred as both are meant to be read. The text and image are viewed simultaneously and read according to the whims of the reader/viewer. Perhaps in a move to emphasize the reader's role in the poem, and similar to Frankétienne, Castera has omitted page numbers and rendered line numbers impossible to assign.



The poet and the reader not only work together to create the experience of the text, they journey together on this exploration of the poet's subject position. Moreover, the absence of subjectivity, and its centrality as a topos of this work, is highlighted in the opening pages of the book. First, by the image of fragmented and cacographic face(s). Second, by the first line of the poem: "arriverai au dénouement," where the first-person subject pronoun is conspicuously absent. Though the verb *arriver* is conjugated in the future tense for the first-person singular, there is no subject pronoun. The poetic "je" does not appear at all on this page though the first-person possessive adjectives, "mon," "ma," and "mes" are used. Furthermore, to the right of the verses, there is a sort of tree made up of and featuring human figures, bodies.

In addition to the absent "je," the first line of the poem implicates travel and exploration. The poet states, "arriverai au dénouement," which, effectively, initiates our poetic journey. While I have already mentioned the absence of the "je," it is also important to note the verb "arriver." Conjugated in the *futur simple*, the poet will arrive at a predetermined destination, at the *dénouement*. To arrive is to complete one's journey, to reach one's destination. From the first line, we know that there will be a conclusion and a destination. Indeed, in the next line, he reveals, "arriverai au dénouement/ de phrases recluses." He ventures in order to find and open the reclusive sentences of his subjectivity.

In light of Castera's unusual visual-poetic form, *Le Retour à l'arbre* may be explored more in depth through the aesthetics of visual poetry. Both his style and the form recall the visual poetry of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century European avant-garde movements, in particular cubism,

surrealism<sup>76</sup> and dada. One of the most famous examples of this poetic form is Guillaume Apollinaire's—whom Castera mentions as one of the influences of *indigénisme*—calligramme.<sup>77</sup> Having written the article, “Surréalisme en Haïti?,” Castera is very familiar with surrealist influences and expressions in Haiti. In this article, he contests the idea that surrealism is just an imported ideology and establishes a Haitian precedent to surrealism in Clément Magloire-Saint-Aude who had already published two works—*Dialogue des mes lampes* (1941) and *Tabou* (1941)—four years before André Breton's arrival in 1944. He, then, points to René Bélance who published his text, *Épaule d'ombre*, one year later in 1945. Castera identifies, “Deux poètes, trois textes fondateurs du surréalisme haïtienne” (91). Surrealism, then, is not entirely a European import.

Nevertheless, I believe that the language and vocabulary of the avant-garde to be useful to the examination of Castera's poem. My aim, however, is not to privilege the European aesthetic over Haitian expressive arts. A similar concern has also been voiced by the African American poet, Elizabeth Alexander, when she asked, “What genealogy can we think about that doesn't trace contemporary black experimental poetry only and inevitably to, for example, Oppen, Olsen, French surrealists, Marxist political thought, et cetera—sources for white language and experimental poets—and then within black culture just to Ornette Coman and Sun ra?” (2). Though her apprehension is understandable, Castera draws significant influence from surrealism as well as Haitian literary forms such as *indigénisme* as evidenced by his articles

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<sup>76</sup> Visual poetry was not strictly a surrealist practice, it was associated more with cubism and other aspects of the avant-garde. However, Castera acknowledges surrealism's influence on his formation, so I consider surrealism in conjunction with visual poetry.

<sup>77</sup> Georges Castera, “L'indigénisme haïtien, un point de vue contradictoire” *Notre Librairie : Revue du Livre : Afrique, Caraïbes, Océan Indien*, 132 (1997) 76-89.

“Surréalisme in Haïti,” and “L’indigenisme haïtien, un point de vue contradictoire.” In fact, Castera admits that literary engagement is, “Ce qui leur [les poètes] évitera d’utiliser la langue de bois des politiciens, tout en se prémunissant contre les attaques de la dictature en cryptant leurs écrits” (*Surréalisme* 94). He elaborates further, “Côté dessin, il y a chez moi un prolongement et parfois dialogue entre poésie et dessins. C’est une démarche héritée du surréalisme” (Ménard 400). Castera values surrealism as a weapon, a tool and legacy for literary, artistic and political engagement. Indeed, I argue that, unlike that of the French surrealists Bréton and Aragon, his brand of surrealist inflected poetry not only allows Castera to fight dictatorship, it gives the poet the possibility of resisting subjective annihilation. Accordingly, Jean Durosier Desrivières’s assertion that, “L’espace du poème devient alors un vaste champ de bataille marqué continuellement par la violence des mots,” evokes the force and the subversive nature of Castera’s poetry (241). Thus, as I argue, Desrivières also reminds us, in Castera’s own words, that, “La poésie ne tire jamais à blanc” (241). In response to the violence of the dictatorship, Castera deploys his own formulation of avant-garde poetics to reclaim masculinity. In putting the poetic and aesthetic forms of the European avant-garde and Haiti into conversation, I hope to shed light onto Castera’s poetic mission, which engages with and yet surpasses the avant-garde aesthetics as applied to subjectivity, especially in the ways in which his poetics seeks to recover and reconstruct the masculine subject position, the poetic “je”.

Undoubtedly, Castera and Wah deviate from traditional forms and expressions of poetry. In an attempt understand this divergence, I turn to the scholarship on visual poetry and the avant-garde. Several different movements participated in what we call the avant-garde. Cubist art—mainly paintings and collages—and futurist poetry are representative of the field of visual

aesthetics. In his book, *Modern Visual Poetry*, Willard Bohn describes visual poems as, “immediately recognizable by their refusal to adhere to a rectilinear grid and by their tendency to flout their plasticity... they transform the poem into a picture” (15). Furthermore, in *The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914-1928*, Bohn argues, “Unlike conventional poetry, visual poetry utilizes a dual sign. As such it comprises two sets of signifiers and signified—one verbal, the other visual... the written word serves as the support for the visual message” (5). Working through the theorizations of Roland Barthes, Bohn emphasizes the dual nature of the sign which is doubled in visual poetry, working on the textual and visual level concurrently. For instance, in *Le Retour à l’arbre* both written word and visual image are read together; they both constitute the text. It is this simultaneity of experience of reading and seeing that is central in visual poetry and especially in cubist paintings where full and active participation is required on the part of the reader/viewer from the work of art as well as the artist or poet.

By appealing to both the mind and the eye and engaging the processes of viewing and reading, the experience of the reader/viewer is marked by a simultaneity of processes. It has been acknowledged that cubism was working towards new modes of interpretation through the simultaneity of experience, as Simon Morley demonstrates, “against the mechanization of reading produced by the norms of print, the Cubist opens the reader/viewer up to a far more syncopated, spatially expressive experience in which constellations of phrases, words and shapes have shifting inter-relations. No clear line of narrative, and often no obvious anchoring of content, is provided by the texts” (44) It is the task of the reader/viewer to extract, create and form meaning from fragmentation and incongruity. Bohn elaborates further, “situated at the intersection of legibility and visibility, the calligram exploits the visual properties of written

language and the semantic possibilities of visual form” (*Visual Aesthetics* 49). The facility with which the reader/viewer is able to understand the visual layout is disrupted by the difficulty of reading, making the reader acutely aware of the processes of reading itself.

It is indeed very difficult to describe or summarize a text like *Le Retour à l'arbre*. The hybrid nature of the text not only troubles the processes of reading and blurs the field of visuality, it also calls into question the very nature of subjectivity. Surrealist artists and writers were particularly invested in this question which they addressed by attempting to unlock the unconscious, thereby freeing the imagination. In fact, Penelope Rosement characterizes Surrealism as, “an immeasurably expanded awareness” (xxxiii). In his 1924 *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Andre Breton asserts that, “Le langage a été donné à l’homme pour qu’il en fasse un usage surréaliste,” to free himself from the constraints of logic and reality (44). The Surrealists sought to bring the unconscious into relation with the conscious, in doing so, they would liberate the subject. And as Breton proclaims, in the last sentence of his manifesto, “L’existence est ailleurs” (60). That is to say, existence is not always what or where it seems. It is, in Castera’s case, in poetry.

The aesthetics of surrealism, for Castera, offer more than formal experimentation and poetic engagement. Like the antifascist and anticolonial implications of surrealist art from Latin American, the Caribbean, and African cultural producers, surrealism was political struggle and social revolution.<sup>78</sup> In the case of Haiti, this struggle was waged against both white and black racism. *Indigénisme* privileged cultural and racial authenticity, often espousing and promoting

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<sup>78</sup> See Michael Richardson Ades and Krzysztof Fijałkowski. *The Surrealism Reader : An Anthology of Ideas* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2015) for a complete consideration of the role of surrealism in anticolonial and antifascist movements and struggles.

Africanist influences in Haiti. However, *indigénisme* was a literary movement in which François Duvalier participated and which he championed through his political discourse. As René Depestre has revealed, in “Homo Papadocus,” “Le concept de *négritude* suivit dans la tête déréglée de Duvalier la même trajectoire aberrante que le socialisme avait prise dans le cerveau d’Hitler” (57). Indeed, the tenets of *indigénisme* would later be distorted into the foundation of Duvalier’s *noiriste* politics.<sup>79</sup>

In considering a Surrealist and gendered perspective on Castera’s poetry, it must be acknowledged that surrealism has often been accused of being male-centered. The surrealists have been criticized for representing women only as muses or objects of desire.<sup>80</sup> However, rigorous scholarship such as Penelope Rosemont’s *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* (1998), Whitney Chadwick’s *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (2002), and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s *Négritude Women* (2002) demonstrate the extent of women’s participation and contributions to the surrealist movement. While the representation and role of women in surrealist poetry is an important line of inquiry, I examine Castera’s poem from a masculine subject position which I believe to be compromised under the violence of the dictatorship. While he seeks to recover his own poetic subjectivity from the violence of the dictatorship, he may fall into the same trappings as his predecessors. However, Rosemont’s assertion that, “For surrealists, poetry is always discovery, risk, revelation, adventure, an activity of the mind, a method of knowledge leading to revolutionary solutions to the fundamental problems of life,” is exactly in line with Castera’s poetic spirit (xxxiii).

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<sup>79</sup> Munro 25

<sup>80</sup> See Rudolf Kuenzli’s chapter, “Surrealism and Misogyny,” in *Surrealism and Women* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

The visual-poetic form and the attention to the subject is strikingly evident in Castera's poem, as the "je" is conspicuously absent from the first line of the poem as well as the whole first page. The poet's omission of his "je" further draws attention to the state of the subject in his work, or more importantly, to the moment in which his poetic work was conceived and composed. *Le Retour à l'arbre* was published only a couple of years after the change in leadership, from father to son. The continuance of this brutal dictatorship along with the powerlessness that an exiled poet must have felt may have provoked a subjective impasse. On what could be considered the fourth and fifth pages of the poem, we are confronted with the importance of the first-person subject position through wordplay. Castera and Wah present nightmarish images with entangled bodies bound inside strange shapes that sprout roots, spreading out onto the sterile white page instead of burrowing into the earth (see fig. 2). The image on the right-hand page eerily evokes the concentric circles in Dante's *Inferno*, with bodies and limbs swirling inward, or downward, to a body sitting with its knees to its chest and its arms wrapped around its knees. The form, containing this hellish spiral, looks like the mirror image of the human heart. On the left-hand side, we have seven lines,

mais retournons

au jeu

plus personnel

à la ponte d'une

chemise blanche

de la rientise

Here, Castera calls out for a return—in the first-person plural—to the most personal of games, to the order of nothingness. Interestingly, the poet creates a new word from the noun, “rien” and the feminine suffix, “-ise,” resulting in “rientise.” Though he could have used other words like “le néant” or “le vide,” which actually mean nothingness, he chooses to invent something new to describe this most personal of games. The fact that he uses the feminized ending, “-ise,” which expresses some kind of quality or function, is telling. Instead of using the masculine nouns which already exist in the French language, he presents a newly fabricated feminine noun to express the quality of this order of nothingness. By privileging this feminine neologism over the masculine noun, Castera hints at the ineffectuality of established masculine constructions. He chooses to deviate from the established norm, choosing creativity and invention over convention and heritage.

Furthermore, in expressing his desire for a return to nothingness, he reveals the object of the game. On the bottom right-hand corner of the facing page, he writes, “je joue le je/ je joue le je,” revealing that the game is “le je,” the first-person subject position (see fig. 3).





**Figure 3 “je joue le je,” Georges Castera and Bernard Wah**

Here, there is an obvious play on words as ‘je’ sounds very similar, if not identical, to ‘jeu,’ however, the approximation of the two words reveals the “jeu/ plus personnel,” to be even more personal than initially thought. This homophonic play on words reveals exactly what is at stake for Castera and Wah, the puzzle that is subjectivity. Provided that the “je”/“jeu” ends with nothingness, the absence of a subject position is felt even more acutely. The poet’s “je” is missing, threatening to vanish into nothingness. Always out of reach, the poet discloses, “je tourne en rond/ je tourne en rond” (8). Indeed, “le moi aminci de subjectivité,” appears to be a theme in Castera’s poetry as noted by Jean Durosier Desrivières. In his reading of another poem called “Courir du moi(s),” Desrivières notes that the “je,” plays on “une relation de réflexivité...

qui élucide le recul du sujet” (245). In *Le Retour à l'arbre*, instead of a diminishing subject, we are faced with an absence of the subject. However, all hope is not lost as Castera's creative fashioning of the word “rientise” demonstrates. The poet seeks a generative relation with the reader, one in which we can recover the poetic subject position through creative practices of reading and viewing. In witnessing the birth of “la rientise,” the reader is invested with the task of creation, of putting together the pieces to form a complete picture.

Continuing on this journey through and to subjectivity, in the middle of the book, the reader-viewer is presented with an image without any accompanying verse (see fig. 4). On the right-hand page, a chaotic black and white drawing takes up the entire page next to a blank white page. On the right side of the page, there is an eerie figure in uniform with what appears to be a machete either tucked under his arm or attached to his belt. Next to him, there is a kind of wheel surrounded by an odd mixture of forms and shapes.



**Figure 4 Exile, Bernard Wah**

In the background, there is a cityscape, possibly New York, which is home to the largest population of Haitians in the United States. Near the bottom of the page, under a large wheel and between a vaguely human form lying on its back and a mug which merges into the uniformed man, we find a small sailboat with the word, “IMMAMOU,” written across it.

As the only text on the page, the word “IMMAMOU,” immediately grabs the reader-viewer’s attention. Sitting atop a small body of water, the boat evokes the figure of Agwe (also known as Agwe Arroyo, or Agwe Tawoyo , or Agwe 'Woyo), who is the *lwa* of the seas.<sup>81</sup> As

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<sup>81</sup> For more on Haitian Vaudou, the *lwas*, and/or Agwe see Milo Rigaud, *La tradition voodoo et le voodoo haïtien. Son temple, ses mystères, sa magie, etc.* (Paris: Éditions Niclus, 1953), Alfred Métraux, *Le vaudou haïtien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: the Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston, NY: McPherson, 1953),

one of the primary spirits of the vaudou pantheon, Agwe captains the ship, *Immamou*. In fact, his *vèvè*, the symbolic representation of the *lwa*, is very similar to the boat on the page. It is also a large sailboat with the word, “Immamou,” written on it. As Milo Rigaud explains, “la reproduction des forces astrales figurées par les *vèvè* oblige les *lwa* (qui sont des figurations d’astres, d’étoiles, de planètes) à descendre par terre” (99, *italics in original*). In this light, the sailboat takes on new meaning as a sort of beacon, evoking the watery realms of the ruler of the seas. Known as the *lwa* of the seas and the patron *lwa* of sailors and fisherman, he is often worshipped alongside La Sirène and Erzulie. He rules over the seas, which is to say, he rules over the source of both life and death. The waters give life and nourishment, yet, they are also associated with death, in particular, the countless lives lost during the middle passage.

Indeed, we are reminded of the trauma of the middle passage within the first lines of the poem. On the first page with text, Castera writes, “la panse du néant/ qui sort de mon gant/ du bois de cerceuil à craquer vraiment” (4). For the poet, “la panse du néant,” marks the beginning of his journey to crack open the “bois de cerceuil.” The word *cerceuil*, initially, appears to be “*cercueil*,” or coffin, misspelled. The juxtaposition of “*cerceuil*” and “la panse du néant” conjures up the image of the belly of the slave ship, which not only holds slaves and produces death, it is both a womb and an abyss. It destroys and creates. It holds life and death. However, we find that “*cerceuil*” is, in fact, a real word as there is a town called Bois de Cerceuil in the southeastern part of Haiti near Jacmel. Nonetheless, “*cerceuil*,” evokes the image of the coffin

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McAlister, Elizabeth A. *Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora* (Berkeley: U of California, 2002), Filan, Kenaz. *The Haitian Vodou Handbook: Protocols for Riding with the Lwa* (Rochester: Destiny, 2007).

while reinforcing the poet's ties to Haiti. His quest is Haitian, he aims to recover his poetic subjectivity as a Haitian man.

Thus, the sea represents death and isolation, yet it also represents freedom and escape. This is especially true during the years of the dictatorship when thousands of Haitians fled the island's violence and poverty for better lives. Eventually earning the disparaging epithet of "boat people," Haitians fled the dictatorship to countries like the United States, Canada, Dominican Republic, Cuba and France.<sup>82</sup> They risked their lives to cross the perilous waters, invoking the good will of Agwe to insure their safe passage. In addition to sailors and fisherman, he can also be considered the patron *lwa* of the boat people. He watches over the desperate people as they cross the sea, much like he watched over the African slaves who were forcibly transported across the ocean to the New World. By evoking his *vèvè*, Castera and Wah bring attention to the plight of those who fled the dictatorship to cities like New York or Miami.

Furthermore, Wah's image of the man in uniform is ambiguous. It could either be interpreted as the representation of Agwe, as he is often depicted in uniform, or a Tonton Macoute. The members of the VSN were known for their dark sunglasses, machetes and uniforms that made them look like the *lwa*, Papa Zaka. In this image, we see this figure with a machete-like knife at his waist and one eye covered by dark glasses. He is wearing a military-style cap that morphs into a bell, with an unreadable expression on his uncanny face. Veiled, but not hidden, this association emerges upon scrutiny. If we accept the presence of a Tonton

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<sup>82</sup> See Jean-Claude Gerlus, *The political economy of Haitian migration: A cross-frontier study of the circulation of people, capital, and commodity flows* (State University of New York at Binghamton, 1992) 85-97. Gerlus shows that legal Haitian immigrants nearly doubled from 6,932 in 1970 to 12,666 in 1986 and legal nonimmigrants more than tripled during the same period of time from 24,535 to 79,000. See also, Michel S. Laguerre, "Migration and Urbanization in Haiti." *Sociologus*, vol. 37, No. 2, 1987, pp. 118-139.

Macoute in this image, we understand the reference to Immamou and Agwe in another light. The reference to the Macoute renders the image even more sinister, as a very real representation of evil. Moreover, the ghoulish image of the Macoute further reinforces the association with death, necessitating (and justifying) an escape plan and subsequent exile.

This image partially returns eight pages later, accompanied by text. The Macoute/Agwe figure, the Immamou, and the figure lying on its side provide a sort of framing background for the textual verses. The images, this time, are in grey instead of black and white. The faded quality of the images serves to both soften and invert the images. The Macoute/Agwe figure appears almost like the photo negative of the previous one. Literally framing the text, the hovering figures add an air of menace to the words. The first line on the page reads, “je m’écris,” followed by, “sur n’importe quel bout d’insecte/ (confiances des labyrinths).” The “je” returns here to write itself, on anything. The “je” wants to inscribe itself onto anything, even pieces of an insect. The poet writes himself in the midst of ominous images that frame, or rather enclose the text. Encroaching danger aside, the poet feels compelled to write himself, to compose himself, in doing so, he composes his own subject position.

Moving to the next tercet, Castera confesses, “je suis du nombre/ encombré d’éclipses/ d’ellipses.” At first glance, the tercet seems to be spouting nonsense. However, “je suis du nombre,” can mean many things; the meanings proliferate under closer examination. We can understand it as a state of origin, of substance, or of context. As the meanings multiply and confound, the reader endeavors to place and understand the poetic “je.” The next two lines express the heart of the matter, the question of obfuscation and omission. The poet is encumbered by eclipses, by ellipses. While eclipses obscure, ellipses omit and silence. As

Jennifer DeVere Brody explicates, through her reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), "The ellipsis carries with negative space and suggests the not (t)here... Like empty signifiers, they mark a desire, whose meaning can never be fulfilled but must always be filled" (77). While Brody uses the ellipses to read the performance of blackness in *Invisible Man*, we can read the ellipsis, here, as an erasure of the subject while at the same time calling for the composition of a different subject position. Indeed, Castera's reference to the ellipsis reminds the reader of an omission; one that must be resolved. He confers a similar function to the eclipse, in that, as it obscures, it actually reveals and reaffirms that which is being concealed. In fact, the dual themes of obfuscation and omission are reiterated through the state of the poetic "je," whose omission from the first line of the poem draws more attention to its absence.

The first-person pronoun makes its final appearance on the last page of the book. This time, the poet and illustrator draw attention to the poetic "je" by presenting it as a key (see fig. 5).



**Figure 5 “J’interdis au soleil...,” Georges Castera and Bernard Wah**

The loop of the *J* is the bow, while the letter’s stem serves as the key shaft and the horizontal stroke at the top of the letter has been transformed into the bit. Notably, the letter *J*, as the first-person pronoun, brackets all the verses on the page. The top of the *J*-key starts with the first line “interdis” and ends below the last line “ratures.” While the “je” is conspicuously absent from the first line of the poem, it is even too present on this last page, encompassing all the text on the page. The first line is an interdiction. The poet forbids the sun, and he forbids the entry of his erasures. The word, “rature,” means striking or crossing out, therefore enacting a sort of erasure. Even more than the ellipsis, and the eclipse, the “rature” actually leaves visible that which was crossed out. Though it is meant as a sign of erasure or exclusion, the line draws our attention to



the intended omission. As stated previously, I argue that the poet's manipulations of erasures and omissions refer to the state of the first-person subject position "je" under the Duvalier dictatorship.

Looking beyond the surface value of the image-text, we can glean references to the *lwa* of the crossroads, Papa Legba, hinting that the poet himself is at a crossroads.<sup>83</sup> Papa Legba is the gatekeeper to the spiritual realm, appearing as an old, crippled man with a crutch. Like St. Peter in the Catholic tradition, Legba, *Maitre-Carrefour*, is often depicted holding a ring of keys. The key unlocks, moreover, it means gaining access to something concealed. It can also represent freedom and the key holder is often conferred power and authority over that which is locked away. In addition to being the master of the crossroads, as Milo Rigaud explains, "Legba, the origin and the male prototype of Voodoo, is the sun which presides over the rites" (*Secrets* 45). As the gatekeeper, he is the first to be called in vaudou ceremonies and rituals. He is also the incarnation of the cosmic phallus, as Alfred Métraux clarifies, "il [Legba] est aussi une divinité phallique représentée devant toutes les maisons d'habitation par un monticule en terre surmontée d'un membre viril en bois ou en fer" (319). With this in mind, the poet's attention to the key-shaped *J* and his interdiction of his erasures ("ratures") to the sun ("soleil"), take on yet another meaning.

The image of the key along with the allusion to the sun inevitably conjures up the figure of Papa Legba. His position between worlds requires him to be an intermediary, he facilitates communication between our world and the spirit realm. He is said to be fluent in all languages,

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<sup>83</sup> For more on Papa Legba and his importance in vaudou rituals, see Milo Rigaud, *La tradition voodoo et le voodoo haïtien. Son temple, ses mystères, sa magie, etc.* (Paris: Éditions Niclus, 1953), especially chapter 8 : "Les Legba."

thus, we can understand language to be the key to accessing another plane of existence. It is through language that we can attain a higher, or at least a different, consciousness. Furthermore, the symbolic references to Papa Legba indicate that the poet, himself, is at a crossroads. His predicament, therefore, can only be resolved through the power of language, in other words, through poetry. He is at the end of his poetic journey, standing at a juncture, invoking the *Maître-Carrefour*. In calling out to Legba, he not only seeks the sun and the gatekeeper, he seeks the prototype of maleness, that is to say, the model of masculinity. The poet seeks to reclaim and reconstruct his masculine subjectivity through the repurposing of the language of violence for creative ends. He deploys that violence to mend and to restore the broken shards of his poetic “je.”

In reclaiming his masculine subjectivity, Castera speaks to and out against the violence of the dictatorship. Warning against complacency, the poet cautions, “ici c’est par routine/ qu’on va à la mort/ et non par erreur” (10). Moreover, he encourages his reader to look up from their apathy, speak back, and stop the dictatorial machine, as follows,

à peine un peu de poussière  
soulagée par les yeux  
à peine l’encoche de la lèvre  
pour arrêter la roue  
le mouvement griffé de la roue. (16, 20)

Repeated again in four pages, these lines echo the words of the Gorilla in Marie Vieux Chauvet’s novella, *Colère*, in which an individual is like, “le rouage d’une immense machine” (272). Thus,

we have to potential to stop or to break the machine. However, before the poet can act, he must recover himself.

Both Castera and Frankétienne critique and dismantle the violence of the dictatorship through poetry, with particular attention to the deleterious effects of that violence on masculinity. Preferring creative endeavors over mindless destruction, the authors appropriate the violence of the dictatorship and incorporate it into their poetic language. They write not only to express their art, but they write their trauma. It is through a creative act that they can make sense of the horrors of the Duvalier dictatorship. By espousing and transforming the violence inflicted on Haitians by the state through poetic language, they are effectively able to steal back and deprive the dictatorship of some of its power. Poetry, here, is both critical and regenerative. It pieces together the fragments of masculinity and provides a commentary on the gendered consequences of dictatorial violence. *Ultravocal* reproduces the virulent masculinity of the dictatorship and metabolizes that violence into prose, whereas *Le Retour à l'arbre* imagines a poetics capable of reconstituting the poet's position in the world. What is central to these works is the freedom to create under any circumstances as well as the need to create.

### 3. Poète Mystère Vaudou: Reclaiming Masculinity in René Depestre's *Le Mât de cocagne* and *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*

The presence of vaudou<sup>84</sup> in modern Haitian literature suggests its centrality in the Haitian cultural imagination, shaping discourses on national identity and history. As one of the many ways that Haitian culture has resisted oppression and erasure, vaudou is the mode of resistance *par excellence*. Vaudou has historically been associated with resistance to domination, as evidenced by the crucial role that the Bois Caïman<sup>85</sup> ceremony played in mobilizing the Haitian Revolution. This connection is critical to René Depestre's exploration of masculinity through vaudou in *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* (1967) and *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979). Indeed, Joan Dayan explains that “[f]or Depestre, the essentially dual nature of Voodoo is its uncompromising spirit of revolt, predicting a complete revolution of human existence through the magic power of the mind and through its positive power of synthesis” (Rainbow 39). It is this spirit and history that has made vaudou so vital to both Haiti and Depestre. This

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<sup>84</sup> There are many orthographic variations of vaudou and each is intensely debated by different communities. Leslie Desmangles proposes replacing “voodoo” with “vodou,” arguing that the former, “voodoo,” is an offensive term derived from a racist historical perspective meant to denigrate the religion. See Leslie G. Desmangles, “Replacing the Term “Voodoo” with “Vodou”: A Proposal.” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 18.2, Special Issue on Vodou and Créolité (2012): 26-33, and Bob Corbett, “The Spelling Voodoo.” *Haiti: The Spelling Voodoo*. Webster University, 1998. <<http://faculty.webster.edu/corbette/haiti/voodoo/spelling.htm>>. While I agree with Desmangles’s proposition as well as Corbett’s attempt at revalorization, I follow Depestre’s orthographic choice: *vaudou*, and leave it in the original French.

<sup>85</sup> The vaudou ceremony held in the Bois Caïman took place on August 14, 1871 and is generally acknowledged as the beginning of the Haitian Revolution which would result in the founding of the free black republic in 1804. For more information on the ceremony and the Revolution see, Chapter 2: “Bois Cayman and Carmagnole,” in Robert Debs Heinl, Nancy Gordon Heinl, and Michael Heinl, *Written in Blood: The Story of the Haitian People, 1492-1995* (Lanham, MD: U of America, 2005). See also Chapter 4: “Slaves in the North,” in Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti : The Saint Domingue Revolution from below* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee, 1990) and Chapter 3: “The First Days of the Slave Insurrection,” in Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: U of Chicago, 2007).

syncretic religion is practiced by the majority of the Haitian population and during Duvaliers' regime, it became closely associated with the dictator and his otherworldly power over life and death.<sup>86</sup> It is in reaction to Duvalier's usurpation and manipulation of this popular religion that Depestre writes. In his texts, Depestre deploys vaudou as a system to reclaim Haitian masculinity and revalorize it, away from the violence of the dictatorship. Moreover, he uses the defiant and subversive nature of vaudou and its fluid conceptualization of identity to formulate a different masculine identity that is malleable, porous, and multiple, but more importantly, resistant to the oppression and violence of the dictatorship.

Celebrated as a revolutionary who brought down a dictatorship, René Depestre is arguably one of the most influential writers of Haitian literature. He is celebrated for his poetry and remembered for his role as instigator, leader and participant of the Revolution of 1946 that resulted in President Élie Lescot's abdication and subsequent exile. As the editor of the leftist literary and political journal, *La Ruche*, René Depestre and Theodore Baker<sup>87</sup> inspired a generation to stand up and reclaim their country through literary combat. Indeed, Louis-Philippe Dalembert describes Depestre as, "le poète militant, qui fait de la négritude, du marxisme et du surréalisme ses armes de combat" (136). Depestre takes up arms against racism, imperialism and the Cold War through his use and deployment of vaudou, in his "poème-mystère vaudou," *Un*

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<sup>86</sup> See Chapter 5: "Vaudou, sorcellerie et pouvoir," in Laennec Hurbon, *Culture et dictature en Haïti: L'imaginaire sous contrôle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979), Chapter 8: "Popular Religion and Culture," in Charles Arthur and J. Michael Dash (eds.) *A Haiti Anthology: Libète*, (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1999) and Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan, 2012) 331-3.

<sup>87</sup> In an interview with Franz-Antoine Leconte, Depestre emphasizes the fact that *La Ruche* was not a solitary endeavor and that his good friend and co-editor Théodore Baker was as important to the publication and the Revolution of 1946 as he was. Depestre declares, "Et puis, dès la fondation de *La Ruche* nous avons, Théodore Baker et moi, fait appel à l'Alexis. En effet, ce sont Baker et moi qui avons été les initiateurs de ce journal et je tiens ici à souligner le nom de Théodore Baker parce qu'on a tendance à l'oublier" (155). See Franz-Antoine Leconte, "Dérive politique et synergie esthétique : Un entretien avec René Depestre." *Écrire en pays assiégé = Writing Under Siege: Haiti* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 145-167

*Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*. His struggle against violence and tyranny continues in *Le Mât de cocagne* where he critiques Duvalierism through a fictionalized representation of life under dictatorship, where Depestre exposes the regime's use of vaudou by redeploying the Haitian religion as he does in his earlier 1967 *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*.

In this chapter, I propose a vaudou reading of these two works by René Depestre, *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* and *Le Mât de cocagne*, which, I argue, develops a study of masculinity under systems of oppression, such as dictatorship and/or racism, and proposes a new radical form of masculinity, one that is able to resist against such forms of oppression. I, first, investigate the nefarious instrumentalization of vaudou by the Duvalier dictatorship. Next, I consider the ways in which *Le Mât de cocagne* responds to the dictatorship's abuse of the popular syncretic religion by formulating a vaudou conceptualization of masculinity. Through the history of the figure of the *zombi*, I advance vaudou as the means of reclaiming and revalorizing masculinity within the context of oppression and dispossession, that is the Duvalier dictatorship. Moreover, I insist that Depestre creates a new category of *zombi* through the fictionalized dictatorship. Next, I question, as does Depestre, the construction of the black male body by the Western world through an engagement with Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952). Subsequently, I demonstrate that, through the medium of vaudou spirit possession, Depestre effectively destroys the racist stereotypes about black masculinity by inhabiting them. Moreover, he annihilates the black male body that the West has constructed as the repository for all of the ills of humanity. Finally, I examine the concept of the self in vaudou, which, by its very multiplicity, renders Western gender paradigms inadequate, which is further exacerbated by an encounter with spirit possession.

My analysis of Depestre's texts draws on scholarship on vaudou, gender and dictatorship, as well as the intersection of one or all of these elements. First, my investigation of vaudou is indebted to pioneering scholarly works such as Joan Dayan's *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, Alfred Métraux's *Le vaudou haïtien*, and Milo Rigaud's *La tradition vaudou*, amongst others. Their works have provided vital insight into a religion that has been vilified and exoticized by the white Western world in the form of sensationalist news, movies, and even accusations of devil worship which have served as justification for its suppression on more than one occasion. Furthermore, their studies have inspired generations of scholarship engaged with bringing vaudou into conversation with other disciplines, interrogating the significance of vaudou in relation to other social, historical, economic, and personal domains. In one such study with special significance for this chapter, Elizabeth McAlister, in "Love, Sex, and Gender Embodied: The Spirits of Haitian Vodou," probes the question of gender in relation to spirit possession, with particular attention to caricatural performances of gender by the Gede spirits. Her attention to the multiple manifestations of a single *lwa* was especially illuminating with regard to understanding a vaudou conception of selfhood and gender identity. Referring to the multiple iterations of Èzili, she asserts, "Freda and Dantò represent a range of gendered possibilities that are not offered by Roman Catholicism. Whether she come as heterosexual paramour, as her daughter's mother, as lesbian, warrior, or grandmother, the Èzili are more complex and present far more diversity than the female figures of the New Testament" (136). The deity is both one and multiple, lending herself to multiple interpretations and performances of her femininity. More importantly, her performances of her gender(s) are not bound by the same constraints of Western society. In the third chapter of *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender*

*Participation in African-inspired Traditions in the Americas*, Randy P. Connor and David Hatfield Sparks take the investigation further through the plight and perspective of LGBT practitioners as well as the varying, complex, often convoluted expressions of gender and sexuality during spirit possessions.

While the role and importance of vaudou in Depestre's texts has inspired many scholarly discussions, there is a lack of substantive accounts of the concept of masculinity in his work. As Carrol Coates notes, "*The Festival of the Greasy Pole* cannot be adequately understood without some knowledge of Voudou" (xxix). More generally, Bernard Delpêche and Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken have both devoted entire books to the function of vaudou in Haitian literature. With regard to Depestre, Delpêche's *Magouilles d'une esthétique: René Depestre et le vodou* presents the concept of "écriture-magouille," which seeks, "de s'élever, à certains moments, contre les injustices sociales et, à d'autres moments, d'explorer le labyrinthe des rêves et des émotions" (10). Furthermore, Delpêche posits vaudou as the key to the reading and experiencing Depestre's texts. He, notably, traces the development of the "je," in *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*, where he explains that, "La fonction du vodou, dans le texte, est de donner cette poussée ascensionnelle pour 'agiter' un nouveau 'Je identitaire'" (44). While I agree with his characterization of the function of vaudou in the text, he overlooks the question of gender in his consideration of identity. Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken devotes two chapters to René Depestre in her book, *Spirit Possession in French, Haitian, and Vodou Thought – An Intellectual History*, where her careful examination of the state of "possession" offers an illuminating view on both vaudou and Haiti. Though her analysis overlooks the question of masculinity, she maps an intellectual history of possession using Depestre's novel, *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*



(1988). Furthermore, she asserts that the one of the goals of the text was “to restore Vodou’s image,” especially after the way it was corrupted and exploited by the Duvalier dictatorship (215).

In addition, writers and scholars such as Louis-Philippe Dalembert, Stanley Péan, Jean-Claude Michel, and Edward Kamau Brathwaite have privileged vaudou as a primary lens through which to read Depestre’s various works throughout his career. However, none of the studies include any considerations into masculinity and its relation to either vaudou or Depestre. In reading masculinity through vaudou, I hope to reveal Depestre’s engagement with masculinity within oppressive contexts. Both Michele’s surrealist view of Depestre’s poetry of revolt and Brathwaite’s revelation that the poet in *Arc-en-ciel* is a reincarnation of Shakespeare’s Caliban expose the range of influences on these texts as well as the limitations of Depestre’s reliance on vaudou as a literary and political frame. Dalembert and Péan read Depestre’s deployment of vaudou as an extension of the eroticism that pervades all of his writings. Given its centrality to Depestre’s oeuvre, eroticism offers a productive avenue for the exploration of masculinity. Furthermore, they see both the eroticism and vaudou as part of Depestre’s project of liberation and revolt. Along similar lines, Bernadette Cailier’s “L’Efficacité poétique du Vaudou dans *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’Occident chrétien* de Rene Depestre,” offers an evaluation of Depestre’s use of vaudou in the poem, though she ultimately finds it to be unsuccessful. Taking a particular ideological stance, she argues that, “L’exploitation du Vaudou par un poète marxiste ne peut qu’être ludique, sacrilège ; elle rompt nécessairement avec certains aspects de la culture populaire” (58). The perceived ideological conflict betrays her paltry understanding of the history and practice of vaudou, especially with regard to Duvalierist Haiti. Neither an organized

religion, in the traditional sense, nor an opiate for the masses, vaudou, I insist, is compatible with Marxism rather than conflicting as Depestre demonstrates in the studied texts. Given vaudou's history as a mode of resistance against oppression and erasure and its syncretic foundation, it is a religion receptive to adjustments and interpretation, including political praxis.

#### Papadocrazia: Vaudou, René Depestre and Duvalier

René Depestre has a personal stake in criticizing the dictatorship, especially considering that he knew Dr. François Duvalier growing up and was later offered a post in his administration. After more than a decade in exile, René Depestre was finally able to return to Haiti on December 23, 1957. In February 1958, hearing of Depestre's return, newly elected President François "Papa Doc" Duvalier summoned the poet to a meeting where he would offer Depestre the estimable position of *responsable culturel* in the *Ministère des Affaires étrangères* (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Given the president's prestige and almost otherworldly authoritative power, Depestre knew that he could not refuse the request outright, and instead, took his time to think over the proposition. Then, after a rousing speech at the conference entitled, "*La responsabilité des intellectuels devant leur peuple*," during which Depestre denounced the terrorism and censure of the dictatorship, the Tonton Macoute broke into his house in the middle of the night and threatened him and his family.<sup>88</sup> A few days later, he was informed that his house was under surveillance and warned against leaving the city. While stuck in circumstances resembling house arrest in Port-au-Prince, Depestre heard news of the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and

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<sup>88</sup> On René Depestre's life and work leading up to and after his return to Haiti, see Claude Couffon and René Depestre, *René Depestre* (Paris: Seghers, 1986).

Ernesto “Che” Guevara. In response, he wrote an article, “*Le Sens d’une Victoire*,” published in *Le Nouvelliste*, which caught the attention of Fidel Castro. With Guevara’s invitation, Depestre was able to leave Haiti for Cuba where he would remain for many years. In retaliation, President François Duvalier revoked Depestre’s Haitian citizenship.<sup>89</sup> Following his exile, Depestre has spoken about this period in his life in interviews as well as penning a short story, “*La mort coupée sur mesure*,” which presents a fictionalized recounting of his encounters with Duvalier and the Tontons Macoutes and his eventual exile.<sup>90</sup>

It is during these years in Cuba that Depestre would write from December 1964 to June 1965<sup>91</sup>, *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’occident chrétien*, published in Paris through *Présence Africaine*. While this “poème-mystère vaudou” battles racism and subjugation to the White world, in particular the United States, he assails the racist logic and hypocrisy of Duvalier regime more directly in *Le Mât de cocagne*. I demonstrate that in both of these texts, Depestre responds to the exploitation of vaudou by the Duvalier dictatorship, and offers a reconceptualization of masculinity in dictatorial Haiti through his own deployment of the country’s religion.

Considering himself as the *Chef Spirituel* of Haiti, François Duvalier manipulated the public through his instrumentalization of vaudou. Given that the majority of the country practices vaudou, Duvalier was able to secure and maintain his power through the appropriation of vaudou imagery and iconography, the recruitment of spiritual leaders into the ranks of his private militia,

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<sup>89</sup> For a timeline of events in Depestre’s life, see Léon-François Hoffmann, “Chronologie de René Depestre.” *Île en île* (ile-en-ile.org/chronologie-de-rene-depestre/).

<sup>90</sup> See Martin Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrière, Danticat*. (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007) 82-3.

<sup>91</sup> Couffon and Depestre 68.

the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*, and by encouraging rumors and superstition.<sup>92</sup> There were even rumors that Papa Doc, himself was a *bokor*—a vaudou priest who often lends his services out for hire and is reputed to practice black magic—which he neither corrected nor explained. Instead, the former doctor turned dictator strengthened his association with the spiritual by fashioning his own image after the *lwa* of death, Baron Samedi, by wearing the very symbols of this *lwa* such as glasses, tall hats and sports coats.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, even the fictional dictator in *Le Mât de cocagne* starts a fashion trend, “complet de casimir noir, chemise au col blanc impeccable, cravate rouge grenat, mouchoir assorti, lunettes noires, feutre gris Stetson ou Borsalino, gants beurre frais, mitraillette au poing” (50). Gun in hand, he presents himself as a deadlier, contemporary, manifest version of the Baron Samedi. With the objective of securing his domination over the public, Papa Doc carefully deployed elements of vaudou to incite fear, to coerce, and to force the masses into submission. As a result, vaudou would, for some, become tainted by Duvalierism.<sup>94</sup> Nowhere do we see this more than in *Le Mât de cocagne* where Depestre very explicitly contrasts the toxic vaudou practiced and promoted by the dictatorship against the positively associated vaudou practiced by the novel’s protagonist, Henri Postel, and his camp. In the beginning of the novel, it is shown that Henri is estranged from the religion of the masses, and later is shown to be injured by vaudou as the dictatorship turns against him and activates the process of zombification against him. Indeed, when Henri tells his friend, David, that he intends to enter the tournament of climbing the greasy pole of the novel’s title, the friend responds, “Nous voici en pleine magie. Je te croyais guéri du vaudou” (41). Instead, Henri develops a unique

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<sup>92</sup> See Arthur and Dash 258, Dubois 331-3, and Laennec Hurbon, *Voodoo : Truth and Fantasy* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) 74, 117-9.

<sup>93</sup> Dubois 331

<sup>94</sup> Hurbon 117

relationship to the Haitian religion, one where as a *zombi*, he is empty. He is empty of power, religion, hope, and of particular interest to this study, he is empty of masculinity. It is through his practice of vaudou and his status as a Zacharian *zombi* in this novel that I examine masculinity as expressed through vaudou and under dictatorship.

*Zombi Man: Vaudou and Masculinity in Le Mât de cocagne*

Published in 1979, *Le Mât de cocagne* takes place on a fictional tropical island which is suffering under a fictional dictator. The title, French for the greasy pole, refers to the medieval utopia, the land of Cockaigne.<sup>95</sup> The island has been renamed, “Le Grand pays Zacharien,” after “Le Grand Électrificateur des âmes” himself, President Zoocrate Zacharie. While the writer insists, in a paratextual disclaimer preceding the novel, that, “*Les événements et les personnages de ce récit appartiennent donc à la pure fiction,*” it quite obviously implicates the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti (11 *italics in original*). The parallels drawn between the fictional dictatorship and the real one are far too concrete to ignore, such as the reference to Zacharie’s fraudulent election and the date of the festival which corresponds to the date of Duvalier’s inauguration, which is also the dictator’s fetish number.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, it is clear that Depestre’s intention is to critique and represent the Duvalier dictatorship through his novel.

On this island, his “Excellence le Président à Vie, l’Honorable Zoocrate Zacharie” sends ex-senator and current rival, Henri Postel, to a village called Tête-Boeuf to be forgotten by the

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<sup>95</sup> See Jacques Le Goff, “L’utopie médiévale: Le Pays de Cocagne,” *Revue Européenne Des Sciences Sociales* 27.85 (1989): 271-86. Investigating the possibility of a medieval concept of utopia outside of heaven, Le Goff finds “le pays de Cocagne,” as the only real medieval utopia. “Le pays de Cocagne” is a land of excess, largess, and idleness. Furthermore, he emphasizes the aspect of social critique inherent in conceptualizations of utopia.

<sup>96</sup> See the Introduction to the English language translation of *Le mât de cocagne* where Carrol F. Coates delves into the fictional references to the real life dictatorship and reveals the many allusions to Duvalierism as well as Haitian history in general, in *The Festival of the Greasy Pole*. Trans. Carrol F. Coates. (Charlottesville: U of Virginia, 1990).

public and, as Depestre relates, zombified by his own boredom and impotence (16). For fear of turning him into a martyr Zacharie enacts a special kind of zombification upon Henri in which, “Il n’aura ni l’air absent ni le regard vitreux de nos traditionnels morts-vivants. Il faut qu’il demeure jusqu’au bout conscient de son état” (14). This “zombification par soi-même” robs Henri of any power, agency, and status that he once had (15). Indeed, this specific process of zombification is also one of emasculation, taking away the very axes upon which masculinity is constructed. Intending to reclaim some of his masculinity and influence others to do the same, Henri enters the competition to climb the greasy pole.

Formerly part of the dictator’s inner circle, Henri Postel is banished to Tête-Boeuf and forced to live a mundane life running a little store named Noah’s Ark, completely isolated from society and the public eye. Once known as an “un homme d’action” (13), now, “il avait laidement épaissi au cou, aux épaules, au ventre et aux fesses. Il avait la nuque, le bas du visage et les mains vivement striés de rides. Tout en lui allait à la dérive sauf ses bras qui conservaient de la force et ses yeux qui paraissaient parfois moins vieillis que le reste de ses traits” (17). As Bernard Delpêche affirms, “Postel n’est pas un nom propre mais un symbole d’impuissance et victimisation” (88). No longer even a man, but a manifest body of emptiness, Henri does not inspire much confidence when he announces his plan to enter and win the competition to climb the greasy pole. Accordingly, Martin Munro, borrowing Maximilien Laroche’s formulation of the Haitian antihero, considers Henri Postel’s depiction to be that of the, “anti-heroic nihilism” of Haitian literature and history. He insists that, “Postel is Depestre’s own incarnation of this longstanding archetype” (108). While the question of whether he is a reincarnation of historical Haitian protagonists remains open for debate, the depths of his helplessness and isolation are expounded at length in

the novel. Due to the nature of his condemnation, his plan to participate in the tournament attracts the attention of “l’Office National de l’Électrification des Âmes (ONEDA),” which is the fictional version of the VSN, or the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*, commonly known as the Tontons Macoute (13).<sup>97</sup> Seeing docile Henri as a threat once again, they plan to take actions against him to ensure his loss and further humiliation, which they enact by invoking the *lwa* of death, Baron Samedi.

Indeed, vaudou plays a central role in the text and creates the means through which Henri can attempt to reclaim his masculinity. Both Henri and Zacharie practice vaudou and call upon the *lwas* to assist in accomplishing their goals. Zacharie and ONEDA, or the *Office National de l’Électrification des Âmes*, perform an *expédition*, or a rite, to ensure Henri’s failure. The ONEDA is the fictional counterparts to the VSN, *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*, better known as the Tontons Macoutes. As I have mentioned in previous chapters, the Tonton Macoute is the nightmarish bogeyman of Haitian folklore who fills his knapsack with naughty children that he will later consume. The VSN were, therefore, the embodiment of evil and an extension of the dictator.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the vast network of Tonton Macoutes enhanced the otherworldly associations of Duvalier’s power. Thus, it is no surprise that Espingel Nildevert—minion, bokor<sup>99</sup>, and Tonton Macoute—casts a rite against a citizen like Henri. He initiates the ritual by pulling from his sack, “un chapeau haut de forme, une redingote, une fausse barbe blanche, un nez postiche de perroquet, en carton jaune, un cierge noir... une paire de lunettes noire, une

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<sup>97</sup> Coates xlii

<sup>98</sup> For more on the brutal practices of the VSN and the role of paramilitarism in Haitian politics see, Jeb Sprague, *Paramilitarism and the Assault on Democracy in Haiti* (New York: Monthly Review, 2012).

<sup>99</sup> A vaudou priest who will sell their services for good or evil, they are often associated with black magic. They are usually responsible for making a *zombi*.

canne, une bouteille pleine et trois gros sachets” (105-6). While, initially, these objects may seem innocuous, Depestre makes clear that, “Le public, médusé, reconnut illico les accessoires du *loa* de la mort, Baron-la-Croix, dit Baron-Cimetière ou Baron Samedi” (106). Here, the author does three things: 1) he makes yet another reference to Duvalier who was known to dress in a similar manner, cementing his association with otherworldly power, 2) he demonstrates that the dictator’s power goes beyond life and death, and 3) he reminds the reader of the network of vaudou priests and priestesses at the dictator’s disposal. Furthermore, Depestre delineates two kinds of vaudou, one in opposition to the other. He, on the one hand, makes reference to a distorted and false vaudou practiced by the dictator and his circle as they cast an *expédition* against Henri. On the other hand, he presents a true and authentic vaudou used to defend against the magical assault, as evidenced by the celebratory depiction of Henri’s practice of vaudou. His is the real vaudou practiced by the Haitian people. Given Depestre’s two contrasting portraits of the religion, we see that vaudou is not only the matrix of the narrative of dictatorship, it is invested with the power to both destroy and to create. It is when Henri reestablishes his faith in vaudou that he is roused from his zombified state, and it is only through the practice of vaudou that his masculinity can be revived.

Before continuing, it will be useful to define and elaborate on the condition of the *zombi*. Considering Henri’s sentence as zombification, it is necessary to understand what exactly a *zombi* is, in the Haitian sense, and its history. In Haiti, zombification is often considered the worst fate for any individual, especially because of its origins and association with slavery. The *zombi*, as defined by Alfred Métraux,



est une bête de somme que son maître exploite sans merci, le forçant à travailler dans ses champs, l'accablant de besogne, ne lui ménageant pas les coups de fouet et ne le nourrissant que d'aliments insipides. L'existence des *zombi* vaut, sur le plan mythique, celle des anciens esclaves de Saint-Domingue. (250-1)

Thus, the *zombi* is the most nightmarish and extreme version of the slave. While slaves maintained freedom in their minds and their souls, the *zombi* is completely enslaved, body and soul. Indeed, both Joan Dayan and Doris Garraway have explicated the associations between *zombi* and slave. Dayan states that the, “zombi—a soulless husk deprived of freedom—is the ultimate sign of loss and dispossession,” which recalls the memories of slavery (37). Whereas Garraway traces the emergence of the *zombi* across the diaspora, relating that, “witchcraft supplied a culturally acceptable explanation for slavery and colonialism’s deleterious effect on African peoples and social organization” (179). Moreover, Yves Saint-Gérard, trained doctor and neuropsychiatrist, views what he calls the *zombi* phenomenon as a symptom of domination and insists that the process of zombification is uniquely Haitian. He asserts that, “En Haïti, la toile de fond du phénomène zombi est la situation de tout un peuple écrasé par un vieux système dictatorial qui le confine dans la misère morale et physique” (136). Notably, Alfred Métraux, Laennec Hurbon, and Saint-Gérard all identify two types of *zombi* : “les *corps sans âme* et les *âmes sans corps*” (Saint-Gérard 35). Hurbon expands, “l’un c’est l’âme d’un individu décédé, qui peut être captée par un *bòkò* (prêtre-vodou) et déposée dans une cruche ou une bouteille” (*Barbare* 195) and the second, “l’individu tenu seulement dans un état léthargique et qui, inhumé, est repris du cimetière par un *bòkò*... totalement obéissant à son maître” (*Barbare* 198). In the case of Henri Postel, Zacharie enacts a version of the latter.

Zombification is, undoubtedly, the most extreme process of disempowerment, leaving the individual in a state resembling bare life, as posited by Kaiama Glover in, “New Narratives of Haiti, or, How to Empathize with a Zombie.” In her analysis, she relies on Giorgio Agamben’s theorization of bare life, that is, a life deprived of politics and reduced down to its animal state (*zoe*). Though she concludes that the zombie is not the *homo sacer*, she exposes the ways in which the conditions of bare life have been reproduced by Haiti’s own government. Furthermore, she states, that, “Haiti functions as *gens/populus/natio sacer*. It is a negative mirror that reflects the ‘developed’ world to itself, allowing that world to know itself and its right(eous)ness, even if that means, as Frankétienne declares, effectively casting Haitians as people who enjoy living in misery” (203). Similarly, Sibylle Fischer, in “Haiti: Fantasies of Bare Life,” finds that the slave cannot be considered *homo sacer* because of their status as property, rather than subject, a fact which exempts them from sovereign power. I would be remiss in not mentioning the connection between the dictator’s name, Zoocrate Zacharie, and biopolitics. The morpheme, *zoo-*, means “animal, living being,”<sup>100</sup> whereas *-crate* means, “strength, power.”<sup>101</sup> The dictator’s first name is literally a synonym of biopower, which is a fitting name considering he exerts power over life and death, stealing the political life (*bios*) right out of people’s bodies. As the *Grand Électrificateur des âmes*, he has zombified a nation, commanding his peoples’ bodies and minds. His title connotes his power over his subjects, as evidenced by *Larousse*’s definition the verb *électrifier*, “transformer une machine, une installation, etc, pour la faire fonctionner à l’énergie

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<sup>100</sup> See “Zoo-.” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, [www.etymonline.com/word/zoo-](http://www.etymonline.com/word/zoo-).

<sup>101</sup> See “Autocrat.” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, [www.etymonline.com/word/autocrat](http://www.etymonline.com/word/autocrat).

électrique.”<sup>102</sup> Suppressing both the soul and free will, the processes of electrification transform men into automatons, or in Henri’s case, a *zombi*.

The *zombi* is made by capturing the part of the soul associated with what we would consider consciousness. While there is some disagreement, within scholarly circles as well as amongst *vaudouisants*, over the exact roles of the two parts of the soul, there is a consensus that the spirit linked to consciousness must be removed in order to make one a *zombi*.<sup>103</sup> In vaudou, the soul is comprised of two parts: *gwobonanj* and *tibonanj*.<sup>104</sup> The *gwobonanj* is typically the objective and impersonal part of the soul, whereas the *tibonanj* is the seat of the self as a person. According to Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, “the *ti-bon-anj* is a person’s personality, that which identifies a body as a distinct individual, but the Vodouyizan envisages this personality as a constituent part of a larger, collective community” (232). It is when the *tibonanj* is captured by the *bokor* that the *zombi* can be made. As Hurbon explains, “Ayant perdu toute personnalité, c’est-à-dire ce qui lui confère sa personnalité (le principe spirituel du *petit bon ange*), il obéit mécaniquement à sa propriétaire” (*Barbare* 199). Again, scholars such as Roberto Strongman and Maya Deren have argued the inverse about the roles of the *tibonanj* and the *gwobonanj*, yet they agree that the “personality” is the part to be extracted and captured during the process of

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<sup>102</sup> See “Électrifier.” Def. 3. *Dictionnaire de Français Larousse*, <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/électrifier/28195>.

<sup>103</sup> Roberto Strongman argues that the *gwobonanj* is the consciousness. Though he considers it a mistake, he points out that several other scholars have insisted on the reverse, meaning that the *tibonanj* is the consciousness and the *gwobonanj* objectivity. See, “The Afro-diasporic Body in Haitian Vodou and the Transcending of Gendered Cartesian Corporeality.” *Kunapipi* 30.2 (2008): 11-29. However, Kenaz Filan acknowledges that the roles may be inversed depending on the sect or practitioner. See, *The Haitian Vodou Handbook: Protocols for Riding with the Lwa* (Rochester: Destiny, 2007): 64.

<sup>104</sup> These terms have many orthographic variations, I will use *gwobonanj*, *tibonanj*, and *bokor* unless it is a direct citation. Variations for *gwobonanj* include: *gros bon ange*, *gwo bon anj*, *gro bon anj*, etc. *Tibonanj* is also spelled *ti bon ange*, *ti bon anj*, or *petit bon ange*, whereas *bokor* can also be spelled, *bòkò*.

zombification. It is for this reason that the master can exercise total dominion over the *zombi*; under such circumstances, resistance is impossible.

Furthermore, the extrication and subsequent confinement of the *tibonanj* is one of the principal constitutive elements of zombification. In order to make a *zombi*, a *bokor* will, normally, concoct a potion and recite an incantation in order to a) raise the body from the dead and b) capture the *tibonanj*. In Depestre's version, however, the crucial step of imprisoning the *tibonanj* is eliminated to maximize Henri's suffering. Zacharie specifies, "J'ai décidément écarté les mécanismes de zombification du siècle dernier" (14). Leaving the traditional practices behind, he embarks on a new kind of zombification. In declaring that, "L'électrification des âmes accède à une nouvelle dimension métaphysique : la mort qui ressemble plus à la vie qu'à toute autre chose," Depestre via Zacharie creates a third category of *zombi* (15). He explains, "Il [Henri] n'aura ni l'air absent ni le regard vitreux de nos traditionnels morts-vivants. Il faut qu'il demeure jusqu'au bout conscient de son état" (14). Here, Depestre reproduces, almost verbatim, the definition of a traditional *zombi* as Métraux describes, "On reconnaît le *zombi* à leur air absent, à leurs yeux éteints, presque vitreux" (251). In light of his reference to Métraux and his parodic tone, Depestre implicates the overstated authority of Western anthropological accounts of vaudou, which, in turn, exerts undue influence on the reception and practice of vaudou outside of Haiti. He speaks back to Western academic and scientific communities and presents something different. In fact, Zacharie diverges from the traditional process of zombification in two ways. First, he does not require a dead body, he, instead, wants to orchestrate a fate worse than death for his rival. Second, he does not capture Henri's *tibonanj*, leaving him conscious of his own zombification. Unlike the traditional *zombi*, whose dead body has lost its consciousness,

that of Depestre is cognizant of his status and is unable to do anything other than experience the suffering that is his total and complete enslavement of the mind and body.

While the new Zacharian *zombi* shares many of the same characteristics and history as the traditional *zombi*, it distinguishes itself by being self-aware. Zacharie's, therefore also Depestre's, decision to keep his consciousness intact has some interesting consequences and implications. Zacharie not only maximizes Henri's suffering but he robs Henri of his agency and power. The dictator wants Henri to feel the pain of losing his will to live and the powerlessness of his new reality. Moreover, he wants Henri to remember the loss of his friends, family and supporters killed by the regime. One of Zacharie's chief concerns is that Henri be isolated and powerless. For example, he orders his right-hand man, Clovis Barbotog,

l'échoppe la plus minable du Portail-Léogâne ou de Tete-Boeuf, et colle de force notre Henri à la place de son propriétaire. Aie soin, avec le doigté qu'on te connaît, *qu'il n'y ait plus jamais à ses côtés rien de vivant ni chaud : ni femmes, ni enfants, ni parents, ni amis, ni partisans, ni le moindre animal domestique.* (15-6, *emphasis mine*)

Here, we see that Zacharie wants to remove Henri, as much as he can, from the social and familial spheres; the domains in which masculinity operates and thrives. Given masculinity's highly relational nature, it is important to note that masculinity gains validity and authority through social relations. As Linden Lewis elaborates, on Caribbean masculinity, "Men define themselves in ways that underscore their *autonomy*, their ability to define situations in terms compatible with their interests. To be a man is to *decide* where you want to be, what you want to do, how you want to dress and who you want to look in the eyes of women but also in *relation* to other men" (97 *emphasis mine*). In this explanation, he emphasizes that masculinity is highly

relational, and is socially constructed. Masculinity only has value if that value is acknowledged by others, both men and women. For instance, Martin Munro points out the masculine dynamics between Henri and the *houngan/bokor* Nildevert, “significantly, the authority of the *houngan* Nildevert is further undermined on the second day... It is as if the nonconformist upsurge has had the effect of emasculating the *houngan*, of rendering him ridiculous in the eyes of the public” (116). Clearly failing in his mission to weaken and undermine Henri, Nildevert deteriorates physically as his power and authority are conferred to his opponent. His emasculation is a result of the loss of esteem by others. In the eyes of the public, his power is depreciating, as is his masculinity. Besides the masculine exchange value, masculinity is also undergirded by the desire to be in control and to make decisions. It, therefore, requires the very things that the *zombi* cannot access nor exercise. Thus, cutting him off from these relations is tantamount to cutting off his masculinity. Indeed, Zacharie isolates and denies the very elements that condition the practice of masculinity. The new formula for zombification entails the excision of masculinity rather than the extraction of consciousness. It seeks to emasculate rather than stupefy. Indeed, when Barbotog, in response to the plan, exclaims, “C'est la gomme à effacer l'homme à partir de sa conscience,” he confirms their plan of masculine erasure (14).

Returning, briefly, to the *zombi*'s origins in the context of slavery, it is necessary to highlight that the condition of the zombified body reflects that of the slave body. It, too, is a captive body that is controlled and abused by a master. Furthermore, like the slave, it is a degendered body. As Venetria K. Patton indicates, in her reading of Hortense Spiller's seminal essay, “Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” that, “Spillers suggests that the slaves were not sexed when they were actually seen as degendered, not unsexed” (9). The

*zombi* suffers similar repercussions, but to a greater degree. The slave body, before zombification, is robbed of a gendered identity. Given the fact that slaves were considered to be possessions like cattle rather than a person, only their biological sex was recognized. That is to say, their capacity to reproduce made them valuable to breeders, slave traders, and plantation owners. While slavery is considered, in Spiller's words, "a theft of the body," zombification is a theft of the soul, more specifically of personhood. In other words, the zombified body is just that a body, devoid of consciousness. Accordingly, the *zombi* represents the antithesis of gendered identities in general, and masculinity specifically.

While the many phallic connotations of the *mât de cocagne* may allow for a more facile interpretation of masculine redemption, in vaudou it offers a more complex and variable understanding of masculine identity; one not bound by the constraints of Western convictions. Frequently compared to the male sexual organ, for example, "un gigantesque membre viril" (57) and "un arbre de nature phallique" (60), the pole only represents one way to exhibit masculine prowess. While Jacqueline Couti contends that, "Le mât est le lieu de rencontre masculin, le nexus où la masculinite se cristallise," I argue that the pole only puts traditional and dominant masculinity on display (50). Specifically, the kind of masculinity celebrated by the tournament is hypermasculinity. The men who participate in this event are often associated with criminality and delinquency, thus "un champion du mât suiffé choisissait d'emblée un avenir de malfaiteur" (27-8). These "malfaiteurs" put on display their physical strength, aggression and violence. In other words, they perform hypermasculinity. However, Henri seeks neither traditional masculinity nor hypermasculinity, he wants to be, "un nègre tout neuf" (135). Echoing the poetic voice in *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*, "Me voici un nègre tout neuf/ Je me sens enfin

moi-même,” Henri desires a new consciousness altogether (2.13-4). Recalling Depestre’s announcement, in *Arc-en-ciel*, “Je ne batirai de nouveau temple,” it becomes clear that the problem with dominant masculinity is structural, cultural and historical. The temple represents an institution; one that must not be rebuilt but destroyed in hopes of creating something different in order to avoid repeating the cycles of violence within which masculinity is trapped.

To counteract the rite performed by Zoocrate Zacharie’s *oungans* and *bokors*, Sor Cisa performs a counterrite, calling on the *lwa*, Papa Loko to come to their aide. Sor Cis is the local *mambo*—a vaudou priestess—who has an intricate knowledge of the spirits and nature. She favors Papa Loko and assists Henri with his mission. Though Depestre does not explicitly say so, she is a skillful *mambo* who must be very powerful given her ability to not only cast a counterrite, but succeed in counteracting the *bokor*’s damaging *expédition*. During the ritual, Sor Cisa proclaims, “Te voici un nègre tout neuf. Tu es Henri Postel, l’homme que tu es” (135). She enacts a kind of anointment as she dips her fingers in oil and traces crosses on Henri’s forehead, stomach, chest, arms, knees, and even his testicles. Having appealed to the *lwa*, Papa Loko, that, “*Postel aura des couilles de lion/ Pour vaincre les fureurs du mât*,” her anointing of his sexual organs further implies that it is Henri’s maleness and his biology that are at stake (128). Further emphasizing his male biology, Depestre details a sexual union between Henri and a beautiful woman named Éliisa which concludes the ceremony. The highly erotic depiction of the scene, especially the attention to the sexual organs, further highlights the importance of gender and eroticism. Indeed, the role and representation of eroticism has been thoroughly investigated by many scholars who have found eroticism to be one of the main axes of Depestre’s poetry and



prose.<sup>105</sup> Éric Dazzan contends that *eros* brings autonomy back to the body posits that, “[l]a jouissance est ce par quoi le sujet peut encore, malgré tout, s’éprouver comme tel” (199).

Analyzing the sexual encounter between Henri and Éliisa has more than a physical interaction, Stanley Péan argues that, “l’erotisme du *Mât de cocagne* a partie liée avec un sentiment de transcendance cosmique” (55). Indeed, eroticism allows the body to transcend the slave body, to experience “jouissance,” not as a reproductive imperative but a freely erotic act. Through the power of spiritual and erotic unions, Henri has quite literally been transformed into a new man, “un nègre tout neuf.”

While Loko, at first may seem like an unusual choice, Sor Cisa assures Henri that Loko is the only *lwa* who can help him in his quest to climb the greasy pole. After all, he was the *lwa* who “protegea Dessalines durant toutes les batailles de l’Indépendance” against the Napoléon and the French during Haiti’s revolution, and therefore would also assure Henri victory against the powerful oppressor that is the ONEDA (81). Primarily associated with trees and vegetation, as Milo Rigaud refers to him as “L’arbre-prince,” “L’arbre du Bien et du Mal,” and, significantly, “Le poteau-mitan des péristyles voodoo” (159), Loko is also known as the father of all priests—for both genders, *houngans* and *mambos*—the guardian of sanctuaries and a master healer.<sup>106</sup> Notably, as the tree of good and evil, he is particularly sensitive to injustice. So, while a tree spirit seems like an unlikely choice at first; Loko is the most pertinent *lwa* for the task at

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<sup>105</sup> See Louis-Philippe Dalembert, Graziano Benelli, Jacqueline Couti, Carrol F. Coates, and Éric Dazzan, “Éros politique/ Éros poétique.” *René Depestre : Le Soleil devant*, edited by Marie Joqueviel-Bourjea and Béatrice Bonhomme (Hermann, 2015) : 199-217.

<sup>106</sup> Fila 86-7, Métraux 94-5.

hand, given that the object of the tournament is to climb up a greasy pole, just as one would try to mount a tree, and Loko is himself a tree and more than that the greasy pole itself.

As Coates and Couti have remarked, Henri's surname Postel means post or pole in old French.<sup>107</sup> In light of this fortuitous connection, his last name seems to confer a destiny upon Henri, to climb the greasy pole and win the tournament. Furthermore, Postel in modern French would be *poteau*, which inevitably conjures up the wooden post in the center of the *péristyle*—a vaudou temple—called the *poteau-mitan*. It is arguably the most important element of vaudou, what Milo Rigaud relates as, “le *mystère-principe* du culte,” (93) and, “l'*axe cosmique de la magie voudou*” (94 *emphasis in original*). It is around the *poteau-mitan* that all rituals and ceremonies in vaudou are conducted, representing the chief *lwa* and the master of the crossroads, Legba. In fact, a variation of his name Legba Ati-bon translates to “un *bois juste*, un *bois de justice*,” (Rigaud 93 *emphasis in original*). Legba is, moreover, the intermediary between the worlds and between humans and the divine, and as such he is always invoked first during the rituals. As Métraux characterizes, “Il est aussi une divinité phallique représentée devant toutes les maisons d'habitation par un monticule en terre surmonté d'un membre viril en bois ou en fer” (319). The phallic associations of Legba are embodied or extended onto the *poteau-mitan*, and by extension the greasy pole.

Though the *poteau-mitan* is primarily associated with Legba, it is also in the domain of Papa Loko. As the guardian of sanctuaries and as the manifestation of the *poteau-mitan* as well, Loko inhabits every aspect of vaudou. Importantly, this vegetal being is also a gendered being. While many of *lwa* are ambiguous or fluid in their gender identity, Loko is a male spirit with

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<sup>107</sup> Coates xxxv, Couti 47

masculine duties. In her analysis, Maya Deren emphasizes the categorical maleness of Loko, she writes, “The functions of the phallus and of the womb or umbilical cord are not blended as in Legba, nor is the distinction minimized, as in the other cosmic male-female couples” (146).

What is more, Deren understands the highly gendered nature of both Loko and his wife, Ayizan, as a sign of their proximity to humanity and the physical world. Rooted in the physical world, Loko requires a more concrete notion of gender in order to properly perform his duties and exercise his power. For this reason, he is the necessary choice for Henri and Sor Cisa. Only he can aid in Henri’s quest for a new masculine identity and a new relation to power.

What is more, Depestre reveals the importance of the tree as a symbol when he asks, “n’est-il pas, l’arbre, le support vivant qui régénère sans cesse le cosmos?” (69). He, then, follows with a list of sacred trees such as the Scandinavian Yggdrasil, the Caribbean mapou, the tree of liberty, the May Pole and the wedding of the tree in India. All these arboreal references evoke a sense of the eternal, of a world connected and existing beyond time. In the text, the tree, represents a kind of living temple to house the gods, to hold up the cosmos, to preserve freedom or to protect matrimony. The tree is the regenerating force of the cosmos and this power is conferred onto the humble greasy pole. Thus, Henri’s mission cannot be reduced to a simple show of strength or an act of defiance. It is much more significant as it is an act that seeks regeneration. He not only wants to restore his own masculinity, but he yearns for a regeneration of hope. He wants to show the public the possibility of a new world order.

When Henri Postel climbs the greasy pole, he does not know of the effect it will have. Reacting almost on a visceral level, he only knows that he must climb the pole. He discloses to a friend, “Je veux simplement donner à voir à cette île qu’elle n’a plus comme chemin qu’une dure

montée” (41). And while his act may not be a complete success, he accomplishes more than he could have ever imagined. He has broken free of his zombification and reclaimed his humanity via his masculinity. Indeed, as he climbs towards his goal, Éliisa repeats, “Tout un homme, tout un homme,” as if to say, he has become a whole man (196). No longer a zombie, but a man in full possession of his own capabilities, Henri jumps off the pole mid climb to grab a gun. He shoots Clovis Barbotog and is shot in return. Having chosen his own fateful end, he goes down laughing. In the epilogue, a letter from Elisa reveals that Henri did not die right away and they were able to recover his body for a burial, but does die en route. The writer of this tale reveals that, “L’exploit d’Henri Postel et le bain de sang qui le suivit eurent des échos dans le monde entier.” Henri’s journey through zombification to masculine empowerment lives on, animated by the power of vaudou. However, despite his heroism, “il [le Grand Pays Zacharien] retomba dans son silence et ses ténèbres habituels” (198). Though Zacharie feared major ramifications from his death, the epilogue discloses that Henri’s death only caused a minor three-day disturbance to the dictatorship and then everything returned to normal. Henri’s martyrdom becomes a question as his country remains ruled by fear and oppression, while his life has become an embodiment of resistance through the recounting of his story.

While his country returns to a state of dictatorship, Henri’s death is mourned and celebrated by his friends and supporters in a ceremony they christen a “Noël-Postel” (205). Instead of a funeral honoring the end of his life, Henri’s death is celebrated as a (re-)birth. Sor Cisa expresses, “Tu finis cette étape de ta vie au milieu de ton peuple. Tu seras un berceau joyeux pour tout ce qui naîtra de bien et de beau de nos terres” (206). While Henri’s actions may

not have ended the dictatorship, he lives on not as a martyr, but, as the inspiration and embodiment of a future, better world.

De-possessing the Black Male Body in *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien*

*Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* is a poetic masterpiece that defies categorization and transcends boundaries. Lying somewhere between and beyond the epic, lyric and narrative traditions and prose, it is the life force of vaudou that animates Depestre's poetry. To illustrate, the poet announces in the Prélude, "Je sais désormais tout ce qui est mort en moi... Et le nom du vaudou qui agite en mon corps." He continues, "Et j'aime ces flammes miennes/ Leur musique scande tous mes elans." Indeed, vaudou pulls the poet back from the brink of death, breathing life into his body and giving him the power, "De bruler tout ce qui me tombe sous la main/ Je suis la grande race des volcans." Through the power of the volcano, of destruction and creation, he burns down the capitals of racism in 1967. He rages, "Lorsque Memphis brûlera ce sera moi!/ Lorsque Johannesburg brûlera ce sera moi!" (15). He makes clear that the fight against racism is at the heart of his poetry. By reclaiming his voice and his power through a creative engagement with vaudou, I argue that the poet destroys the racist Western stereotypes imposed upon the black male body through the implementation of spirit possession. Situating this text between Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* and vaudou conceptions of self, I propose a reading which addresses the intersections of race, gender, and religion within the context of oppression.

*Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* unfolds over seven parts, five of which engage directly with vaudou as a primary theme. The poem starts with a Prélude in which the poet declares, "Oui je suis un nègre-tempête/ Un nègre racine-d'Arc-en-ciel" (11). Setting the tone of the piece, the poet promises both destruction (tempête) and regeneration (racine and Arc-en-ciel).

At the end of the *Prélude*, the poet is possessed by sixteen different male *lwas*, starting with Atibon-Legba and ending with Loko. He, then, turns his attention to the daughter of a white Christian family in Alabama. As the poet pontificates, we are presented with an all-male procession of *lwas* in “*Épiphanies des dieux du vaudou*.” Sixteen male *lwas* speak their truths and then they wash away the filth of Western discourse in “*Le bain du petit matin*.” This is followed by “*La cantate à sept voix*” and “*Les sept piliers de l’innocence*,” where the female *lwas* finally speak and praise bygone heroes who have fought against oppression, racism, and injustice in Haiti and beyond, in such figures as Toussaint Louverture, Charlemagne Péralte, Malcolm X amongst others. The remaining two sections, “*Aphorismes et paraboles du nouveau monde*,” and “*Pour un nouvel age du coeur humain*,” offers an absurd rewriting of commonplace notions about black life and history and, in the latter, the poet presents an apocalyptic farewell that is also an attempt to make peace.

Published in 1967, *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’occident chrétien* situates itself inside the antiracist and anticolonial struggles that marked this time period. Through vaudou Depestre seeks to rebuild and reaffirm the black body. As J. Michael Dash reminds us, in *Haiti and the United States*, “The Haitian self-image is by the mid-1970’s marked by the humiliations and the violence inflicted by the Duvalierism,” which is evidenced by the emergence of defiled bodies in Haitian literature (124). The imperative to bring dignity and agency back to the black body is felt acutely across the globe. From Alabama to Haiti to South Africa, the fight against racism is raging. Depestre joins this fight with his most powerful weapons: poetry and vaudou.

In view of the prominence of vaudou in the text, it is necessary to acknowledge, then, that the concept of the self is very different in vaudou than in Western traditions. Then, we must

understand that self in relation to spirit possession. In vaudou, the self has a tripartite structure with the soul residing in the head. The vaudou self is comprised of the body (*kòr kadav*), and the two parts of the soul: the *gwobonaj*, and the *tibonanj*. The self, therefore, is always multiple, yet singular. This is further complicated by spirit possession, when a *lwa* descends into the body. Though we call the phenomenon spirit possession in the West, for *vaudouisants*, it is described as the *lwa* riding their horse. While in this altered state, the person mounted will exhibit the qualities and mannerisms of the *lwa* inside them. For example, Elizabeth McAlister depicts a scene of sexual ambiguity, “Women, ‘ridden by the *lwa* (spirit), will become men. Grasping walking sticks—some with penises carved at the top—they will begin the *gouyad*, a grinding, *wining* dance of the Banda, a stylized parody of sexual intercourse” (129 *italics in original*). Here, she calls attention to the women who become men. They do not only perform masculinity, they *are* men. For the time that they are mounted by the *lwas*, they are those *lwas*. Importantly, Joan Dayan notes that, “Although it has been said that the self must leave for the *lwa* to enter, the self is not erased. The experience of alternating attention and expansion prods us to envision a configuration of wills, recognizing each other through their relation” (68). The self yields to the *lwa*, and while they share the same body, they create a new consciousness and a new identity. The *lwa* relies on the *tibonaj* as a support and vice versa, in a mutually constitutive relationship. As mentioned previously, the roles of the two parts of soul can be in the reverse order depending on the practitioner and whether the part associated with the personality is extracted when making a *zombi*. Moreover, Joan Dayan delineates the dynamics of identity during spirit possession in vaudou where the *lwa* descends into the body. Once the *lwa* is not supported by the *tibonanj*, it no longer possesses its chosen identity, and the *lwa* is expelled.

In order to properly situate Depestre's antiracist mission, I turn to bell hooks and Frantz Fanon's scholarship on the pernicious effects of oppression and racism on the black male psyche. In, *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, bell hooks identifies patriarchal masculinity as the biggest threat to black males. Tracing the problem back to slavery, she states, "Transplanted African men... had to be taught to equate their higher status as men with the right to dominate women, they had to be taught patriarchal masculinity" (3). Having embraced the violence of white patriarchy, she writes, "meant that most black men measuring against the norm would also be less than a man, failures, unable to realize the ideal. Such thinking led to grave psychological unrest and disease" (14). Here, hooks points to the potential consequences of a disjunctured identity that oppresses rather than strengthening the individual's place in the world. In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Frantz Fanon locates the root of the problem as the trauma of colonization. He expounds on the psychological implications of colonialism and racism on colonized subjects, but more specifically for the black Antillean man. He states that within the colonial context, "nous assistons aux efforts désespérés d'un nègre qui s'acharne à découvrir le sens de l'identité noire" (11). That is to say, the black Antillean man is alienated from himself because the foundation for the very construction of his identity is, in fact, French. Hence, the Antillean, as a colonized subject, is not a product of his own culture, but that of an imposed white French culture. Fanon writes as a Martinican who lived under French rule and as a French citizen, while Haitians freed themselves from the slavery and the French in 1804. However, Fanon speaks for and of colonized subjects in general, and also specifically to the Caribbean. Nevertheless, as the result of colonization, the black man is prone to neuroses and disassociation.



Fanon examines, in the chapter entitled “Le Nègre et la psychopathologie,” the reality of living as a black man inculcated with white European values which designate the black body with the “bad” desires and impulses of white society. Indeed, bell hooks makes a similar observation about society’s view of African American men in her preface, “Seen as animals, brutes, natural born rapists, and murderers, black men have had no real dramatic say when it comes to the way they are represented... At the center of the way black male selfhood is constructed in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy is the image of the brute—untamed, uncivilized, unthinking, and unfeeling” (x). Echoing these same reflections, Depestre confirms, “Je suis collectionneur de monstres” (15). However, this implies an action of choice rather than an imposed reality. He chooses to collect the monsters of the white world and puts them on display for all to see. He curates a grotesque exhibition of racism, oppression and exploitation.

Both Depestre and Fanon aim to, “être un miroir à infra-structure progressive, où pourrait se retrouver le nègre en voie de désaliénation” (Fanon 148). Fanon, however, concentrates on a process of disalienation, while Depestre addresses the white world directly and forces them to face their virulent racism. For example, Cap’tain Zombi, while possessing the poet, demands, “Écoutez monde blanc/ Les salves de nos morts/ Écoutez monde blanc/ En l’honneur de nos morts” (56). He holds the white Western world accountable for the violence against his people and demands their attention while he lists their crimes. As evidenced by the title, *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’occident chrétien*, this collection of prose and verse poems is intended for a Western audience. Starting with Jacques Roumain, Depestre presents six other interlocutors in the form of epigraphs, ending with the following citation from Fanon, “Je ne veux pas chanter le passé aux dépens de mon présent et de mon avenir. Je ne veux qu’une chose : que cesse à jamais

l'asservissement de l'homme par l'homme, c'est-à-dire de moi par un autre. Qu'il me soit permis de découvrir et de vouloir de l'homme, où qu'il se trouve" (9). What is of interest here is a shared concern for the black man's journey to self-discovery and understanding. Both writers endeavor to assist in the quest for self-recognition and acceptance that has been denied to the black man.

The process of disalienation, for Depestre, requires an exorcism of the colonial neuroses from the black psyche, only then can he find himself. This point is beautifully illustrated in the following passage,

Je remue les légendes de ma vie

Je ne bâtirai pas de nouveau temple

Je fais sauter ma peur

Je fais exploser ma biologie...

Vos ruses vos tabous vos histoires de blancs ! (11-2)

As mentioned above, the poet pronounces himself, "un nègre-tempête" and asserts that, "Le vent qui brise tout, c'est moi!" (11) He is a violent and destructive force, annihilating the negative associations so ingrained in the black psyche. Moreover, the black body serves as the surface upon which sociocultural taboos are reflected by white society, "projetant ses intentions chez le nègre, le Blanc se comporte 'comme si' le nègre les avait réellement... Le nègre, lui, est fixé au génital ; ou du moins on l'y a fixé" (Fanon 133-4). Thus, the black man embodies a dangerous sexual power, imposed on him by white society. In other words, "[l]e nègre est un objet phobogène, anxiogène" (Fanon 123). His very presence provokes fear and anxiety, but also desire.

Furthermore, the internalization by Blacks of these negative stereotypes arouses the feelings of negrophobia which manifest in different forms of neuroses, such as a sense of alienation, self-loathing, anxiety, malaise and feelings of inferiority. However, Depestre refuses to be captive to this hypersexualized and genital body, choosing, instead, to destroy it. On the very first page of his poem, he declares, “Je fais sauter mes ténèbres,” which is followed by his exclamation, “Je fais sauter ma peur/ Je fais exploser ma biologie” (11). Black men are taught to hate and distrust the color of their skin and suppress their blackness in order to enter into civilized white society. Depestre rejects the darkness, but not his blackness. He, furthermore, shatters the body that the white world has constructed out of their fears and taboos. He is blowing up those fears and the hypersexualized and dangerous associations with the black male body.

By demolishing his fear and his biology, he is effectively destroying the foundations of negrophobia. Depestre confesses, “A mon corps noir on a donné les pires termes de comparaison. Noir comme le mal. Noir comme une atrocité ou comme un génocide. Noir comme l’enfer” (124). He intends to destroy the black body onto which all of the evils of the human condition have been imposed. He is dismantling, as Fanon would say, “L’archétype des valeurs inférieures [] représenté[es] par le nègre” (153). Refusing to be reduced down to the genital and biological level, he exposes “les faux-dieux” of the white dominant understanding of blackness (11). On the one hand, the black man has historically been associated with violence and animal savagery which has colored the white popular imagination for centuries. As the, “expression des mauvais instincts, de l’obscur inhérent à tout Moi, du sauvage non civilisé, du nègre qui sommeille chez tout Blanc,” (Fanon 151). Haunting the fringes of white consciousness, the black man is associated with animal

savagery and unbridled sexual power which manifest through rape and violence, or in other words the uncontrolled desires and impulses normally repressed and policed by society.

On the other hand, Depestre's new brand of violence, like the volcano, is a generative and productive force which destroys in order to inaugurate a new racial consciousness. He warns, "Je ne bâtirai pas de nouveau temple," that is, he is not creating a new institution built on the ruins of the old. Instead of perpetuating old stereotypes in different forms, he is collecting the monsters of white society and putting them on display. He states,

Ma collection de papillons ce sont les monstres

Que vous avez lâchés sur mes rêves d'homme noir

*Monstres de Birmingham monstres de Prétoria*

Je collectionne vos hystéries

Je collectionne vos tréponèmes pâles

Je m'adonne à la philatélie de vos lâchetés

*Me voici un nègre tout neuf*

*Je me sens enfin moi-même*

Dans ma nouvelle géographie solaire

Moi-même dans la grande joie de dire adieu

A vos dix commandements de Dieu

A vos hypocrisies à vos rites sanglantes

Aux fermentations de vos scandales ! (13, *emphasis mine*)

Referencing two of the most notorious capitals of racism of the time, Birmingham, Alabama and Pretoria, South Africa, Depestre reminds the reader of the scale and range of violence inflicted onto black bodies. The white world has imposed on his black male body the monsters of humanity. Indeed, his very consciousness is tainted with the monstrous projections of white society and history that block his access to his real, true, black self. In order to become the “nègre tout neuf” and to finally feel and understand his true inner self, he must collect and expose the terrible realities of society’s injustices towards the black race. He takes his leave of the malignant hypocrisies of Christianity and leaves the West with his “volcan de [s]a nègrerie!” (14).

Towards the end of the *Prélude*, the poet ventures into the Deep South, “une ville d’Alabama,” which represented, and perhaps still does, the worst of the racist violence in the United States. Having previously mentioned Birmingham, the poet could quite possibly be in the city that would be nicknamed “Bombingham” after a series of bomb attacks were carried out against African Americans during the 1950’s and 1960’s. The most infamous bombing was the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing on September 15, 1963 where four little girls were killed and 22 people were injured.<sup>108</sup> A turning point in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the attack galvanized the movement and contributed greatly to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>109</sup> Though the author leaves the city unnamed, it is clear that Alabama is synonymous with

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<sup>108</sup> "Birmingham Church Bombing." *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century* (2009): Encyclopedia of African American History, 1896 to the Present: From the Age of Segregation to the Twenty-first Century.

<sup>109</sup> See, *An Act to Award Posthumously a Congressional Gold Medal to Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley to Commemorate the Lives They Lost 50 Years Ago in the Bombing of the Sixteenth*

racism and violence. Here, the poet confronts the, “Famille blanche d’Alabama” (18) whose patriarch is a judge, “ce Juste d’Alabama” (16). The perfect American family of four represents all that is wrong in the West, “Une belle famille debout dans son écume” (17). They are the epitome of hypocrisy and embody the baleful values of white America. The son is described as, “Le-fils-cadet-de-West-Point/ Le-fils-qui-broutait-les-mirages-de-Yale-University/ Le-fils-futur-sénateur-républicain-de-l’Alabama” (16). In other words, he is a man of power in the making; a militarily disciplined, ivy-league educated, conservative who embodies the values of his parentage, carrying on the family name as well as the family traditions, in particular, that of the historic racism that built Alabama and the Americas. The daughter is given a lengthier and more complex introduction with an incestuous twist,

La-fille-élevée-dans-le-meilleur-collège-du-pays-etcoetera

La-fille-déesse-de-tous-les-stades-y-compris-le-lit-avec-le-bas-ventre-le-plus-  
étonnamment-lyrique-de-la-crétation

La-fille-à-papa-avec-une-goutte-tenace-d’inceste-dans-le-regard-à-part-cela-d’un-vert-  
sans-reproche (17)

In addition to creating new words, Depestre shows the future of the white South with the two siblings. They represent the hopes, dreams and aspirations of white society. The son will go on to be a senator and a great man, surpassing his judge father. A man of power, the son will be at the model of masculine power in the U.S. Meanwhile, the daughter has been groomed to be the perfect wife, having gone to the right schools and met the right people, yet, there remains

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*Street Baptist Church, Where These 4 Little Black Girls' Ultimate Sacrifice Served as a Catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 2013.

something “*toujours bouleversant*” about her (16). Characterizing her in deific terms, she is depicted as a highly sexualized goddess of stadiums—a masculine domain—and the bed. Furthermore, she is a widow, thus not a virgin, who secretly desires her father. While, initially, she appears as a good Southern white woman, things turn and we see that she is, “*La-fille-assez-mal-vue-dans-la-sainte-famille-pour-avoir-dit-un-jour-que-la-couleur-noire-lui-jette-des-diamantes-dans-les-rues-et-que-si-on-n’y-prenait-garde-elle-était-bien-capable-d’en-rapporter-un-à-la-maison-pour-fêter-la-neuve-aurore-de-ses-règles !*” (17). Here, it remains unclear what exactly she is capable of bringing home, it could be either a diamond or a black man. The color black is a dehumanization of the black man who desires her sexuality and would do anything to possess her. As one of the spirits possessing the poet exclaims, “*J’arrose la terreur qui se love en vos yeux/ J’arrose les points cardinaux de vos vices*” (33). Indeed, that is the secret fear of all white families. They fear that the hypersexual and bestial black man will come and rape their pure, white daughter. Worse yet, they fear that she may secretly desire the black man in return. For this reason, she is reproached for even considering any of the color black’s “gifts.” They must all protect their themselves, that is to say their whiteness, from the contamination of the color black.

Instead of denying the stereotypes or dispelling them as a white supremacist fantasies, the poet literally inhabits them. After announcing, “*Et Abraham ce soir c’est moi,*” (18) he becomes possessed by the spirits,

*Ce soir toute la magie de ma race rôde dans mes mains ! Tous ses loas sont descendus dans ma tête et dans mes gestes d’Abraham inassouvi ! Tous ce qu’il y a de vaudouisant dans le cœur de mon peuple tient dans l’allongée de mon bras et de mon sexe !* (19)

At this moment, he is one and multiple. As the poet, he is Abraham and as poet-Abraham, he opens himself up to sixteen more spirits. He must inhabit the rapacious black body in order to destroy it and to create something different from the mandates of the West. As Damballah-Wedo, the serpent spirit, he taunts, “Si vous voyez un Arc-en-ciel embrasser/ Avec fureur son public c’est de nouveau moi ! Je change en Arc-en-ciel l’aînée de vos filles” (33). As the warrior spirit, he discloses, “Mon épée jette sur vos cinq filles/ Son regard moqueur de dieu païen/ Mon épée phallique d’Ogou-Badagris” (41). And as Guédé-Nibo, spirit of death, he tells the reader, “Mon phallus mesure un demi-mètre... Et il porte sur le dos... Une superbe crois blanche... Et il porte sur la tête... Une couronne d’épines” (43). The poet-spirits inhabit the sexual rapaciousness assigned to the black body in order to destroy it and then transform it. They/he even inhabit Christianity as Guédé-Nibo’s phallus is discovered to be Jesus Christ. Indeed, Éric Dazzan’s claim that, “Revendiquer et chanter un éros noir, c’est revendiquer (et chanter) une identité à partir de cela même qui a constitué l’absolue négation de l’homme noir,” shows one way of freeing the black body. However, Dazzan’s focus on *éros* overlooks the importance of vaudou in Depestre’s conceptualization of the black man (200).

Taking into account the self within a vaudou framework, both Laennec Hurbon and Roberto Strongman elaborate on the multiplicity of the self, distinguishing it from the Cartesian dichotomy prevalent in Western discourse. In *Culture et dictature en Haïti*, Hurbon rebuffs Western assumptions about subjective normativity in vaudou, remarking that, “La possibilité de jouer plusieurs rôles, d’être possédé par différents esprits, apparaît en fait comme un moyen de protection pour l’individu, contrairement à ceux qui affirment que le vaudouisant n’a pas le sens de la personne, fondant leur explication sur la conception occidentale (dominante) de l’individu”



(128). Strongman expands on this line of inquiry in “The Afro-diasporic Body in Haitian Vodou and the Transcending of Gendered Cartesian Corporeality,” by adding the non-heteronormative gendered body into his consideration of the “Afro-diasporic self [as] removable, external, and multiple” (14). Similar to Elizabeth McAlister, Strongman uses the example of a female priestess mounted by a masculine spirit which he posits as, “the Vodouisant’s corporeal re-gendering” (18). Elizabeth McAlister’s goes further in her examination of “creole constructions of gender and sexuality,” revealing the complexity of gender constructions due to the multiplicity of selves at play in vaudou (131). Furthermore, Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken, in her reading of the window scene in *Aube tranquille*, expounds on the precarity of a Western conception of selfhood, especially with regard to temporal fluxes and shifts, “the window scene does not depict space as phenomenon dominated by the *je*, but rather, as one in which the *je* and the *elle/tu* admit the dual identity of the *nous*. Through the *tu/you*, they call upon each other, speak to each other” (291). Emphasizing the overlapping subjectivities, she reveals that the Western *je* can neither assert itself nor dominate the narrative because it is already always plural. This multiform identity exceeds Western categories and conceptions of the body, the self and gender. Though the poet has been mounted entirely by male *lwas*, he does not remain male according to dominant Western paradigm due to the multiple, intermingling entities which produce a new consciousness, but also a new self.

After mounting their horse, the *lwas* each present themselves to the reader and they denounce the West while explicating the history of the poet’s ancestors. In vaudou, regular human beings can become *lwas* after their death, and become part of the universe.<sup>110</sup> For

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<sup>110</sup> Deren 27-33

example, revolutionary hero and first emperor of Haiti, Jean-Jacques Dessalines has a place of honor in the vaudou pantheon.<sup>111</sup> These ancestors, therefore, are also the poet's past selves who become present selves when they mount their horse. Regarding this moment, Bernardette Cailler notes, "le transfert du 'je' initial de la surconscience poétique au 'je' multiple des esprits vaudous s'accomplit, à l'instant où le lecteur fixe le dernier mot du 'Prélude'" (53). She extends the possession out the reader, which implies, then, that reader is the poet and vice-versa. The reader is one of the multiple selves of the poet, the one transforming the other. Hence, the reader becomes the spirits that seek vengeance and reparations for the exploitation of black bodies by the white world, which, interestingly, will be conducted through the poet's arms and sex. Furthermore, still possessed, he declares, "Je choisis ce soir pour cheval celle de vos filles qui se montre la plus rebelle à mon diamant" (19). In Jean-Claude Michel's surrealist evaluation of Depestre's poetry, he concludes that, "The joy of possessing, and of sexually transforming the Alabama judge's daughters, allows the poet to laugh at this absurd concept of the Negroes' sexual potency" (150). While there is an undeniable comic element to the poem that pokes fun at irrational stereotypes, he misses the significance of Depestre's poetic gesture. Depestre identifies the negrophobia that lives in the hearts of white Americans. Through poetic hyperbole, he becomes the black male rapist, the savage who wants to violate white womanhood. In so doing, he not only ridicules these assumptions, he annihilates them as well as the body upon which they were projected. However, he not only seeks a physical penetration, he wants to join with her spiritually and in so doing transform both himself and her. The poet's use of spirit possession

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<sup>111</sup> Métraux 40-1

enables the poetic hyperbole to reach new dimensions in which hypersexualized stereotypes of the black male body can be destroyed.

Exemplifying the *vaudouisant's* subjective multiplicity, he states, “Je suis un dieu en seize personnes et des dizaines d’autres loas mineurs émettent sur la même longueur d’ondes que mon sang” (74). He emphasizes that his singular body is a vessel for dozens of *lwas*, dozens of personalities and consciousnesses that are speaking through his single mouth. In his book, Delpêche rejects Bernadette Cailler's claim that the sexual segregation of the *lwas* hints at the masculine domination of the female *lwas*, he argues, instead, that since the voices of the sixteen deities is transmitted through “un actant parlant qui n'est ni homme ni femme,” that neither sex is privileged (52). Cailler and Delpêche overlook the complex implications of vaudou and spirit possession for gender categories. The very nature of the multiple self in vaudou invalidates Western gender constructions. Furthermore, with regard to the poet’s altered state, Dayan asserts that, “Possessed, he has been transformed. He emerges as the god. No longer a mere poet, he is both victim and creator, both uninitiated and mystagogue” (Rainbow 53). Despite her views of the poet as a singular being, her attention to his transformation is important in that it implies not only an altered mental or spiritual state, but a change in the physical state. The poet as a whole has been transformed into a new being with a new identity.

At this point, it will be useful to note that, many of the *lwas* are gender ambiguous or cannot be categorized as strictly male or female. To clarify, I turn to Maya Deren’s characterization of Legba who is both the cosmic phallus as well as (umbilical) cord connecting to the universe, “Whether cord or phallus, Legba—life—is the link between the visible, mortal world and the invisible, immortal realms.” She also adds that, “As principle of life, as the initial

procreative whole, Legba was both man and woman and his vever still bears the sign of this totality” (97). The *lwas* are not bound by earthly distinctions and categories, they exist beyond the hierarchies, dichotomies and classifications of the human world. Their identifications are neither fixed nor singular, as both the possessor and possessed create entirely new corporeal realities. It must be remembered that the body in vaudou is as much a part of the self as the spirit. Therefore, when the *lwas* ride an individual, they transform the entire self and are transformed in return.

When the self is receptive, it can ascend to higher heights and transforms. It reaches levels of understanding that we, normally, cannot access without the assistance of the gods. The synthesis of selves and spirits reveals new ways of exploring identity, while, at the same time, obliterating imposed categories of being. While the heternormativity and Western gender divisions are no longer applicable, this opens up a space in which new understandings of gender can emerge.

This study has explored the concept of masculinity through vaudou in Depestre’s *Le Mât de cocagne* and *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’occident chrétien*. Considering Haiti’s history of oppression, from slavery to the U.S. occupation to the Duvalier dictatorship, the question of gender becomes even more pressing. In the context of slavery, claiming a gendered identity was tantamount to claiming personhood. Under the dictatorship, the questions of gender are often obfuscated by the rampant terror and violence, yet, as these works attest, masculinity must be reclaimed and rebuilt.

4. Broken Down: Wounded Masculinity in Postdictatorial Haitian Literature by  
Dany Laferrière and Kettly Mars

Mon univers mental

Je suis né en 1953. J'avais donc quatre ans quand Papa Doc est arrivé à la présidence en 1957. Et les deux Duvaliers (père et fils) sont restés au pouvoir jusqu'en 1986. Je suis donc un enfant de ce régime. Durant mon enfance et mon adolescence (et cela jusqu'à l'âge de vingt-trois ans, date de mon départ d'Haïti), je n'ai pas connu autre chose que le monde inventé par Duvalier.

Un univers étrange. (15)

As Dany Laferrière elucidates in, “Mon univers mental,” he is a child of the dictatorship. Having known only the world created and permitted by Duvalier until the age of twenty-three, he cannot escape the legacy of the dictatorship, nor can he ignore its impact on his psyche and his formation as a writer. Similarly, Kettly Mars was born in 1958, one year after François Duvalier became president. As we see in her literary works, she, too, is a product of the regime. The Duvaliers invented a world and left an ineradicable mark on Haitians inside and outside of Haiti. After nearly thirty years of one of the most violent and repressive dictatorships in history, it is impossible to be unaffected by the atrocities and horrors of life under tyranny.

Haitian writers are indelibly imprinted by their direct and indirect experiences with the dictatorship, as such, it continues to inform and shape their writing, even long after the fall of the regime in 1986. As Idelber Avelar states, in *The Untimely Present: Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning* (1999), “postcatastrophe literature reactivates the hope of providing an entrance into a traumatic experience that has seemingly been condemned to silence and oblivion” (10). In other words, it is in the aftermath of the dictatorship that the public

can finally begin to make sense of what has happened and postdictatorial literature offers a healing space to process the trauma. Kettly Mars's and Dany Laferrière's works, in particular, reflect this postdictatorial imperative to give voice to and make sense of their trauma and make new meaning from their experiences. Significantly, these works examine the legacy of the dictatorship in the rubble of Duvalierist masculinity, reassembling the fragments to create new masculine discourses.

Several authors have engaged with the enduring legacy of dictatorship and revisited the traumas of Duvalierism through their literary works. Notably, Dany Laferrière's *La Chair du maître* (1997), Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* (2004), Marie-Célie Agnant's *Un Alligator nommé Rosa* (2004), Margaret Papillon's *La Mal-aimée* (2008), Evelyne Trouillot's *La Mémoire aux abois* (2011)<sup>112</sup>, and Kettly Mars's oeuvre including *L'heure hybride* (2005) and *Saisons sauvages* (2010) attest to the persistence of the dictatorship in the Haitian memory and the importance of addressing the traumas of the past. What all of these texts have in common is the need to process the horrors of the dictatorship, bridging the gap between history and the individual. Through fiction, they make the experience of dictatorship personal. In this chapter, I will examine the postdictatorial representations of masculinity and male sexuality through the figure of the Tonton Macoute in Kettly Mars's *Saisons sauvages*, and the Haitian gigolo in Mars's *L'heure hybride* and Dany Laferrière's *La Chair du maître*. These postdictatorial novels evince a wounded masculinity that seeks expression and healing.

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<sup>112</sup> See Jean-Charles, Régine. "Beyond Truth and Reconciliation in *La Mémoire Aux Abois* and *Un Alligator Nommé Rosa*." (*French Forum* 38.3 (2013)) 147-64.

This chapter will unfold in two parts, focusing on the representations of masculinity penned after the fall of the dictatorship. In the first section, I will examine Kettly Mars's portrayal of the Tonton Macoute as a performance of hypermasculinity which will, ultimately, lead to its down destruction. In the following section, I argue that the gigolo emerges an alternative masculine figure to the hypermasculinity of the dictatorship. The gigolo performs masculine reassemblages from the fragments of hegemonic masculinity which allows him to explore masculinities that are separate from the violence of the dictatorship and Haitian history. Both authors reveal the ways in which the dictatorship promoted a violent and toxic form of masculinity, while, at the same time, failed to produce a functional and inclusive model of masculinity. It is, perhaps, through these representations of masculinity that we can avoid repeating the violent past and create a discourse on gender relations.

Seasoned Savages: Hypermasculinity and the Autophagic Dictatorial Machine in *Saisons sauvages*

Mars's works, in particular *Saisons sauvages* and *L'heure hybride*, engage with the ruins and remnants of the dictatorship, with particular attention to Duvalierist masculinity. Both novels reveal a reflective space within which to examine and interrogate the values, modes of thought and dominant structures of gender, masculinity and subjectivity, while also proposing new theorizations. It is here that Haitians, in particular, can begin to reconcile with the traumas of the dictatorship as well as the history that made Duvalier's ascent possible. As Régine Jean-Charles explains, "Because the historical record is so incomplete, the realization of justice so elusive, the cultural memory so lacking, the imaginary becomes a space in which to explore other possibilities" (161). Importantly, this postdictatorial literary space imagines the possibility

of deviating from the cycle of violence that is intrinsic to and defines Haitian masculinity. The rubble of a disintegrated masculine ideal represents the opportunity to rebuild, redefine and renegotiate the terms and practices of masculinity. In the afterword to the English translation of *Saisons sauvages*, Madison Bell concedes that, “As *Savage Seasons* makes painfully clear, that situation is nothing to go back to, but it remains unclear where the nation will go instead” (247). Past the point of no return, Mars journeys into an uncertain present and future. She reflects on the masculinist and noiriste politics of Duvalier, particularly, its failure to produce a healthy masculinity. As I will show, Duvalierism promoted a brand of hypermasculinity circumscribed by violence, power and corruption, making its own collapse implicit in its design. Hypermasculinity, in the form of Macoute masculinity, is an inherently fugacious practice especially given its propensity for power, advancement and ostentation.

Duvalierist masculinity promotes destructive and dangerous practices which are motivated by greed and violence. I begin by arguing that through the figure of the Tonton Macoute, Kettly Mars interprets Macoute masculinity as a performance of hypermasculinity, which will inevitably lead to its own destruction. Her portrayal, of what I call the autophagic Duvalierist machine, exposes the ways in which the regime promoted a culture of hypermasculinity defined and driven by violence, greed, power, and sexual rapaciousness. Inherently self-cannibalizing, the dictatorial machine must consume its own agents and citizens in order to acquire more power and influence. While the autophagic reflex may have initially helped to strengthen the regime, it’s insatiability cannot be sustained. It devours everything and anything, including its own agents and resources.



With this in mind, I examine the representation of Macoute masculinity through the character of Raoul Vincent who is the apotheosis of Duvalierist masculinity. Mars's unflinching portrayal of Secretary of State Vincent reveals the ways in which the dictatorship promoted a culture of hypermasculinity within the ranks of the *Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale* (VSN), which was the reason for both its success and inevitable downfall. I continue with an interrogation of the structure of Duvalierist power and the congenital instabilities that will ultimately lead to its own destruction. Raoul's psychological motivations and his investment in masculine power and image, undergirded by his inherent fragility, exemplifies the autodestructive nature of the entire Duvalierist machine. As the core of Duvalier's power, extending out into every aspect of Haitian life, the Tonton Macoutes embody and expand the power of the Duvaliers. Hence, the self-cannibalistic nature of the VSN, as well as the dictatorship, predicts its own demise as it continues to consume itself in order to grow and gain power. Lastly, after the implosion of the Duvalierist machine, we are left with the legacy of dictatorship and the ruins of masculinity.

Despite the relatively recent date of its publication, there are a number of scholarly explorations into *Saisons sauvages*.<sup>113</sup> To date, John Walsh's "Reading (in the) Ruins: Kettly Mars's *Saisons Sauvages*," and Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken's last chapter in *Spirit Possession in French, Haitian, and Vodou Thought : An Intellectual History* analyze the intricate webs of desire, politics and economics at play in the novel. In addition, Yves Chemla's book review in the

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<sup>113</sup> Kettly Mars's other novels, such as *L'heure hybride* and *Fado*, have received more scholarly attention. See Lindsey Scott "Selling Sex, Suppressing Sexuality: A Gigolo's Economy in Kettly Mars's *L'heure hybride*" (*Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 19:5) 543-550, Paul Humphrey "Of Sound, Mind and Body: Female Sexuality and Vodou in Kettly Mars' *Fado*." (*International Journal of Francophone Studies* 17.2) 137-57, and Régine Jean-Charles, Michel Magniez, and Joëlle Vitiello in *Écrits d'Haïti: Perspectives sur la littérature haïtienne contemporaine (1986-2006)*, edited by Nadève Ménard (Paris: Karthala, 2011) 213-228.

*Le Nouvelliste*, “Kettly Mars, Saisons sauvages,” and Madison Smart Bell’s afterword in the English language translation of *Saisons sauvages* delve into the text. Generally speaking, the question and theme of masculinity under dictatorship is often overlooked in literary and critical scholarship on Haiti. However, in her article, “Selling Sex, Suppressing Sexuality: A Gigolo’s Economy in Kettly Mars’s *L’heure hybride*,” Lindsey Scott engages directly with themes of masculinity, dictatorship, personal economy and sexuality. Her article explores the changing political climate in Haiti and its effect on Rico’s personal sexual economy, she argues that, “the pending collapse in regime parallels a collapse of restrictive structures that have suppressed Rico’s sexuality” (544-45). Though she overstates the subversive potential of Rico’s suppressed homosexual desire, her attention to the limited agency granted by Rico’s chosen profession as a male prostitute reveals the varied ways in which individuals not only exercise agency, but resist domination.

The somewhat arduous task of investigating the effects of dictatorship on masculinity as well as the role and construction of masculinity within such a context there largely remains to be undertaken. Some compelling models in other fields include, Barbara Spackman’s *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (1996) probing the rhetoric of virility in Fascist Italy, Lauren Hutchinson Derby’s *The Dictator’s Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (2009) touching on the manipulation of a masculinist based “vernacular politics” under Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and Maja Horn’s *Masculinity after Trujillo: The Politics of Gender in Dominican Literature* (2014) analyzing the rhetoric of hypermasculinity disseminated and espoused by Trujillo’s regime. By engaging with

Mars's work, I therefore seek to open a debate about masculinity, dictatorship and postdictatorial Haitian literature.

Mars's uncompromising depiction of Duvalierist masculinity is in dialogue with a changing political and social climate as well as shifting racial and social hierarchies. Her understanding of masculine identity promoted by Duvalierism is informed by the country's historical obsession with the mulatto class, the disruption of traditional racial and class hierarchies, and the rapacious desire for power. Furthermore, male sexuality according to Mars is always enmeshed in a web of power and desire where one cannot be without the other. For example, race and (skin) color play a central role in both *Saisons sauvages* and *L'heure hybride*. The fetishization of white skin and the objectification of light-skinned women attest to the hypocrisies of *noirisme*, while the obsession with obtaining whiteness through sexual conquest and violence directly reflects the practices of Duvalierist masculinity. For example, Mars describes her protagonist, Nirvah Leroy, in *Saisons sauvages* as, "Une femme qui symbolisait une nation divisée, une histoire mal partie, le bien-être et les privilèges pour un petit nombre insolent et un héritage de mépris pour toute une majorité d'hommes et de femmes, depuis trop longtemps" (25-6). It is this history that fascinates and enthralls the Secretary of State, as Nirvah represents both what he hates most in the world and that which he most desires. The *noirisme* advanced by Duvalier's administration displaced the power structure by privileging black Haitians over the mulatto class. However, this racial and political displacement did not apply to the realm of desire as whiteness was still preferred. This is further evidenced by Jean-Claude

Duvalier's decision to marry a woman of lighter complexion, Michèle Bennet.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, Mars engages with deep-rooted historical and political discourses on race and gender identity through the relationships and desires in her texts.

Ketty Mars's fourth novel, *Saisons sauvages* illustrates the severity of the daily and pervasive oppressions under the Duvalier administration and his personal police force, the *Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*. They were commonly referred to as Tonton Macoute, which roughly translates to Uncle Gunnysack. Named after a nightmarish figure in Haitian folktales, this "uncle" would kidnap naughty children and take them away in his sack.<sup>115</sup> Thus the reader is plunged into the text and guided through the claustrophobic and terrifying domain of the dictatorship by the bogeyman himself. Her unflinching portrayal of the destructive power of the Duvalierist state reflects an almost didactic function in her writing as she brings oppression, violence and fear into the present where in reading the novel, we become victim, perpetrator, and accomplice. As Bell intimates, "Where her predecessors had to deal with the subject [of dictatorship] most obliquely in order to avoid not only censorship but also sometimes deadly reprisals, Mars operates under no such constraint" (255). She writes openly about the horrific realities of dictatorship, plunging the reader into the text and forcing our active participation through the experience of reading.

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<sup>114</sup> Several scholars have pointed to the way in which Baby Doc's marriage to a light-skinned mulatto was viewed as a betrayal of *noiriste* principles and effectively severed his link to the disenfranchised black masses. See David Nicholls's preface and David Malone *Decision-making in the UN Security Council: The Case of Haiti, 1990-1997* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 149.

<sup>115</sup> See Nicholls 217, Trouillot 154, Dubois 312, and "The Tonton Macoutes: The Central Nervous System of Haiti's Reign of Terror," *Council on Hemispheric Affairs* <http://www.coha.org/tonton-macoutes/>

Mars reacquaints the reader with the dictatorship through one of its most nefarious manifestations: the Tonton Macoute. Nirvah becomes, “la maîtresse d’un secrétaire d’État macoute,” finding herself in a precarious situation in which she is both victim and partisan of the regime, a pretender to Duvalierism (173). Her lover, Raoul Vincent is the Secretary of State and one of the most powerful men in the country. He is, “Un nègre hautain et vicieux dont tant de collaborateurs du Président se méfiaient. Un être sombre, imprévisible, superstitieux, insondable qui gardait encore la confiance de Papa Doc” (91). As the head of the private militia, he publicly projects an image of masculine fortitude and power while personally suffering from epilepsy, ill health and neuroses.

Following in the footsteps of Marie Vieux Chauvet, Kettly Mars uses this conflicted figure as the representation of Macoute masculinity par excellence, as well as the embodiment of the dictatorship. Moreover, through Raoul’s epilepsy, she alludes to Jacques Stephen Alexis’s protagonist in his political novel, *Compère Général Soleil* (1955). Alexis’s Hilarion Hilarious famously suffers from epilepsy which is the root cause of his social marginalization for its association with spirit possession and alterity.<sup>116</sup> Mars’s intertextual references allow her to rewrite and reinterpret the symptoms of the abuse of power and dictatorship. Driven by greed, power and violence, Raoul Vincent subscribes to and projects out an image of the hypermasculine Macoute. I argue that through the figure of Raoul Vincent, Mars portrays Macoute masculinity as a performance of hypermasculinity which simultaneously fuels and weakens the autophagic Duvalierist machine. She reveals the ways in which hypermasculinity is

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<sup>116</sup> See Jacques Stephen Alexis *Compère Général Soleil* (Paris : Gallimard, 1955) and for more on the association between vodou spirit possession and epilepsy see E. Carrazana et al. "Epilepsy and Religious Experiences: Voodoo Possession." (*Epilepsia* 40.2) 239-41.

always destined to implode as it constantly seeks ways to consume more power and prove itself. By endorsing a hypermasculine culture predicated on violence, power and terror, the VSN, as well as the regime, is ensuring its own destruction.

Mars's provocative novel, *Saisons sauvages*, relates the story of Nirvah Leroy. She describes herself as living two lives, "l'une où elle attendait Daniel et l'autre où elle jouissait d'être la maîtresse du secrétaire d'État" (196). Told through multiple perspectives, we follow the life of the Leroy family as the Duvalier dictatorship enters their home and destroys their lives. Nirvah, having exhausted every available option, goes to the Secretary of State following the arrest and subsequent disappearance of her husband. As both the Secretary of State and the chief of Duvalier's private militia, Raoul Vincent is an extremely important and dangerous person who uses his power to manipulate her into being his mistress. The moment he meets the light-skinned Nirvah, he is captivated by her beauty and pursues her.

Unable to refuse, Nirvah reluctantly becomes his mistress in order to protect her family and gain access to information about her husband. Mars presents two very contrasting portraits of Haitian men through the characters of Daniel Leroy and Raoul Vincent. Raoul is the cruel and amoral chief of the Tonton Macoutes and the right-hand man to François Duvalier. Daniel Leroy is a husband and a father of two children who is imprisoned for his political views and activities. Reflecting the historical class divisions in Haiti, Raoul is black, and Daniel is mulatto. In Daniel's absence, Raoul imposes himself onto every part of Nirvah's life, including her children. He has the roads paved near the Leroy house, installs air conditioning, buys her lavish gifts, and eventually starts to sexually abuse her two children. Raoul further perverts and performs what

Doris Garraway calls the “incestuous family romance”, assuming the role of the absent father, only to violate those under his care.<sup>117</sup>

As years go by, Nirvah becomes accustomed to her new reality, yet she remains blind to the full extent of Raoul’s greed and violence. His need to completely possess Nirvah becomes an obsession which results in the devastation of everything she holds dear, as well as his own downfall. His sexual appetite and the fetishization of Nirvah’s light skin and her light-skinned children are the product of historical class and racial tensions operating in Haiti since colonial Saint Domingue. Indeed, Martin Munro confirms that, “she [Mars] is careful to suggest... that these crises largely emphasize already existing patterns of sexuality and social relations” (*Writing* 135). Though he referring to the earthquake in 2010, another devastating crisis was the Duvalier dictatorship which exacerbated historically inherited divisions and desires. Thus, for Raoul, his obsession becomes more pronounced due to the dictatorial machine. As the Duvalierist machine advances and grows more powerful, his position becomes increasingly precarious. Until, finally, the political machinations of his enemies succeed in deposing him and he is forced to flee. Though he gives a large sum of stolen public funds to Nirvah, he saves himself first and escapes without her. She must find a way to leave Haiti with her son and her daughter who is barely starting to recover from a botched abortion.

The relationship between Raoul and Nirvah inevitably recalls the characters of Marie Chauvet’s novella, *Colère* (1968). Indeed, Lindsey Scott’s article, “‘A rose by any other name,’

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<sup>117</sup> See *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Garraway states, “Considering the mulattoes are both claimed as illegitimate children of the white master and feminized as his preferred sexual objects, the racial taxonomy would appear to index the unconscious desires of the white male elite. What we have, then, is a dynamic metaphor of filiation, a mis en abyme of the illegitimate family romance that installs the white father as perpetually in pursuit of his own mixed-race daughter” (277). However, in this case, Raoul usurps the position of white master and sexually dominates the mixed-race daughter and her children.

Amplifying Marie Chauvet's *Colère* in Kettly Mars's *Saisons sauvages*," reads Mars's novel as a rewriting of Chauvet's *Colère* in which the original political critique is amplified, and the position of the victim obfuscated. The tacit accord between Raoul and Nirvah mirrors the Faustian pact struck between the Gorilla, the commander of the local militia, and the fair-skinned Rose. Both Rose and Nirvah are *mulâtresses* who submit to the absolute authority of *makout* power<sup>118</sup> through their feminine bodies, with devastating consequences on their lives and families. While Rose sacrifices her body for her family's property, Nirvah exposes her own body as well as the bodies of her children to the sexual predation of the chief of the Macoutes. Indeed, Raoul Vincent is the apogee of Macoute advancement, he is what the Gorilla aspired to be and could have become. Scott argues that while Chauvet negates the humanity of the Gorilla, "Mars suggests with her paralleled clarification and obfuscation, understanding this man as more than a monster will help illuminate the social structure that contributed to the development of a person willing to be complicit in such an oppressive government" (64). Blurring the lines between victim and perpetrator, Raoul is indeed the Gorilla; drawn out to the *n*th power, out to infinity. The Gorilla was a commander assigned to a small town who enjoyed limitless power and authority over his local environment, whereas Raoul rules over all of Haiti and Port-au-Prince. However, as we see with both Raoul and the Gorilla, the higher one climbs, the farther one has to fall. If Marie Chauvet started to sketch the silhouette of Macoute masculinity, Kettly Mars completes the portrait. While Chauvet outlines the practices of coercion, domination and violence in the expression of Macoute masculinity, Mars extrapolates Macoute masculinity out

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<sup>118</sup> See Trouillot 175.



to its farthest extent and watches it come crashing down. I insist that, for Kettly Mars, the hypermasculine nature of Macoute masculinity is its own undoing.

In order to better understand Macoute masculinity<sup>119</sup>, it is necessary to understand the concept of hypermasculinity and the ways in which the dictatorship encourages and fosters hypermasculinity as a masculine identity and a mode of survival. Developed by Donald Mosher and Mark Sirkin, their Hypermasculinity Inventory measures the “macho personality constellation,” which is “posited to consist of three related components: (a) calloused sex attitudes toward women, (b) a conception of violence as manly, and (c) a view of danger as exciting” (151). That is to say, hypermasculinity is essentially defined by violence and the need to appear powerful and dominating. Moreover, Hans Toch states that, “In cultures of masculinity, the demonstrated willingness to fight and the capacity for combat are measures of worth and of self-worth” (170). His explanation is exactly the rationale for the Tonton Macoutes, a paramilitary organization, who are driven by greed and acquire value—that is to say power—through violence, oppression and exploitation. Their actual self-worth is earned through their capacity for combat, that is to say, their propensity for violence.

As Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes, the Macoutes were habitually recruited from the lower rungs of society including thugs, criminals and delinquents. He admits that, “few people may have been ready to proclaim their willingness to commit any crime on behalf of the regime, but there were enough to act as if they were—and enough to replace them when they themselves

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<sup>119</sup> The Tonton Macoutes occupy an important place in the Haitian imaginary and are featured in the works of many writers, such as: Marie Vieux Chauvet’s *Amour, colère, et folie* (1968), Edwige Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker* (2004), Marie-Célie Agnant’s *Un alligator nommé Rosa* (2007), and Margaret Papillon’s *La Mal-aimée* (2008). Though they do not specifically emphasize or outline a Macoute masculinity, they depict the Macoutes in a way that both demonizes and humanizes these malevolent figures.

disappeared” (170). Here, Trouillot emphasizes the autophagic nature of the Duvalierist apparatus which devours itself in order to expand its power. With an endless supply of willing or coerced individuals acting on behalf of the regime, the Duvalierist machine grows more powerful by constantly feeding on its own agents.

Notably, Marie Chauvet makes a similar observation through her character, the Gorilla, as he explains, “Je me méfie toujours des mécontents car il y en a beaucoup autour de moi. Notre organisation pourtant a tout prévu pour les satisfaire, mais ils sont insatiables. Tel que vous me voyez, je ne suis que le rouage d'une immense machine” (272). Just a cog in the immense dictatorial machine, the Gorilla underlines the insatiability of not only the individual Macoutes, but the machine itself. Within the environment created by Duvalier and the VSN, it becomes necessary to constantly prove one’s worth in order to secure one’s place within the organization. However, by doing so, it immediately opens oneself up to challengers. The very process by which the Tonton Macoute acquires and secures his power makes him a target for others’ ambitions. Thus, a hypermasculine culture of violence becomes the norm as well as the only means of survival. The fictional Secretary of State Raoul Vincent confirms that, “Le principe duvaliériste de survie est de mordre la main qui vous secourt, de lui manger tout le bras même, s'il le faut” (104-5). The Duvalierist imperative is survival by any means and especially by consuming or conquering others.

Indeed, we are immediately made aware of the power dynamics at play in Duvalierist Haiti from the very first page as Nirvah discloses, “j’ai volontairement renoncé à mon libre arbitre. Depuis la minute où j’ai mis les pieds dans ce bâtiment, mon temps, mon humeur, ma vie dépendent de la fantaisie du secrétaire d’État” (11). She affirms that, “Son pouvoir peut me

sauver ou me détruire” (15) and that, “il est tout-puissant” (124). The Secretary of State inhabits the lexical fields of power and omnipotence bordering on godliness. Not only must Nirvah renounce her free will, she is completely at the mercy of this all-powerful being. He is more than a man, he is almost a god. His status has afforded him immense power and influence, he is an extension of Duvalier himself as well as one of his most trusted friends. His position is coveted by every Macoute. In fact, the Macoute drive for power and domination is elaborated in a conversation with her abrasive sister-in-law, “Des macoutes, il y en a de tous épidermes Arlette. Mulâtres, grimauds, griffes, marabouts, noirs, très noirs... Le pouvoir n’a pas de couleur ni de tour de taille” (77-8, ellipsis in original). The need for power, the need to dominate, transcends differences and it is exactly what drives the Tonton Macoutes. They join the ranks of the VSN in order to gain power and status, ultimately, to be important. Through the VSN, regular citizens have the possibility of acquiring the power and prestige that Raoul possesses. In the text, Raoul becomes the metonym for success in Duvalierist Haiti.

Perhaps the most exemplary case of Macoute success, Raoul Vincent rose up out of a context of destitution to become one of the most powerful men in the country. His story confirms the new opportunities and realities possible under the Duvalier administration. As a child, Raoul was described as, "brillant à l'école mais à l'avenir handicapé par la pauvreté" (200). Crippled by his impoverished background, Raoul was destined to live a life typical of his socioeconomic class. It is only through an uncle that he is introduced to a respected member of high society and is taken under his wing. However, the price of admission to the club of exclusivity and privilege is devastating, as Raoul intimates, "Il avait payé de son corps les largesses de son bienfaiteur qui l'avait introduit dans un club fermé d'homosexuels. Parmi

lesquels se trouvaient des brutes et des pervers" (200). Ironically referring to his abuser as his "benefactor," Raoul is cognizant of the cost of his success and his entry into the world of privilege. He pays his dues with his young, pubescent male body.

Exploited and abused by the group of hebephiles—those who are attracted to adolescents—his introduction to sexuality, power and manhood is mediated through violence and force. He is the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of powerful older men, under the pretense of education, development and social advancement. Young Raoul rationalized the abuse as the cost of success and he views his sexual abuse as something closer to prostitution. He elaborates, "Je me suis prostitué avec des hommes pour sortir de la crasse, de l'anonymat, pour payer mes études, parce que j'avais des ambitions. Ils se sont amusés de moi, me passant d'une paire de fesses à l'autre, d'une paire de couilles à l'autre. Mais aujourd'hui ils me craignent" (242). Though he justifies the abuse as an inevitable consequence of his ambition and drive, his determination to succeed is bolstered by his need to avenge himself on the world. He not only desired an education in order to succeed, but he also wanted to be in a position to dominate his abusers. His need to succeed is informed not only by the physical and sexual abuse that he suffered as an adolescent, it is also a result of the historical and psychological traumas of being poor and black in Haiti. His desire for power stems from and is fueled by a need for redress, to right the historical wrongs that continue to keep the lower class in chains.

While it remains unclear whether he desires men naturally or as a consequence of his early sexual education, he, nonetheless, finds himself attracted to men in his early adulthood. Realizing that his homosexual desires are incongruent with societal norms and would hinder his access to masculine power, he suppresses his hidden, personal desires in the name of success.

His choice is explained as such, "À force de volonté et soutenu par sa grande ambition, il avait réussi à surmonter ce penchant, à refouler ces élans qui ne seyaient pas à ses projets d'avenir et à *l'image de virilité d'un homme fort*" (201, *emphasis mine*). In other words, young Raoul's ultimate objective is to achieve success, which means, suppressing his homosexual desires and performing dominant masculinity. As Kamala Kempadoo indicates in her book, *Sexing the Caribbean* (2004), Caribbean societies are structured by the principles of heteropatriarchy, which she defines as, "a distinction and relatedness between the ways in which sexuality and gender are socially, legally, and politically organized." She continues that, "homoeroticism and same-gender sexual relations are denied legitimacy" (9). Those who deviate from or transgress established sexual norms are considered outlaws and noncitizens. Hence, if Raoul does not adhere to the principles of heteropatriarchy, he will not only be denied masculinity, but power and legitimacy.

As he tamps out his homosexual desires, Raoul reconstructs his own sexuality and masculinity in accordance with acceptable and established practices of heteronormative society. When he enters into politics, he surprises himself in several ways. For example, "dans la politique [il] avait découvert avec voracité le goût des femmes, même s'il s'étonnait lui-même de ne pouvoir en jouir que dans la violence" (201). He finally has access to the kind of power that justifies his sacrifices and that enables him to suppress his homosexual desires. He becomes voracious and as his appetite for power grows so does his desire for women. However, he can only enjoy sexual relations with women through violence. In order to secure his manhood and cultivate his masculine power, he trains himself to be a womanizer and uses violence to execute his manliness. He understands his homosexual desires as a weakness and consciously makes the

decision to suppress any and all threats to his masculinity. Like other male sexual abuse victims, Raoul develops a need for revenge, hypersexuality, aggressive sexual behaviors and an aversion to homosexuality.<sup>120</sup>

As is typical with male victims of sexual abuse in youth, Raoul's primary adaptive anger transforms into destructive aggression which is expressed through his profession as well as his personal life. Studies in the fields of psychology and sociology, such as Marijke Baljon's "Wounded Masculinity: Transformation of Aggression for Male Survivors of Childhood Abuse," have demonstrated that the trauma of early sexual abuse in boys provokes feelings of anxiety and aggression, while also jeopardizing the development of a functional masculine identity. Therefore, Baljon argues that the nature and the effects of the trauma present situations and feelings that conflict with traditional images of masculinity—void of emotions and vulnerabilities—male sexual abuse victims must renegotiate the terms of masculinity itself in order to break the cycle of violence and heal. Though Raoul changes his sexual desires and attitudes, he does not question the structure of masculinity itself nor does he seek to break the cycle of violence. Instead, he reiterates the violence done to him and unleashes it onto the world. He not only continues the cycle of violence that gave birth to Haitian masculinity, but he adopts hypermasculinity as a way to engage with the world and ascend to more power and privilege. Notably, he actualizes his hypermasculine sexuality through the sexual violence that he imposes onto the bodies of Nirvah and her children, Marie and Nicholas.

Given the shameful nature of homosexuality in a masculinist culture, Raoul has spent the better part of his adulthood denying and repressing, what he considers, his aberrant desires. He

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<sup>120</sup> See Romano, Elisa, and Rayleen V. De Luca.

understands the importance of heteronormative practices and lifestyle to the credible presentation of a masculine image; therefore, he abhors homosexuality and the weakness it represents. He desires power above all else, therefore any sign of weakness must be eradicated from his public as well as private image. His all-consuming need for power, his penchant for violence and his sexual rapaciousness culminate in the sexual victimization and subjugation of the Leroy family. The most heinous of his offenses, is the sexual abuse of Nirvah's youngest child, Nicolas.

Initially, Raoul despised Nicolas for his effeminacy, "Nicolas n'était pas une vraie graine d'homme" (198). Furthermore, he disapproves of the way Nirvah dotes on her youngest son. He thinks that, "Elle l'étouffait, l'empêchait de devenir un homme, un vrai" (199). However, over time, Raoul narcissistically comes to desire Nirvah's thirteen-year-old son because Nicolas reminds him of a younger version of himself. He states, "Pourtant le gamin lui rappelait étrangement cet adolescent qu'il avait été et qui s'était trouvé désespéré devant la vie" (200). Due to both Raoul's aversion to homosexuality and a resemblance to his younger self, Raoul engages in what he rationalizes as a pederastic relationship with Nicolas. He must define his attraction to Nicolas through the Ancient Greek practice of pederasty in order to deny his homosexual or pedophilic desire. He considers himself the *erastes* that takes an *eromenos* under his tutelage.<sup>121</sup> While teaching Nicolas about culture and history, Raoul contemplates, "Éromène... Ce mot ne quittait pas la tête du secrétaire d'État... Il se retrouvait dans l'innocence de Nicolas et des sensations oubliée le submergèrent avec une force nouvelle" (203). He develops his thoughts further as, "Il dévorait l'enfant des yeux. Il en avait la gorge sèche.

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<sup>121</sup> See Dover, K. J. *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1978).

Éromène. Le garçon d’amour...Il serait son Éraste. Son mentor. Son papa d’amour” (204) Thus elevating, in his mind, their relationship to a noble tradition reserved for the Greek aristocracy.

In Ancient Greece, pederasty was an institutionalized practice among the elite and a common trope in art and literature. In places like Sparta, it became the basis for their pedagogy which focused on military and physical training.<sup>122</sup> As Jennifer Larson elaborates on this practice in Ancient Greece, “[pederasty] was institutionalized as an educational practice by which the values of nobles were transmitted from one generation to the next... the pederastic relationship was a rite of passage by which a boy reached manhood and began his military service” (102). In other words, it was a system of masculine education with the aim of helping young boys become men. Though a questionable practice in modern times, Raoul Vincent deludes himself into believing that he is following the ancient Greek customs. He ruminates that, “Il fallait un homme pour sortir l’homme de cet enfant, pour le retirer de cette sorte de gynécée que constituaient son foyer et les deux femmes qui l’y couvaient” (204). He will take Nicolas from his overly feminine upbringing and escort him into the realm of masculinity. Raoul uses pederasty to cloak and avoid his homosexual desires, while also repressing his own past sexual abuse.

As I have mentioned before, Raoul understands his past experience as a victim of sexual abuse in capitalistic terms. He gives a transactional value to his trauma, likening his abuse to prostitution rather than pedophilia. However, this consideration conflicts with his pederastic fantasy. For instance, male prostitution would have resulted in the revocation of citizenship in

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<sup>122</sup> See William A. Percy *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois, 1996) 73-4 and Chapter 4 in Jennifer Larson, *Greek and Roman Sexualities* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).



Ancient Greece.<sup>123</sup> Homosexual male prostitution led to political disqualification, which would prevent the individual from holding office, voting, owning land, etc. It was the belief that any citizen who would so willingly sell his body, would also sell his loyalties.<sup>124</sup> Consequently, without citizenship, Raoul would have been prohibited from engaging in pederasty. He, instead, is trying to own and dominate the Leroy family on every level. It is important to note that while the Greeks engaged in this institution, they did not endorse homosexual relations outside of pederasty.<sup>125</sup> Homosexuals were considered failures of the pederastic tradition as they were expected to become husbands and fathers. In this, Raoul has failed his own education and is passing on a wounded masculinity onto Nicolas.

Though he is able to convince himself that he has overcome his homosexual desires, Raoul cannot eradicate the entirety of his trauma. Having surmounted a great many obstacles to become “l’homme fort de Duvalier,” Raoul shows no vulnerabilities in his public image. As he gained his power, position and esteem through a careful negotiation of the matrices of power, sexuality and violence, he understands that his power depends on his image of masculinity and that masculinity must be impenetrable. However, his mysterious and itinerant bouts of epilepsy remind both the reader and Raoul of his unresolved trauma. He has an uncontrollable and unpredictable neurological disorder which threatens to weaken, at any moment, the masculine image of fortitude and virility that he has so carefully constructed. His two shameful secrets are, in fact, related : his, “soi-disant épilepsie dépassait l’entendement des médecins, il le savait, elle ne relevait pas seulement de la science médicale. Une affaire de naissance, un héritage de

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<sup>123</sup> See Dover p. 29

<sup>124</sup> See Dover p. 20

<sup>125</sup> See Percy, Dover, and Larson for more complete information on the institution of pederasty and homosexuality in ancient Greece.

pouvoir qui se retournait parfois contre lui” (103-4). There is no scientific explanation for his epilepsy, instead, it is the price that he had to pay for his power and current position. Mars’s characterization of his illness as “un heritage de pouvoir,” reveals the extent to which destruction and devastation are inherent to systems of power. Furthermore, it also serves as a reminder of the precariousness of power and success, as his illness works against him. It is perhaps a psychomatic expression of his trauma trying to help him break free from the cycles of violence that trap him into the destructive hypermasculinity of *macoutisme*. As demonstrated in studies such as "A Troubled Youth: Relations with Somatization, Depression and Anxiety in Adulthood," trauma from childhood sexual abuse can manifest in somatization as well as other disorders such as depression, and anxiety.<sup>126</sup> The physical manifestation of trauma is the legacy of a system of power that abuses and devours the bodies of its citizens.

Perhaps we can read Mars's authorial decision to attribute a congenital malady like epilepsy to Raoul's character as a strategic mirroring of the regime's intrinsic structural defects. She emphasizes the ways in which traumas of the dictatorship, like symptoms, manifest physically in those that embody the system. Moreover, Raoul, like François Duvalier, suffers from an illness which threatens his very power. Raoul's mysterious bouts of epilepsy manifest when he feels physically oppressed by his environment, often due to exposure to excessive heat or dust. He takes preventative measures against his illness by carefully controlling his environment through artificial means. In fact, Nirvah's first reaction upon meeting Raoul is to seize up momentarily from the frigid temperature of his office. She wonders, "Comment peut-on vivre dans cette ambiance glaciale?" (14). He even goes as far as paving the road leading to

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<sup>126</sup> See Piet Jm Portegijs et al.

her house and installing air conditioning as well as a generator in Nirvah's house for his own comfort and protection. His epilepsy only manifests when he feels out of control, which could be a consequence of his childhood sexual abuse. For example, Raoul suffers a particularly undermining epileptic fit when he is eventually ousted from his post in the government. This inexplicable disorder can be explained as a somatization of his trauma, which constantly threatens his masculine image and power.

Inasmuch as Raoul represents the archetypal Macoute, his weaknesses can be seen as a reflection of the regime's own deficiencies and congenital defects. While the hypermasculine culture of violence, greed, sexual rapaciousness and domination had helped the regime to expand beyond the imaginable, the rate of its growth cannot be sustained. The predatory vehicle of the state terrorizes and consumes not only the poor and exploited masses, it consumes its own agents. That is to say, it consumes itself. The voracity of the autophagic dictatorial machine ensures its own undoing as it is only concerned with destruction. Thus, the machine simultaneously powers and weakens the regime much like the dictator's own weak heart.<sup>127</sup> As Raoul reflects, "L'obsession du docteur-président était la multiplication des macoutes. Ce corps paramilitaire était sa chose, sa créature, qu'il avait façonnée avec l'amour et la patience d'un orfèvre... Avec ses hommes et femmes habillés de l'uniforme de gros bleu, Duvalier ne craignait

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<sup>127</sup> Both François and Jean-Claude Duvalier suffered from heart disease. However, François Duvalier's heart problems were present during his reign, constantly threatening to unseat him from the Presidency. While François Duvalier ultimately died from complications related to diabetes in 1971, Jean-Claude Duvalier died from a heart attack in 2014. For more on François Duvalier's health problems see Elizabeth Abbott *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 96-8, 152-3. For Jean-Claude Duvalier, see Abbott 265-6 and "L'ancien dictateur d'Haïti Jean-Claude Duvalier est mort." *Le Monde.fr*. Le Monde, 04 Oct. 2014. Web. 07 Oct. 2016, <[http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2014/10/04/l-ancien-dictateur-d-haiti-jean-claude-duvalier-est-mort\\_4500679\\_3382.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/disparitions/article/2014/10/04/l-ancien-dictateur-d-haiti-jean-claude-duvalier-est-mort_4500679_3382.html)>.

rien” (227). Though the VSN strengthen and empower Papa Doc, they are also the regime’s Achilles heel.

Emphasizing this point, Mars’s descriptions of the dictatorship and its agents are embedded in a lexical field of voracity and power. While reflecting on her state, Nirvah laments, “ La dictature dévore la vie saine comme un cancer, elle semble immortelle, éternelle, prenant tous les jours plus de force, plus d'audace, se grisant de son propre pouvoir” (173). Though Nirvah compares the dictatorship to cancer, a black hole, devouring everything in its path in the name of power, may be a more appropriate analogy. Like a black hole, the dictatorship gains mass by ravaging its own resources until, ostensibly, there is nothing left. Furthermore, the machine/black hole can never be satisfied, continuing on its path of annihilation. No one is safe from the insatiable Duvalierist machine, which Mars illustrates through the downfall of Raoul Vincent. As Bell notes, “But Duvalierism creates a mechanism for state-run terror so fearsomely efficient that it devours its executioners as well as its victims in the end, and there is no way out” (247).

The insatiable voracity of Duvalierism created a highly unstable and volatile environment where the only constant was Presidents for life Duvalier. The only thing that mattered was loyalty to Duvalier, “un code de fidélité” which was constantly being tested and threatened by others wanting to prove their own loyalty (227). Raoul elaborates that, “qui défendait les intérêts de la révolution avec le plus d’acharnement, d’ingéniosité dans la corruption ou de cruauté dans l’anéantissement des ennemis se voyait bien vite propulsé dans le cercle des fidèles généreusement gâtes par le pouvoir. Fidélité qui faisait qu’on acceptait tout pour faire marcher la cause, même l’assassinat de proches parents” (91). Given that loyalty must be constantly proven

through the use of violence, there is no guarantee of remaining in the dictator's good graces. Therefore, violence becomes the only means of survival and loyalty becomes an impossible practice within the autophagic machine of the dictatorship. Moreover, Duvalier periodically purged his social circle and the ranks of the militia,<sup>128</sup> in order to reinforce blind devotion to the President. At the core of the Duvalier's fellowship of loyalty was survival and ascension.

Raoul's downfall not only demonstrates the autodestructive nature of the paramilitary organization, it foreshadows the inevitable fall of the dictatorship. As Duvalier's oldest friend and right-hand man, Raoul, "était parmi ceux de la première heure, les purs et durs, les intouchables" (91-2). Given his status and position, he has made many enemies and survived the endless political reprisals and machinations. Believing himself to be invincible, he reveals the range of his hubris by overextending his power in order to completely possess Nirvah. His obsession with Nirvah leaves him exposed and vulnerable, putting his power and position into jeopardy. Though cognizant of the risk, he, nonetheless, continues to pursue Nirvah.

Having been a vital member of Duvalier's inner circle for so long, he, more than anyone, understands the mechanisms that drive the dictatorial machine. Reflecting on his obsession with possessing Nirvah, he predicts that, "son heure viendrait, il finirait par tomber, par commettre une erreur fatale" (92). His "rival par excellence," Maxime Douville, sees this vulnerability and orchestrates an elaborate plan to overthrow Raoul Vincent (250). Described as, "Le secrétaire d'État mulâtre" (90), he "nourrissait envers Raoul Vincent une haine pure comme un diamant" (91). Having lost several family members to the whims of Duvalier, Douville displaces his anger

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<sup>128</sup> See Jeb Sprague *Paramilitarism and the Assault on Democracy in Haiti* (New York: Monthly Review, 2012) 36 and Abbot 88.

and hatred toward Raoul. He notes that, "Toute sa haine porte sur l'homme de l'autre cote de la table, le principal exécuter des basses œuvres de la dictature" (250). He even places stricter measures of control over the finances of Raoul's department, limiting his movements and his freedom. Furthermore, he takes advantage of the question of Daniel Leroy's (Nirvah's husband's) imprisonment to put Raoul in an unfavorable position in front of François Duvalier.

In order to keep possession of Nirvah, Raoul needs Daniel to stay in prison.

Unfortunately for him, the entire cabinet moves to release Daniel except Raoul, further exposing his dissonant priorities. In that moment, his loyalty to Duvalier is compromised and he is effectively deposed from office by the vengeful and insatiable members of the cabinet. Though Raoul created the conditions for his own undoing, it is important to note that he is just another casualty of the Duvalierist machine. He is another dispensable member, consumed by his own organization as his power feeds back into the machine. Raoul reflects, "L'impuissance, comme une bile brulante, montait à la gorge du secrétaire d'État. La machine qu'il avait créée, dont il avait imaginé la mécanique et les rouages se retournait contre lui, pour le broyer" (280). He is crushed under the immense machine that he himself helped to build and to improve. His power is pulverized by the gears of the machine until there is nothing left.

In a system which only rewards violence and fortitude, any sign of weakness must be repressed. Having worked so hard to hide his homosexuality and build his masculine power, Raoul finally attained a position of power and privilege through sheer determination. However, his obsession with Nirvah has left him exposed and vulnerable to attack. Nirvah represented the culmination of masculinity for Raoul. Possessing her would right historical wrongs and fortify his position as a Haitian man of power. His downfall not only reveals the precariousness of

power within the Duvalierist system, it also represents the collapse of Macoute masculinity. When Raoul falls, all that he has built comes crumbling down with him. His masculinity, his image and most importantly, his power disintegrate before his eyes. He reflects on his predicament, “L’ingratitude de François Duvalier ne l’étonne point, elle est inhérente à son être profond et l’a maintenu au pouvoir jusqu’à présent. Les états d’âme sonnent le glas des dictateurs. Probablement qu’à sa place il aurait agi de la même façon” (293). Instead of condemning the actions of the president, he understands the demands of power and of the dictatorship. He himself had once used the same tactics and the same rationale to cultivate his power and position. He understands more than anyone else, that Duvalierist power and masculinity must constantly be fed and managed. Though he had once been at the apex of Duvalierist masculinity, he is later found utterly disgraced and divested of his masculinity. As she attempts to flee the country, Nirvah hears from her brother that Raoul has been arrested on his way to the Venezuelan ambassador’s house. She laughs at the news and thinks, “Raoul Vincent... déguisé en femme! Quelle fin pitoyable pour Son Excellence” (327). Ironically, the strongman’s only hope for survival, lies in the successful performance of femininity. The once powerful Macoute is reduced to a cowardly woman desperately seeking refuge in the house of an influential man. Unable to defend himself or his dependents, he no longer displays the bravery inherent to the Duvalierist code of loyalty. After all, cowardice is abhorred by the dictatorship as it represents weakness.

Raoul’s fall from grace reveals the politics and mechanisms of power of the dictatorship. Power and status can only be achieved by and through the Duvalierist machine, which, in turn, is fueled through the consumption of its own resources and agents. The machine only serves one

master, Duvalier. In fact, “Duvalier se savait invincible tant que s’étendrait sur tout le pays l’emprise de ces hommes et femmes qui lui étaient dévoués corps et âmes, qui étaient prêts à verser leur sang pour lui sans sourciller” (228). The bodies and souls of the VSN, empower the physically weak Duvalier, rendering him larger than life and nearly invincible. Their omnipresence becomes his omnipotence. However, the autophagic machine is driven by and produces violence without measure, demonstrating that a system which is only designed to perpetuate violence will ultimately collapse in on itself as the violence grows and becomes uncontrollable, annihilating everything in its path.

Haitian Gigolo: Performing Masculinities in *La Chair du maître* and *L’heure hybride*

After the collapse of the dictatorship in 1986, Haitians inside and outside of Haiti had to contend with the aftermath and the trauma of the regime. With Jean-Claude Duvalier in exile and the ranks of the militia in disarray, Haitians have been left to process, heal and reassemble not only the shattered pieces of their government and economy, but themselves as well. Duvalierism promoted a particularly malignant form of masculinity through the dictatorship—in the form of the Tontons Macoutes and the president himself—which left a legacy of violence, terror and destruction. I argue that, in its wake, an unconventional masculine figure has emerged from the rubble of Duvalierist masculinity: the gigolo, notably in the works of Kettly Mars and Dany Laferrière. While renowned Haitian authors such as Jacques Roumain and Jacques Stephen Alexis have featured the female prostitute in their novels, the gigolo has not been afforded much literary attention.<sup>129</sup> In fact, Dany Laferrière’s *La Chair du maître* (1997) and Kettly Mars’s

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<sup>129</sup> See Lindsey Scott’s “Selling Sex, Suppressing Sexuality: A Gigolo’s economy in Kettly Mars’s *L’heure hybride*,” for more on the presence of prostitutes in Haitian literature, particularly in the novels of Jacques Stephen Alexis and Jacques Roumain.



*L'heure hybride* (2005) are the only works that give voice to the gigolo in Haiti. Their investment in a figure as marginal (and as taboo) as the gigolo is in itself a subversive act. The gigolos are more than background or minor characters, they are protagonists, narrators, and/or main characters. Furthermore, these gigolos consciously avoid the violence and power-hungry masculinity of the Duvaliers, this marginal masculine figure reveals alternative engagements with the reconstruction, performance and practice of masculinity. Their masculine reassemblages offer an alternative to Duvalierist masculinity.

I argue that Dany Laferrière's *La Chair du maître* and Kettly Mars's *L'heure hybride* engage with the malleability of Haitian masculinity through the figure of the gigolo and that the gigolo emerges as an alternative masculine figure in postdictatorial Haitian novels. More specifically, the gigolo represents a masculinity that diverges from the masculinities in power, such as Duvalierist masculinity and/or white heteropatriarchy. Both writers examine the disintegrated masculine ideal and recompose a postdictatorial Haitian masculinity through their portrayals of the male prostitute. I believe that these masculine reassemblages imagine the possibility of separating the practice of Haitian masculinity from its violent history and circumstances. While both writers focus on the gigolo and his engagement in redefining masculinity for profit, they differ in their approach. Indeed, their respective positionalities result in disparate portrayals of the gigolo. Laferrière writes from a diasporic position to a North American and European audience, whereas, Mars writes from Haiti to a Haitian public. For this reason, their representations of the Haitian gigolo are socially and phenotypically distinct; they are formulated for entirely different economies of desire. Laferrière's gigolos are young black

men who seduce and entertain wealthy older white women from the global North, while Mars's protagonist Rico is an older mulatto who circulates in the high society of Port-au-Prince.

Laferrière's collection of short stories features his infamously sexualized and provocative style which exposes the intricate webs of desire, power, and race inside and outside of Haiti. Writing from the diaspora, Laferrière's work exposes the ways in which these webs are both interconnected and tied to larger transnational contexts. As he moves from personal experience to fantasy to an almost theatrical mode of storytelling, he deals with the varying perceptions, constructions and manipulations of black masculinity through the figure of the gigolo. I will examine his engagement with postdictatorial black Haitian masculinity in his short stories: "Vers le Sud," "Les garçons magiques," and "Le bar de la plage." At first glance these representations may seem essentialist, but read carefully they serve as a mirror of inherited cultural and social conventions and stereotypes. I contend that by manipulating stereotypical and commonplace notions, Laferrière's gigolos alter the exchange value of black male sexuality and racially based stereotypes in both the Haitian and transnational imaginations. Their conscious exploitation of preconceived associations and conceptions of black masculinity—such as the black stud or rapist—in the Western imagination offers the possibility of dismantling, revising and adjusting black masculinity, which, in turn, lead to new understandings about the intersections of race, sexuality and masculinity. In particular, his treatment of the gigolo exposes the vulnerability and exploitation of black male bodies within the context of romance tourism, which sheds new light onto the implicit power dynamics present in the industry. My analysis explores the echoes of slavery and slave rape that emerge from the depictions of romance tourists and the gigolos.

Furthermore, Laferrière illustrates the racial, sexual, gendered and economic tensions between Haiti and the global North through the figure of the black gigolo.

Based in Haiti, the oeuvre of Kettly Mars speaks to and about the trauma of the Duvalier dictatorship. While *Saisons sauvages* serves as a sort of autopsy of the virulent Duvalierist masculinity, *L'heure hybride* examines the commercialization of desire and the reconstruction of a fluid and variable masculinity from the fragments of a disintegrated masculine ideal. The narrative unfolds under Jean-Claude Duvalier's reign; however, it was written well after the fall of the dictatorship. In performing masculine assemblages, Rico profits directly from the commercialization of desire and the capitalization of sexuality. Rico entertains the upper crust of Haitian society; older, wealthy women pay Rico for sex and companionship. Early in the novel, he introduces himself, "Je me nomme Jean François Éric L'Hermitte, profession gigolo. Mes amis et mes maîtresses m'appellent Rico" (21-2). The name that he chooses to be called, Rico (rich in Spanish), reflects the economic drive of his identity and life.

Taking advantage of his aristocratic sounding name and light skin complexion, he invents personas that appeal to the lonely women of the upper crust. Describing himself as, "Ni blanc ni tout à fait noir, ni gras ni trop maigre, plutôt grand avec des muscles saillants et nerveux. On me décrit comme un mulâtre brun, un griffe ou un grimaud amélioré," Rico cannot be neatly categorized into one identity or state of being, he is variable and ambiguous (33). Furthermore, he affirms himself through the act of negation, neither black nor white, neither fat nor thin, he is Rico. Importantly, he is exactly who he chooses to be. He plays on his ambiguity; by inventing and composing identities that serve his needs of the moment. It is my contention that by assembling the fragments of masculinity in order to sell his male sexuality, he thereby valorizes

alternative modes of being and divergent masculinities. Rico's performances of sexualized masculinities for profit not only offer a critique of dominant masculinity, they also provide the possibility of disassociating manhood with the corrupt and violent practices of the Duvalier dictatorship. Furthermore, I will delve into Rico's conscious refusal of traditional masculinity associated with power, which, in fact, is based on his absolute need for freedom in his expression of masculinity as well as his lifestyle. As he tinkers with and explores masculinity, a sensual practice of masculinity is revealed, where new masculine assemblages are created rather than fixed identities. This gigolo purposefully operates in the margins, chipping away at the structure of hegemonic masculinity and divorcing the practice of masculinity from the violence that has come to define Haitian manhood.

#### Bedding South: The Black Gigolo in Dany Laferrière's *La Chair du maître*

Dany Laferrière is perhaps one of the most famous and prolific Haitian writers in the world. His provocative writing style and suggestive titles have encouraged sales and increased readership inside Canada and around the world. Raised under the dictatorship, Dany Laferrière fled Haiti in 1976 after discovering that his friend had been murdered and decapitated because of his work at Radio Haïti Inter.<sup>130</sup> He left for voluntary exile to the United States and Canada where he would establish his career as a novelist. One of the most influential writers in the Haitian diaspora, Laferrière addresses themes such as racial stereotypes, immigration, dictatorship, sexuality, class and identity with an incisive wit and sardonic irony. Jana Evans Braziel refers to Laferrière as, "a major player in the transnational cultural politics of race,

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<sup>130</sup> For more biographical information see Braziel's *Artists, Performers, and Black Masculinity in the Haitian Diaspora*, chapter 1 and Coates's "Dany Laferrière: A Bio-Bibliographical Chronology."

gender sexuality, and immigration: or the minefield of the diasporic black masculinities” (*Artists* 26). Jean L. Prophète sees Laferrière’s work as, “the denunciation of ethnic and social stereotypes” (947). The extent of his influence was acknowledged even by France when he was elected to the Académie Française in 2013. He is an accomplished author of numerous books, some of which have been turned into films. He delivers no less spectacularly in *La Chair du maître*, published in 1997, a collection of separate and interwoven short stories about desire, sex, oppression, class, dictatorship and the author himself. While there are twenty-four stories in the book, I will focus on three short stories: “Vers le sud,” “Le bar de la plage,” and “Les garçons magiques,” which prominently feature the figure of the gigolo. By reading these three stories within the context of the postdictatorship period as well as the transnational economies of desire, I will demonstrate that Laferrière gigolo appropriates stereotypes about Caribbean and/or black masculinity in order to sell their sexuality to Northern women, which, in turn sheds light onto the vulnerability of black bodies in a transnational economy.

With provocative titles such as, *Comment faire l’amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985), *Le Goût des jeunes filles* (1992) and *La Chair du maître*, Laferrière puts sexuality and desire at the center of his literary projects. As Stephanie Hopwood observes, “Sex for sex’s sake does not exist in *La Chair du maître*; indeed, all of the sexually tinged episodes are imbued with a political agenda” (*Port-au-Prince* 68). Sexuality is intertwined with local and transnational politics as Laferrière plays on the historically inherited associations and stereotypes of black masculinity as inexhaustible, exotic, and hypersexual. Furthermore, Braziel asserts that, “Laferrière reappropriates the images and representations of black masculinity in order to overwork and thus disassemble, the machinic assemblages of American racial constructs”

(*Artists* 37). That is to say, he puts notions of black masculinity back into circulation on his own terms, thereby altering its exchange value. Through the figure of the *gwo nèg* and the politics of “Big Man-ism”, she explores the ways in which “[diasporic] cultural producers all performatively assume and yet simultaneously denaturalize hegemonic forms of power that crystallize around gender and sexuality, or patriarchal heteromascularity” (*Artists* 3). Similarly, in manipulating both his sexuality and masculinity for profit, the gigolo destabilizes the hegemony of modern gender and sexual norms in the Western imagination.

To better situate the figure of the gigolo and ways in which their practice of masculinity resists and diverges from traditional understandings of masculinity, I draw on scholarship from across different fields. Namely, anthropological and sociological research on the industry of romance tourism<sup>131</sup> in the Caribbean, masculinity studies, history, cultural studies, and feminist and queer scholarship. On the concept of masculinity, sociologist, R.W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as the normative gender construct par excellence and that, “it embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women” (832). What is important, here, is that men, too, are subjugated by hegemonic masculinity. Not only does it subjugate women, it gains legitimacy by suppressing other forms of non-normative masculinity. Indeed, Judith Halberstam concurs that, “these ‘heroic masculinities’ depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities” (1). Much like the autophagic reflex of the Duvalier dictatorship, dominant structures like hegemonic masculinity draw power from the subordination

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<sup>131</sup> “Romance tourism” was coined by Deborah Pruitt and Suzanne LaFont in “For Love or Money: Romance Tourism in Jamaica.” *Annals of Tourism Research* 22.2 (1995): 422-440. They make a distinction between sex tourism and romance tourism, not only as a gendered difference, but also as a relationship emphasizing courtship and romance rather than purely transactional sex.

of alternative modes of being. It absorbs otherness and alterity into its very structure, fueled by the consumption of alterity, weakness and desperation.

Likewise, Caribbean sociologist, Linden Lewis professes that patriarchy is a form of domination over both men and women. He elaborates that, “Masculinity is predicated on the presumption of power, whether real or imagined. Though not all men exercise power, all nevertheless view it as an entitlement. Masculinity therefore is often associated with access to and control over resources” (97). Moreover, on Caribbean masculinity specifically, he dismantles long-held stereotypes such as the hypersexual and promiscuous man who eschews domestic and/or familial responsibility. He stresses, instead, that, “one’s analysis of the Caribbean male should be able to distinguish between hegemonic masculinity and other subordinated forms of masculinity” (108). Though masculinity is associated with an exercise of power, a nuanced approach to varying manifestations of masculinity is emphasized. It is important to look beyond hegemonic masculinity, especially in the context of oppression.

Similarly, Kamala Kempadoo’s *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labor* explores the hypersexual image of the Caribbean and its role in the global economy of desire. In her examination of sex work in the Caribbean, she considers the interplay of heterosexism and patriarchy in Caribbean societies that privilege masculine dominance.<sup>132</sup> Importantly, she contests the hypersexualization of the islands, pointing out that, “Caribbean sexuality then is not

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<sup>132</sup> Kempadoo explains, “While both heterosexism and patriarchy seem to nestle around masculine dominance, the combination, i.e., heteropatriarchy, signals a distinction and relatedness between the ways in which sexuality and gender are socially, legally, and politically organized. It is the combination that marginalizes and criminalizes gendered subjects who transgress established sexual boundaries. Heteropatriarchy is thus a concept used throughout this book to denote a structuring principle in Caribbean societies that privileges heterosexual, promiscuous masculinity and subordinates feminine sexuality, normalizing relations of power that are intolerant of and oppressive toward sexual desire and practices that are outside of or oppose the dominant sexual and gender regimes” (9).

normal, but excessive, at times pathological and at others unruly, and it is this characteristic of the people and its region that shapes images, policies, and economic programs from without, as well as internal ideas about self, culture, and development” (7-8). Though the sexualization of the Caribbean has often worked against the region, it is precisely these associations that the gigolos exploit. They sell, through their bodies, the idyllic Caribbean.

While her book primarily focuses on female sex work and male-oriented sexual tourism, she does include a glimpse of male hustling in Curaçao. She claims that Caribbean masculinity is not called into question or denied in heterosexual sexual-economic relationships in the same way as their female counterparts, and instead “real” Caribbean manhood is reaffirmed. (79). I agree that men are not stigmatized to the same degree as women for sex work, however, I maintain that they are often marginalized as a result of the commercialization of their sexuality. For example, in “Les garçons magiques,” Mauléon witnesses the bartender asking the young gigolo to leave the premises. The bartender explains his connection with a local gigolo named Prince, whom he took under his wing, encouraging him to learn English and find a job. Instead, he says disapprovingly, “il [Prince] a préféré les drogues dures, l’argent facile, la mer qu’il connaît bien et les jeux interdits...une véritable plaie” (212). Calling the gigolos a plague or wound, he implies the possible contamination to good society from the throngs of desperate young men looking for easy money. Such discourses are usually reserved for female sex workers, but we see, in this case, that they are equally pertinent to male sex workers. Their presence in Haitian society is disruptive to the way of life, that is to say, to the established order of heteropatriarchy.

In the often overlooked scholarship on gay sexual tourism, Gregory Mitchell’s *Tourist Attractions: Performing Race and Masculinity in Brazil’s Sexual Economy* (2016) offers a



fascinating examination of the interplay of race, sexuality and economics in the commercialized performance of masculinity by the *garotos de programa*. Their performative labor calls attention to the ways in which masculinity is embodied, commodified and consumed (55). Though these Brazilian gigolos target men, like the Haitian gigolos, they “fashion racialized performances of masculinity at the behest of tourists,” composing different identities according to the situation (5). Mitchell’s analysis presents a broader and more complex understanding of gender, highlighting the creativity and agency at play in performing masculinity for profit. The performative labor of male sex workers requires the ability to shift between, through and around established sexual and gender models as well as an understanding of the value of enacting certain manifestations of masculinity within the different economies of desire. By extending his approach, I hope to interrogate the very processes by which gendered and sexual identities are constructed, reconstructed and even destroyed by the performances of the Haitian gigolo. Understanding the various ways in which race, class and gender are performed and re-performed by male sex workers reveals new and divergent engagements with masculinity and thus with power.

On the other side of the gender line, Donette Francis’s *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean Literature* (2010) rethinks history and citizenship through the concepts of sexual citizenship and antiromances. While Francis focuses on women’s bodies and female subjectivities, her consideration of sexual citizenship as a defining poetic practice and its relation to a larger national and transnational context is helpful in understanding the importance of sexuality and the ways in which it has been shaped by colonial, postcolonial forces. Extending her approach to men, she also offers a new way of reading non-

normative masculine sexualities in a postcolonial Caribbean context. However, in her work, he is critical of Laferrière's works as, "largely masculinist, nationalist romances in which redemptive scripts require black male sexual prowess and sexual conquest of the white female body to prove not only the virility but the viability of black men's sociopolitical power," but she, nonetheless, underlines his engagement with sexually and racially charged stereotypes about black masculinity (9). Her investigation reveals the ways in which the nation and sexuality are interwoven into the historical narrative.

Returning to Laferrière's portrayal of male prostitutes, they are the central figures of the "Vers le sud," "Le bar de la plage," and "Les garçons magiques." The first two tales relate the direct experiences of the gigolos themselves or the mistresses, while the last explores the financial potential of Haitian masculinity and male sexuality. In "Les garçons magiques," Mauléon has returned to Haiti in order to fulfill his dream of building a modest hotel on a small parcel of beachfront land that he owns. Lacking the necessary funds, he seeks out an American investor who insults him by refusing a partnership yet offers to buy his property. Dejected and angry, he sits in front of the *Hibiscus* hotel and reflects on his life and the options available to him.

While thinking, he witnesses a young, attractive man seducing a sexagenarian woman. He notes the dismissive attitude of the hotel staff towards the young gigolo and asks the bartender about them. The bartender explains that the women return every year specifically for these types of romantic encounters, they return faithfully for the men. In that moment, Mauléon realizes the economic potential of the commercialization of Haitian male sexuality. He thinks, "Les fils du dieu Soleil... Et au lieu de repousser ces garçons magiques, il va les accueillir, les

tolérer, les recruter même. Une vraie mine d'or!" (213) Comparing their masculine bodies and their sexuality to a gold mine, Mauléon plans to capitalize on the commercialization of sexual desire. The magical boys know how to manipulate their sexual capital and circulate a profitable masculinity. They deploy their masculinity and male sexuality for monetary gain as well as social status. As Kempadoo elaborates, with regard to romance tourists, "the relationships reproduce long-standing racist fascinations with black male sexuality and stereotypes of Caribbean culture" (*Sexing* 129). Mauléon and the gigolos intend to exploit the erotic and exotic associations with the black male body as well as the Caribbean region as a whole.

In "Le bar de la plage," three gigolos go to the bar to unwind and discuss their work. Importantly, this story is told from the point of view of the gigolos themselves. Laferrière effectively places them in the position of subject, when previously they occupied the position of desired object. It is hinted that the bar is, in fact, part of the hotel the Mauléon had conceived in the previous short story. Chico, Gogo, and Mario use this time to unwind and talk about their job and their clients. They share details of their clients and lament the amount of work involved in their encounters.

Though Albert, the bartender, somewhat condescendingly informs them about professional development classes at the local school, Chico responds, "ce qu'on fait ici, c'est aussi un métier." He, as well as the other gigolos, consider sexual labor as work. Gogo adds, "il n'y a pas de sot métier, mais que de sottes gens" (217). As Kamala Kempadoo elaborates on prostitution, "the conception of work includes not just waged labor but also survival strategies and ways in which women make do, which may include a strategic use of their sexuality" (*Sexing* 65). Like their female counterparts, male prostitutes deploy their sexuality for monetary

gain as well as pleasure. However, as Kempadoo indicates, “the notion of Caribbean masculinity, as legitimately attached to multiple partnering and sexual prowess, is powerful, and this idea dominates popular as well as academic understandings” (*Sexing* 79). In other words, Caribbean masculinity is envisioned as a hypersexual subjectivity defined by the marketability of male sexuality. While women may be scorned for their erotic agency, men are expected to perform the hypersexualized masculinity of the Caribbean male.

Furthermore, the success of romance tourism in the region has brought the global economy to Haiti. As Kempadoo indicates, “sex tourism and tourism-oriented prostitution has become an increasingly important topic of research and discussion due to the growing reliance of national governments on income generated by tourism and tourism-related activities” (*Sun* 13). As more and more people come to Haiti in search of romance and/or sex, more jobs are created as a result and in support of the tourism industry. While the benefits from the expansion of romance tourism are dubious at best, the industry undoubtedly has an economic impact. For example, a bartending job like Albert’s is directly contingent on the success of the gigolos at the hotel. Though Albert holds their profession in contempt and considers his own career in higher esteem, it is undeniable that the condition of his employment is the continual return of the romance tourists. If the women stop coming for their romantic adventures, the hotel would most likely close its doors and Albert would have to find employment elsewhere. Thus, the sexual and romantic labor of the gigolos have real implications for the local economy, yet they are subject to derision and their work is dismissed as easy frivolity for the lazy.

Importantly, Laferrière's gigolos target a specific Western and Northern market, mainly older white women from North America or Europe. As the writer illustrates, in “Les garçons

magiques,” “Assise sur la véranda de l'hôtel *Hibiscus*, une femme d'environ soixante ans sirote une boisson colorée. Un jeune homme--seize ou dix-sept ans--traverse la rue ensoleillée et a va s'asseoir à la table de la femme” (211). He depicts a typical encounter within the context of romance tourism, an older woman who feels or is considered undesirable in her own society escapes to the Caribbean for love, romance and sex with younger men.

Moreover, in “Le bar de la plage,” Laferrière reiterates this point by illustrating the kinds of women who frequent the male prostitutes. Mrs. Hopkins talks to Chico as if he were her son, whereas a fastidious and demanding Mme Bergeron makes Gogo work for his money. Finally, Chico and Gogo discuss the nightmarishly concupiscent Mrs. Wenner of Cleveland, Ohio, described as, “une marathonnienne du sexe” (216). She is further depicted as, “cette femme de soixante ans [qui] peut baiser sans s'arrêter pendant plus de dix heures” (216). Given the physical limitations of human men, Mrs. Wenner's excessive libido becomes a source of anxiety for Mario as well as the other gigolos. They joke about taking turns with her as a single man would not suffice for her monstrous sexual drive. Though the banter is light, it reveals the deeper fantasies and expectations of romance tourists like Mrs. Wenner. As Joan Philips elaborates, through her investigation of Barbadian beach hustlers, “Travel for the emancipated Western woman becomes an arena to test out new notions of a liberated femininity that goes in quest of the sexual Other, an Other who is endowed with a primitive masculinity that can no longer be found in the West” (189). They seek not only an exciting romance, they desire the exotic and inexhaustible black male body endowed with stamina and a sexuality bordering on the bestial.

Indeed, it is through the romantic and sexual encounters with Haitian men that their own femininity and power are validated. It is important to note that the mature age or body type of

these women make them feel excluded from the sexual and romantic spheres in their home countries. For example, in “Vers le sud,” Ellen laments, “Laissez-moi vous dire qu'il n'y a rien dans le nord pour les femmes de plus de quarante ans. Rien, rien, rien, bande de salauds” (197). Furthermore, in the same story, Sue denounces the men in her town in the following manner, “mais au fond, je déteste également les hommes de ma race. Ils ne m’ont jamais regardée. Pour les intéresser, il ne faut pas peser plus de cent vingt livres. Et moi, je pèse le double” (194). The women who participate in romance tourism, reclaim their power, femininity and erotic agency through their interactions with much younger men.

While the age gap is significant in many cases, Laferrière emphasis on the young age of the gigolos is particularly distressing. The woman on the hotel veranda is in her sixties, but the boy only appears to be sixteen or seventeen. He is—by both Haitian and North American standards—still a minor and not an adult. Laferrière’s authorial decision to depict the gigolo as a minor instead of an adult puts their relationship as well as the entire romance tourism industry into a troubling light. The interaction turns from a flirtatious encounter to one bordering on pedophilia. Moreover, this detail exposes the vulnerability of bodies to the predatory drive of the state that fosters a system of exploitation. He delves further into the dynamics of power, class, race and sexuality in “Vers le sud,” where three women recount their experience with Haitian gigolos.

“Vers le sud” is told through the multiple perspectives of Brenda, Sue, Ellen and the maître d’hotel, Albert. The three women come to Haiti every year to meet with their lovers and enjoy themselves. Brenda and Ellen share the attention of a young and charismatic gigolo named Legba, while Sue is madly in love with Neptune. The narrative connects all the narrators to

Legba and his mysterious death. All three of the women represent an archetype of feminine undesirability in the North, they are outside of the realms of desire due to their age, weight and/or socio-economic class. Brenda is a good Christian woman from Georgia, married to Bill for the last twenty-five years. Ellen is a forty-five-year-old literature professor from Boston and Sue is an obese factory worker who hates black people, yet relishes in the attentions of her black Haitian lover. The women return every year to indulge their fantasies and, as Mimi Sheller calls it, consume the Caribbean. They are the typical romance tourist seeking sun, sand, and sex.

The enigmatic Legba, we learn, was named after the vaudou *lwa* of the crossroads, between the spiritual realm and the human world. His namesake, Papa Legba, is a vaudou spirit who is known to be both a mediator and trickster. Those are fitting qualities for a man who sells the idea and experience of love to women. As Maya Deren illustrates,

Dahomeans knew him mainly as the cosmic phallus, the statue of Legba, squatting, staring at his own enormous symbol and source of generation, was everywhere... Whether as cord or phallus, Legba—life—is the link between the visible, mortal world and the invisible, immortal realms. (97)

Bearing the name of the *lwa* of the crossroads, our “jeune prostitué,” Legba, is described as being “beau comme un dieu,” further cementing the association of his sexual power with the divine (201). Albert explains, “Des femmes perdues, des bêtes assoiffées de sexe. Et qui en est la cause? Lui, le maître du désir. Il a dix-sept ans, des yeux de braise, un profil pur. Legba: le prince des ténèbres” (200). At only seventeen years old, he is the master of desire, making women lose their minds to his sexual power. In fact, his sexuality is so potent that Ellen claims that, “Il pouvait me faire jouir presque sans me toucher” (201). The idea of him, or more the sight of him is enough to

make her orgasm. She continues, “il savait faire l'amour aux femmes. C'est vrai qu'il aurait pu se contenter d'être beau comme un dieu, et, pour ma part, cela aurait été nettement suffisant pour faire mon bonheur. Je pouvais passer des heures à le regarder. Il faisait de mon corps ce qu'il voulait. Et avec ça, il était infatigable” (201). It is the sight of his black male body that provokes a sexual response so strong that touching becomes almost superfluous. Furthermore, what is revealed in this description of the young gigolo is the racialized stereotypes of black masculinity. As Cécile Accilien reveals, “Legba incarne le mythe de l'homme noir qui est le seul à pouvoir satisfaire les fantasme de la femme blanche et fort probablement de l'homme blanc” (199). Indeed, Legba, like his divine namesake, has an otherworldly sexual power over women.

Accordingly, Ellen sees a young black masculine body that is always ready to serve her sexual needs and one that never tires. It is the idea of the inexhaustible black male body that fascinates her and the other women. For example, Brenda confides, “ Le corps de Legba me fascinait: long, souple, finement musclé. Sa peau brillait. *J'avais du mal à le quitter des yeux. Je l'observais sans cesse, à la dérobée*” (197, *emphasis mine*). Brenda is quite literally transfixed by the sight of Legba's skin, she cannot look away from the fetishized black body. She repeats twice that she cannot stop herself from looking at his body and his skin. Frantz Fanon has claimed that for the white Western world, “Le nègre, lui, est fixé au genital; ou du moins on l'y a fixé... Le nègre représente le danger biologique” (134). In other words, the black male body is not only associated with animal savagery and unbridled sexual power, it defines black manhood. Defined solely by his biology, he poses a threat to white male sexuality.<sup>133</sup> This is precisely the allure for

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<sup>133</sup> Cécile Accilien makes a similar observation through Fanon in her chapter, “Soleil, sex et sable *Vers le sud*,” in *Écrits d'Haiti: Perspectives sur la littérature haïtienne contemporaine (1986-2006)*. However, I contextualize my reading in the commercial realm and exchange value. Accilien, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on Bill's role during the sexual encounter as well as setting it up.



the romance tourists. As Phillips argues, “His [The beach hustler’s] appearance, an obvious marketing strategy, is based on the Western female’s notion of the quintessential hypersexual black man... To the Western female he becomes the archetype of black masculinity” (187). Legba is ogled by the women for his stereotypical black masculinity. Importantly, Accilien notes that, “Le corps de Legba devient un lieu de production, un produit de base qui est fait pour être consommé” (208). His body produces fantasies to be consumed by his clients. When they look at him, they see the cultural and historical associations attributed to the black male body, such as the black stud and his mythical sexual prowess. And it is precisely in manipulating these associations and stereotypes that Legba is able to market his sexuality. His is a carefully manufactured performance of masculinity, operating within the racist notions of black Caribbean masculinity and sexuality.

Despite Legba’s magnetic sexuality and his mastery of seduction, he started out as a poor, starving boy from the small northern village of Ouananminthe.<sup>134</sup> Brenda and her husband, Bill, had come to Haiti two years before the events in “Vers le Sud.” Taking pity on the boy, Bill invites Legba to eat with them, completely undeterred by the maître d’s disapproval. Brenda remembers that, “Il n’avait l’air de n’avoir pas plus de quinze ans” (196) and that, “Il semblait très timide à l’époque” (197). Not yet the confident and mesmerizing gigolo, the young Legba is shy. Comparing him to a lost puppy, Brenda understands her husband’s gesture as one of Christian charity and lets the boy dine with them on a regular basis. She depicts their relationship with Legba in familial and filial terms, “Nous l’avions comme adopté, et il semblait nous accepter aussi” (197).

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<sup>134</sup> Ouananminthe is a town located in the northeastern part of Haiti. It is often caught up in international disputes because of its location, nearly on the border with the Dominican Republic.

Treating him almost like a son, they spent hours together talking about their lives, families and dreams.

It is, then, all the more surprising what comes next. The couple invite the adolescent Legba to an isolated beach where they initiate him into the realm of sexuality. Laying on the beach, Brenda is captivated and aroused by Legba's half-naked, adolescent body. She relates that, "Mon mari s'est vite rendu compte du trouble que me causait Legba... mon mari m'a adressé un clin d'oeil étrangement complice" (197). Moreover, he nearly begs her to act on her desire when she feigns ignorance. It is in this moment that Legba is introduced into the world of sex work; giving new meaning to the French expression, *gagner son pain*.

At barely fifteen years old, he is turned into a sex object as Brenda uses his body for her sexual pleasure while her husband watches. Though Brenda's sexual act and first orgasm can be read, as Shirley Tate characterizes, an "agentic ownership of sexual desire," Legba's abnegation and his young age trouble the sexual interaction (44). The attention to his extreme passivity, bordering on paralysis, during the encounter further disturbs readings of their interaction as one of consensual sex between two adults. For the entire duration of the sexual interaction, Legba "restait totalement immobile" (198), "respirait à peine" (198), and he had "Deux yeux rouges, timides et effarés" (199). His inability to move, his lack of verbal or other discernable consent, and his adolescence displaces previous understandings of their relationship as simply that of romance tourist and entrepreneur. Instead, in this scene, Legba appears as the victim of sexual assault. Not only is he under the age of majority and consent, he has not expressed any form of consent, moreover, he is terrified and confused. Even well into the encounter, "il s'efforçait de rester immobile" (199). For fear that any movement might be interpreted as consent, pleasure or

participation, Legba forces himself to stay as still as possible. He is literally objectified as he is transformed into a sex statue.

The racially based power inequities in this scene evoke the historical abuse of men and women under the institution of slavery. In the context of slavery, every captive body becomes vulnerable to control, domination and violence. Both men and women were subject to the absolute authority of the slave master, and, by extension, his family, class and nation. Brenda and Bill's treatment of Legba evokes the sexual abuse of men and women under the institution of slavery. It highlights the asymmetrical and disproportionate dynamics of power. As adults, as Northerners, as people with money and means, they possess all the power. As Sharon Block expounds, in *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (2006), "The porous boundaries between consensual and coercive sexual relations allowed some men to infuse sexual force with the appearance of consent. In other words, men could commit rape not just as an act of power—they could use their power to define the act" (54). Though Brenda is a woman, she occupies a similar position of power as her husband with respect to young Legba. She exercises her power to define their encounter on her own terms, choosing to interpret the act through the lens of romance rather than coercion and violence. Furthermore, J. O'Connell Davidson and J. Sanchez Taylor expound,

Where back home white female sex tourists' racialized privilege is often obscured by their lack of gender power and economic disadvantage in relation to white men, in sex tourist resorts it is recognized as a source of personal power and power over others. Meanwhile, their beliefs about gender and sexuality prevent them from seeing themselves as sexually exploitative. (52)

Thus, Brenda not only exercises her sexual and economic power over Legba's body, she turns his body into a sexual and economic commodity and exploits his sexual vulnerability. Furthermore, she remains blind to her role as perpetrator and dominator. However, it is precisely through this exercise of power and authority that she is able to achieve her first orgasm.

In Thomas Foster's article, *The Sexual Abuse of Black Men under American Slavery*, he reveals the extent of the abuse and the rape of enslaved men. More importantly, his study sheds light onto an historically neglected area of study, arguing that, "enslaved black men were sexually assaulted by both white men and white women. It finds that sexual assault of enslaved men took a variety of forms, including outright physical penetrative assault, forced reproduction, sexual coercion and manipulation and psychic abuse" (447). While men are typically seen as the powerful and impenetrable aggressors with regard to rape, Foster calls attention to the erasure of the sexual assault of men under slavery due to our classed, raced and gendered definitions and perceptions of rape. Investigating the sexual coercion of slave men by white women, he explains that, "As an alternative to or in conjunction with threats of retribution, some white women may have wielded the purse as a means of coercing enslaved men to have sex with them. That is to say, some men may have been paid for their sexual services to white women" (461). While this exchange may seem advantageous in some respects, as slaves, the men had no recourse to resist. Their captive bodies were the under the absolute control and domination of the white slave masters, both men and women. The male slaves were as vulnerable to sexual predation as their female counterparts to sexual abuse.

Through the scenes in "Vers le sud," the readers are reminded of the sexual exploitation of men under the institution of slavery. Legba's socio-economic class, race, and age all highlight the

vulnerability of the black male body in the transnational economy, especially within the context of the dictatorship. Indeed, Hopwood elaborates that, “Although Legba the prostitute had held a sexual-based power over others, it is the Haitian class system that eventually leads him to his downfall” (*Port-au-Prince* 70). By “his downfall,” she is referring to Legba’s mysterious death. He is found dead on the beach with no explanation. It is his position in society, or rather in the margins of society, that had exposed his body to the dangers of sexual predation along with other forms of physical and psychological debasement in the first place.

As a poor, starving boy from a northeastern border town, he had limited possibilities and even fewer choices. After all, it is under the “economic revolution” of Jean-Claude Duvalier that basic living conditions deteriorated drastically, exacerbating the problems of the already impoverished peasants and lower class; forcing many to seek alternative and unconventional methods for survival and employment. Poverty, starvation and desperation exposed Haitian bodies to exploitation, abuse and subjection by internal and external forces. Specifically, Laferrière elaborates on this reality through the penniless and emaciated Legba who came to the city in search of a better life. It is in trying to ameliorate his circumstances that he meets the Christian couple from Georgia. While they appear to be a nice couple with pure intentions, they quickly prove themselves to be predatory opportunists. The domination and exploitation of Legba’s adolescent body puts the relationship to the romance tourists as well as the romance industry as a whole into a troubling new light. By portraying Legba’s initiation into the realm of sexuality and desire, Laferrière effectively recreates a scene of slave rape. However, what was once the plantation has now been transformed into a resort.

Considering the current site of transactional sexual relations, the resort or hotel can be seen as a sort of neo-plantation in the global capitalist economy. While slave ships may no longer bring captive black bodies for use and abuse, cruise ships, instead, bring the multitudes of tourists from wealthy Northern countries to exploit Caribbean sexuality. It appears as an inversion of the slave trade where rich white tourists cross the seas to dominate and consume Caribbean bodies. According to Mimi Sheller, the global North is directly connected to and continues to thrive on the wealth generated by slavery. She argues that the North has, “unceasingly consumed the natural environment, commodities, human bodies, and cultures of the Caribbean,” and continues to do so (3). Furthermore, in her chapter, “Eating others: Of cannibals, vampires, and zombies,” she demonstrates that,

The sexualisation of young 'exotic' bodies, male and female, has become a standard tool of Caribbean tourist promotion, from hotel brochures to magazine advertising and guidebooks. Certain regions even specialize in the selling of particular kinds of bodies, from the dark-skinned 'African' rent-a-dread in Jamaica to the 'hybrid' light brown mulatta woman in the Dominican Republic or Cuba. (161)

Here, the inextricable ties between commercialized sexuality and the tourist industry are revealed. Not only do the romance and sex tourists come for the sun and beaches, they come to consume idyllic Caribbean sexuality in the form of the mulatto or the rastafarian. The industry operates through a careful manipulation of associations and stereotypes related to Caribbean sexuality in order to lure tourists into spending money.

Although the tourist industry saw a sharp decline under Francois Duvalier's totalitarian regime, tourism was revived under Baby Doc, Jean-Claude Duvalier.<sup>135</sup> As Baby Doc's administration favored relations with the United States, it sought to provide cheap labor and idyllic beach settings for Americans. It is under his rule that Haiti developed an unhealthy dependence on the United States, with a vested interest in foreign aid money. For these reasons, the second half of the dictatorship took on the appearance of addressing the gross human rights violations, corruption and extreme poverty for the sake of foreign powers. In reality, however, the administration had found more effective ways of hiding the atrocities of the regime in order to secure foreign aid.<sup>136</sup> As the quality of life deteriorated and the resources became increasingly sparse under the politics of *Jean-Claudisme*, more and more bodies became available for consumption, domination, and violation. It can be said that the Duvalier dictatorship created the conditions necessary for a kind of coerced sexual slavery within the context of tourism. The dire circumstances enabled the sex tourism industry in Haiti. Furthermore, the dictatorship was responsible for the vicious cycle of consumption and the generation of sex workers. The dictatorial machine creates the conditions and the space for coerced sexual slavery where sex workers are constantly being consumed and spit out by the dictatorship. The autophagic dictatorial machine is only concerned with boosting and driving the economy in addition to reinforcing the power structure. It needed bodies to fuel the machine and continue its path of destruction.

In a similar manner, Dany Laferrière's text promotes a certain idea about Caribbean male sexuality that is historically and transculturally formed. He deploys historically ingrained

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<sup>135</sup> See H. Seraphin p. 40 "Hispaniola: The future tourism destination of the Caribbean?" *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice* 3. 2 (2011) 40.

<sup>136</sup> See Trouillot 200-14 for a more detailed treatment of Jean-Claude Duvalier's economic revolution and its affects. See also, Brazier 193-5 on humanitarian aid and its role in the politics of Jean-Claude Duvalier.

stereotypes associated with the black male body and black masculinity not only to sell books, but to expose the continued insistence that Caribbean sexuality is excessive and must be dominated. Stephanie Hopwood describes the stories in *La Chair du maître* as such, “In these tableaux, sexual engagement soils the participants, perpetuates the already existing divide between partners, and empowers those who dominate sexually” (*Port-au-Prince* 67). Elsewhere, in another article, Hopwood celebrates the ways in which Laferrière’s *Le Goût des jeunes filles* (2004) reconstructs memories with agency and rewrites Haitian history, especially with respect to the Duvalier dictatorship.<sup>137</sup> These two contrasting statements about Laferrière’s works highlight the slippery nature of power, especially when relating to sex. Thus, Laferrière not only rewrites Haitian history, he gives the gigolo the power to explore sexuality and masculinity to his advantage.

Conscious of his primarily North American and European readership, Dany Laferrière manipulates historically ingrained notions of black masculinity and sexuality. He deliberately exploits stereotypes such as the black stud, the black rapist, and the savage throughout *Chair du maître* and the rest of his oeuvre. In doing so, he simultaneously reinforces and dismantles long held beliefs about black sexuality and the black male body. Not only does he change the exchange values of these racist stereotypes, he engages with an alternative mode of masculine expression, identity and agency under dictatorship. Though the gigolo is a marginal figure in Haitian society, Laferrière recognizes the possibility of inhabiting masculinity in a non-normative manner which diverges from the dominant structures of power. He imagines a masculinity which creates its own formulation of manhood, even under the worst conditions.

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<sup>137</sup> See Hopwood’s “Subverting the Dictatorship in Dany Laferriere’s *Le Goût des jeunes filles*,” for more on the portrayal of female prostitution under the Duvalier dictatorship.



Beau Gigolo: Performing Mulatto Masculinity in *L'heure hybride*

The hours that unfold in *L'heure hybride* take place under the reign of Jean-Claude Duvalier, or Baby Doc. While maintaining the oppression and violence that defined his father's regime, *Jean-Claudisme* further polarized incomes and standards of living in Haiti in addition to putting strain on the economy and an increased dependence on the United States. The weakened economy resulted in the increased taxation of the Haitian people, which, in turn, led to massive inflation and shortages of basic necessities.<sup>138</sup> This period was also marked by the exodus of Haitians fleeing poverty, violence and oppression.<sup>139</sup> This reality is woven into the fabric of the Mars's narrative as Joëlle Vitiello remarks that, "Le politique fait partie non d'une trame séparée, mais de la trame quotidienne des personnages, s'insérant dans les réactions les plus infimes comme les plus déterminants... Le politique est présent sans être nécessairement représenté comme tel" (371). Mars's oeuvre is entrenched in the memories and the aftermath of the dictatorship. As I have elaborated previously, the masculinity that developed under and was promoted through the dictatorship was a particularly virulent incarnation driven by greed, power and violence. The Tontons Macoutes personified and embodied the violence, power and corruption of the regime. However, Mars's protagonist, the self-proclaimed gigolo and "maître dans l'art du bluff," Rico chooses a different path to agency and manhood (22). He eschews traditional and dominant forms of masculinity obsessed with power, status and violence, instead, he engages with alternative modes of being and living. He prefers to perform and enact masculinity on his own terms.

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<sup>138</sup> See Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Haiti: State Against Nation*, especially chapter 7 for comparative analysis of the two regimes.

<sup>139</sup> See Dubois 351.

Published in 2005, *L'heure hybride* has garnered significant scholarly attention in the few years since its appearance on the literary scene. Rico's ambiguous sexuality has been of particular interest to scholars such as Michel Magniez and Joëlle Vitiello who have investigated the implications of Rico's homosexuality in their contributing chapters in *Écrits d'Haïti: Perspectives sur la littérature haïtienne contemporaine (1986-2006)*. Vitiello understands Rico's ambiguous sexuality as the only authentic gesture of engagement which, ultimately, leads him to self-discovery. In a similar yet different vein, Magniez considers Rico's power over seduction to be the central theme of the novel. However, his homosexual desires threaten to overpower his hold over the game of seduction. Moving away from a strictly homosexual reading of the text, Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken asserts sensuality as Rico's way of life, which, ultimately, will allow him to confront his fears stemming from poverty (339). Staying in the realm of sensuality, Lindsey Scott's article, "Selling Sex, Suppressing Sexuality: A Gigolo's economy in Kettly Mars's *L'heure hybride*," she examines the portrayal of prostitution as a form of agency, especially within the context of the Duvalier dictatorship. She understands Rico's homosexuality as a subversive act paramount to an act of resistance. Although I agree with Scott's assertion, I insist that within Rico's multiple and varying performances of masculinity lies an agential potential which allows an alternative engagement with masculinity and power. It is not necessarily the practice of prostitution that gives him agency, rather it is his variable and often commissioned performances of masculinity that enable him to represent and engage with different modalities of masculinity.

Born as a light skinned child to a prostitute in Port-au-Prince, Rico was raised in a feminine environment punctuated by visits from male clients. His upbringing is marked, in a

sense, by an excess of love. His mother smothers him with affection and jealously hoards his love for herself. Wanting only the best for her son, she sends him to school so that he may one day enter into good society. Rico recalls that,

Elle comptait sur ma tête de beau gosse pour me faire une situation, c'est-à-dire me marier dans une famille riche. Nombre de pères nouvellement fortunés cherchaient des jeunes hommes à la belle mine pour parer leurs salons et améliorer le profil génétique de leur race. Peu importait leurs origines. Je répondais bien à ces critères avec mon teint café au lait. (48)

His light complexion and good looks afford him the possibility of moving up in the world. The historical divide between the mulatto aristocracy and the black masses works to Rico's advantage in the Haitian realm of desire. After all, both Duvalier *père* and *fils* married women of lighter complexion. François Duvalier freely criticized mulatto elite, painting them as the enemy of the black masses. Yet, he chose to marry the light-skinned daughter of wealthy merchants, Simone Ovide Faine.<sup>140</sup> Like his father, the president Jean-Claude Duvalier married the light-complexioned Michèle Bennett in the interest of lightening and elevating his image and lineage.<sup>141</sup> Thus, the value of his skin color is not lost on Rico as he capitalizes on his complexion—as well as the social, historical, and sexual associations that come from lighter skin—for his work as a gigolo.

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<sup>140</sup> Dubois 321

<sup>141</sup> See Trouillot 208 and Thorald M. Burnham's "'Everything They Hate': Michèle, Mildred, and Elite Haitian Marrying Strategies in Historical perspective" for a more complete understanding of circumstances and consequences of Duvalier and Bennett's marriage.

In light of these historical associations and his current environment, he invents a fictional genealogy and history where his tragic mulatto father fell victim to the hatred of the dictatorship. In other words, he sells stories. He sells stories of masculine ruin, the inability to assert one's manhood under the dictatorship, and the precariousness of life under tyranny. As Vitiello expands, "Le récit, l'invention, sont ce qui le définit." She continues, "Pour les êtres qui ont peuplé sa vie de rencontres sensuelles, Rico incarne l'abjection qui leur est nécessaire, la fiction romanesque sur laquelle ils peuvent projeter leurs rêves de sincérité, d'émotions vraie, de plaisirs qui dépassent les limites claustrophobiques de leurs réalités corrompues" (379). In essence, he is a blank screen upon which others project their desires and imagine another reality. Aware of this, Rico manipulates the sincerity and the desires of his clients in order to create the right masculine character for the role.

Through his performances of masculinity, Rico invents and reinvents manhood on his own terms. Defining his own practice of masculinity within the parameters of opportunism, Rico relates, "Mon instinct me recommande d'éviter de frayer dans les grandes eaux de pouvoir... Alors, je me tiens à distance des gros morceaux, je place mes ambitions plus bas et évolue dans la société des petits-bourgeois en transfert de classe, qui donneraient beaucoup pour s'acheter un nom, pour assurer à leur descendance une nuance plus claire de peau" (107). While Rico could, in theory, choose from the elite class of women such as the daughters of the Macoute officers, he understands his precarious position with relation to the dictatorship and carefully avoids entanglements with power by keeping his ambitions low and staying in the margins.

Indeed, he chooses a life abstracted from the structures of power that necessitate violence. Although it is true that Duvalierist masculinity is inherently opportunistic, Rico's

practice of masculinity is consciously distanced from power and legitimacy. For example, he states, “Moi je ne compte pas, je suis une fourmi, un citoyen de l'ombre, je ne paie pas d'impôts mais je crois en la pérennité des institutions” (99). Characterizing himself as an ant and a shadow citizen he emphasizes both his insignificance and marginalization with regard to dictatorship and the structures of power. Furthermore, he shows his denial of the regime by insisting that he, in no way, supports Duvalierism. He refuses to pay taxes which contribute to the maintenance of the state, nor does he participate in the Duvalierist notions of power. He further cements his position by reiterating his belief that the dictatorship will one day fall because he does not believe in the permanence of institutions. Accordingly, Vitiello observes that, “Détaché de toute responsabilité et de tout engagement civique, Rico s'identifie d'abord en négatif” (379). He consciously remains ambivalent on the periphery; neither outside nor inside the systems of power and control.

Finding himself alone after the death of his mother, 17-year-old Rico goes to Colonel Dumorney to learn his mother's trade. A friend of his mother, the colonel is a former military man, a hedonistic septuagenarian who teaches him the art of seduction and love. He recounts,

Il m'a tout de suite pris sous son aile... Il m'apprit un tas de choses, le Colonel. A flairer le vent et les intentions, à ne jamais me compromettre, à rester loin de la politique, loin des maîtresses des grands bonzes au pouvoir. Il m'enseigna les femmes, à les sentir, les anticiper, les toucher, à ne pas y croire, mais à en profiter en les faisant jouir. Au fil des jours, je devenais un vrai macho, égoïste et âpre. Le colonel me montra comment tenir l'alcool et la nuit. (69)

Under his tutelage, Rico learns not only how to commercialize and market his sexuality, but he, fundamentally, learns how to survive in a delicate but dangerous world. Importantly, the colonel

teaches him to avoid politics and the webs of power traversing the ranks of the regime. It becomes imperative to know how to circumvent the lines of both politics and power as the dictatorial machine expands, consuming everything and everyone in its path. Rico, like many others, is able to survive the dictatorship by being invisible.

The colonel also teaches Rico to master the art of seduction. He learns to attract women by adopting a macho personality. For the colonel, only a real man—a traditionally masculine man—can seduce and pleasure women. Rico further characterizes his time with the colonel as his “premier pas d’homme” (70). Thus, manhood can only be established through the practice of machismo, or hypermasculinity, and adhering to traditional structures of masculine power. While Rico is able to make a living using the colonel’s techniques, he eventually defies his master and they end up parting ways. In defying and leaving his teacher, Rico is, in effect, leaving behind the machismo and masculinist attitudes towards masculinity and women. He is effectively renouncing the way of traditional masculinity and sexuality in order to embark on a new sexual and gendered subjectivity. Thinking back to his mother, he says, “elle m’avait inculqué des ressources, ma maternelle, des réflexes de survie” (68). Here, survival is the operative word. Nothing is more important than surviving life, poverty, and most importantly the dictatorship. In order to endure and possibly thrive, Rico must abandon the machismo of traditional masculinity and formulate his own engagement with manhood.

After his departure from the colonel and his way of life, Rico learns to rely on himself and crafts a different approach to selling his sexuality and manhood. Through a fortuitous encounter with the much older Mme Élise, he discovers a new market of women to seduce and entertain. He recalls, “je pouvais sentir Mme Élise, flairer sa solitude, sa peur de vieillir cachée

derrière les immenses verres fumés qu'elle portait encore” (89). He immediately understands his effects on Mme Élise and realizes the economic potential in their relationship. A widow in her sixties, Mme Élise lives in a luxurious mansion yet suffers from loneliness and boredom. In order to effectively exploit this new opportunity, Rico understands that he must change tactics if he is to secure her affections and her money. He knows that he cannot rely on the macho seduction techniques that he learned from the colonel. He remarks that, “Le coeur et le corps des femmes se gagnent avec de la patience, beaucoup de patience.” Furthermore, he adds, “Les femmes d’un certain âge, celles qui ont mené une vie vertueuse et routinière, avec mari, confort, enfants, domestiques, exigent pour leur conquête une persévérance et une constance sans failles” (93). These mature women require a lighter touch and a different performance of masculinity. The macho lover has no value in this economy, instead, Rico must assemble a masculinity that abandons the traditional and dominant definitions of manhood.

Indeed, Rico learns to construct varying identities and masculine performances for his numerous clients. He admits, “des fois j'en oublie ma propre identité. Je me suis composé tant de personnages, inventé tant de biographies qu'il m'arrive de me perdre dans le labyrinthe des dizaines de Rico L'Hermitte que j'ai créés de toutes pièces” (88). He creates the Rico that his client desires, his masculinity and sexuality are custom made for the circumstances. He reassembles the various pieces of masculinity in order to sell his sexuality more successfully. His multiple, various and fluid performances of masculinity recall Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity. She demonstrates, through the notion of parody, that, “This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggest an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim

to naturalized or essentialist gender identities” (188). By performing and reperforming multiple and varied masculine identities constructed from the remnants of Duvalierist masculinity, Rico creates a sort of masculine pastiche. When the pieces of hegemonic masculinity are reassembled for sale, they do not hold the same power nor do they have the same value. It is, as Gregory Mitchell has expounded, a commissioned performance of masculinity. Rico’s performance of masculinity is dictated by the needs of the client and the marketability of his sexuality. Furthermore, the new masculine assemblages put into circulation fragments of Duvalierist masculinity that are constantly being reassembled, redefined and valorized differently than in its original manifestation.

For example, Rico’s relationship with Mme Élise is constructed around maternal sentiment and loneliness. Pandering to her maternal feelings, he weaves a narrative of loss and despair, “victime de la haine viscérale que la dictature naissante de l’époque vouait à l’élite mulâtre.” Using his light complexion and the precariousness of life under dictatorship to his advantage, Rico plays the part of a poor orphan similar to the characters in “Tous les romans d’aventures lus dans mon enfance, *David Copperfield*, *Sans famille*, *Les Misérables*... Je devins le fils unique d’un grand propriétaire terrien de la Grande-Anse, exportateur d’huiles essentielles.” Instead of the son of a poor prostitute, Rico L’Hermitte becomes the son of a wealthy proprietor and businessman who fell victim to the dictatorship solely based on the color of his skin. This story was the one he, “réservai[t] désormais aux dames d’un âge très mur.” Furthermore, he adds that, “Aussitôt prenait chair en elles un sentiment de responsabilité envers moi, elles voulaient, mieux elle devaient m’aider, me procurer quelque douceur et un peu du confort dont j’avais été si prématurément sevré” (90-1). With this script, he is able to target the



maternal instincts of wealthy older ladies and market the kind of masculinity that fits their modes of desiring. Indeed, Mitchell elucidates, “Performative labor requires enacting masculinity across these different models, strategically shifting between them, and working to render one’s self legible to another as a potential sexual partner” (46). Consequently, Rico is also required to define the parameters of the sexual relationship. He understands that, “*aimer un homme beaucoup plus jeune qu’elles est une étape énorme à franchir*” (93). With this knowledge, he employs patience and emotion, rather than passion and impulsivity. He showers Élise with affection, compliments and innocent caresses. He woos her gently and when he feels that she is ready to “*laisser tomber les remparts de notre pseudo-affection filiale,*” he abruptly stops visiting her (94). He does this in order to create a need, he makes her need him so that she can become his mistress and benefactor.

It is true that Rico’s relationship with his clients is based on an exploitation of maternal sentiments for material gain. He targets and cultivates relationships with mature women because of his need to survive, but also because of his Oedipal desires. He tries to reconcile his feelings for his mother through these economically advantageous relationships with older women. He says, “*Je recherchais inconsciemment la complicité qui existait entre Maman et moi*” (102). Perhaps it is for this reason that he is so successful with older women, behind his performance lies a kernel of sincerity.

While his seduction techniques are impressive, his skillful deployment of instrumentalized desire puts Rico’s own capacity to desire into question. Due to the nature of his work, it makes the reader question whether Rico, himself, is a desiring subject at all. Initially, Rico’s sexual desire appears to be subordinate to his survival instinct. Rico manipulates and

exploits the sexual desire of others for personal and financial gain. As he states multiple times over the course of the narrative, his entire life is circumscribed by the “Question de survie.” He elaborates further, “Car l'objectif essentiel est de fuir la pauvreté par tous les moyens. Ne pas la renier, la pauvreté, mais l'éviter, la mystifier, sinon elle vous bouffe tout cru comme une plante carnivore” (22). If he does not break free from poverty, he will be devoured by the insatiable and self-cannibalizing dictatorial machine. As survival takes precedence over everything else, Rico cannot privilege and acquiesce to his own desire. However, upon examination, a more nuanced engagement with sexual desire is revealed.

Within the narrative, he reveals moments in which he yields to, and permits, his own sexual desires. For instance, during his relationship with Élise, Rico indulges in sexual interludes with younger women. When his affairs are discovered by Elise, he asks the reader, “Mais comment pouvait-elle penser que je me satisfaisais de notre liaison?” He emphasizes his need for young attractive women to refuel and revitalize his libido as well as his masculinity. He articulates, “je devais fréquenter des jeunes femmes au maquillage criard, aux aisselles poilues et musquées pour me sentir un homme, un vrai”(103). He needs sexual validation from young women to feel like a real man. This reveals his need to engage in something real, something that comes from him and his desire alone to live his masculinity. Since his usual interactions with women are motivated by monetary gain, he is always performing manhood. And his manhood is always for sale. Given the commercialized nature of his sexuality, his decision to engage in unrecompensed sex is meaningful. In engaging in unprofitable sexual relations, he is asserting his personhood through his sexual desire. He reminds himself that he is more than masculine masquerade.

Returning to Rico's conscious deployment of sexuality and his performance of masculinity for profit, it is important to note that he capitalizes on the performance of a mulatto masculinity which mirrors colonial depictions of mulatto women. The *mulâtresses* were often seen as agents of colonial excess who cultivated their beauty, sophistication and sensuality solely for the purpose of seducing white men.<sup>142</sup> Admittedly, this view of the *mulâtresse* was just one of the ways that exonerated the colonials from their part and responsibility in frequenting mixed-race mistresses and in the creation of children with increasingly lighter complexion. But Rico deliberately plays on the sexual and historical associations with his complexion for financial gain. He uses his fictional tales of woe to appeal to the hearts of older women and exploits the historically entrenched desires for fair-skinned lovers.

Though Rico often uses his complexion for sexual and financial gain, and unlike Laferrière's gigolos, he does not wish for nor does he pursue social mobility. Contrary to Scott's claim that "[Rico] uses his cunning and sexual manipulation to advance socially, simultaneously, though perhaps subconsciously, protesting the government by not participating in the government-sanctioned economy," I believe that Rico actively avoids social ascension through the continued commercialization of his sexuality (547). Indeed, Benedicty-Kokken makes a similar argument, "[w]hat Rico's narrative role privileges is not a space of economic or social success" (339). Using the example of Rico's reluctance to exploit his many romantic connections for an easier life, she reveals Rico's indifference to social mobility. Rico further demonstrates his disinterest in social ascension by refusing to marry into higher society. As mentioned earlier, Rico's mother had hoped that he would marry into an upwardly mobile family seeking, "des

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<sup>142</sup> See Garraway 230

jeunes hommes à belle mine pour parer et améliorer le profil génétique de leur race” (48). His *café au lait* coloring would have easily opened doors and created opportunities for him, yet he refuses that sort of social integration and ascension. Instead, he chooses a marginal life away from power and legitimacy. He chooses to live his life in the way he sees fit, regardless of the circumstances. More importantly, he prefers his freedom; even over his own survival when faced with the choice. He needs to be free to choose and to live life on his own terms. His voluntary marginalization gives him that freedom; free from the constraints of traditional masculinity and to some extent, the dictatorship.

Furthermore, Rico’s world is sensual. His masculinity is sensual. When he finally allows himself to reach the full potential of his sensuality, he unlocks a desire that he cannot tame. In an interview with Nadève Ménard, Kettly Mars once said that sensuality is the heart of human relationships. She believes that, “La sensualité est ce qui nous sauve de nous-mêmes et des autres. Cette capacité de se sentir vivre plus intensément par la disponibilité des sens à capter les stimulations extérieures et intérieures, à être réceptif aux sensations physiques provoquées par les couleurs, les sons, les odeurs.” She adds, “La sensualité n’est que sexuel” (232). Refusing to reduce sensuality down to sex, Mars describes sensuality as a language, a way of understanding and experiencing the world. Indeed, sensuality allows her to better explore difficult themes such as racism, dictatorship, violence, and despair. And it is through sensuality that we engage with Rico in the final portion of the novel.

*L’heure hybride* presents the reader with a spectacular plot twist. Rico divulges to the reader that he, the skirt-chasing gigolo, had a homosexual experience the night before. Every Thursday night, his friend, Patrice, throws wanton parties full of debauchery and people who are

“pourri jusqu’a l’os” (14). Patrice is described as, “une genie de sculpteur... Une nuée d’amis gravite sans arret autour de lui, jeunes militaires, peintre, sculpteurs, musiciens, danseurs, ministres, maitresses, journalistes locaux et étrangers, curieux, homos, dealer...” (111). Patrice’s parties bring together the many different rungs of Haitian society, providing the perfect hunting grounds for future conquests and patrons.

However, the previous evening’s bacchanalia led to Rico’s first homosexual encounter with “Un homme mince, aux trait fins, un beau visage, trop beau pour un homme” (111). This experience is so jarring and new that he is terrified of coming face to face with, “l’etranger qui porte mon nom, celui qui a passé la nuit d’hier chez Patrice” (120). In fact, upon the realization of his homosexual act, he confesses, “Je marchais vers ma mort. La mort de Rico L’Hermitte. La mort de l’image que je portais de moi-même” (122). He could not master his desire, nor can avoid it. Like a moth to a flame, he is drawn to his own death. It is a metaphorical death, the image that he has created of himself dies in that moment. He is exposed and vulnerable, no longer performing his masculinity and sexuality. In a rare moment of exposure, Rico the great masculine performer has been unmasked. He neither needs an audience nor a performance in order to get what he wants. Instead, he grabs the man with the pretty face and loses himself in, “une felicité sans nom et sans aucun horizon” (123). However, this release makes him afraid of seeing, “le reflet d’un Rico L’Hermitte inconnu” (138). This Rico is new, unknown to him. While he is afraid of this new naked reality, in the end, he decides to embrace his desire for men.

Without a doubt, Rico’s ambiguous sexuality has received the most scholarly attention. Both Scott and Magniez have commented on the subversive quality of Rico’s decision to

embrace his homosexuality. Though I concede that Rico's ambiguous sexuality is a central theme of the novel, I am disinclined to privilege his sexual orientation over his engagement in commercialized sexual transactions and his variable performances of masculinity. Rico's sensual experience of the world is directly tied to his practice of masculinity. By constructing and performing his masculinities, Rico not only ensures his very survival, but he creates a space within which we can imagine a different masculinity. He privileges the margins over the center, he inhabits provisional subjectivities and auxiliary spaces. As a gigolo, he is free to explore masculinity without necessarily defining it. His ancillarity allows him to engage with masculine subjectivities disentangled from the webs of power, domination, and violence.

Though Kettly Mars and Dany Laferrière target disparate audiences, both writers reconcile their traumatic experience of the dictatorship through the act of writing. Left to deal with the legacy and the ruins of the regime, Mars and Laferrière present the gigolo as an alternative masculine figure. Due to, and despite, the precariousness of their realities under dictatorship, the gigolos eschew traditional and dominant masculinity in favor of profit and survival. Their practice of masculinity is neither defined nor motivated by domination and violence. They, instead, content themselves with a marginal masculinity which, on the one hand, is divested of power. On the other hand, it is not restricted by that very same power. Their practice of masculinity imagines the possibility of freeing Haitian masculinity from the violence that is so deeply inscribed into its history. They offer a more sensual conceptualization of masculinity, which seeks to understand the world through feelings, sensations and through openness. The gigolos explore a masculinity open to revision and uncertainty. Moreover, their disavowal of traditional conceptions of masculinity, along with the disassembly and

reconstructions of their own formulations of masculinity, are tantamount to a rejection of heteropatriarchy.

## Conclusion

One of the guiding questions of this study was, “If the axes of masculinity are power and privilege, what does masculinity look like when it is denied not one but both of these things?” Furthermore, what happens to masculinity within a context of extreme oppression, that is to say, under dictatorship? I have explored these questions, in an attempt to answer them, through representations of masculinities in Haitian dictatorial literature of the Duvalier period. As the most violent period in modern history, the brutality of the dictatorship continues to haunt Haiti and Haitians today. Haitian literature reflects the realities—lived and imagined—of the Duvalier dictatorship, depicting the horrors of life under tyranny and the kinds of masculinity that become possible under such conditions.

Despite the harsh realities of Duvalierist Haiti, the literary works often depict masculine characters in a way that allows the readers to imagine a masculinity that is not solely reduced to an oppressive and violent force. While some of the masculine portraits are composed in opposition to Duvalierist masculinity, others reappropriate that violence to critique it. All of the texts I examine break away from Duvalierism in their own ways. Indeed, Duvalierist masculinity is violence personified, and gendered. The dictator himself is the pinnacle of masculine power. His practice of masculinity is contingent on his exercise of power. Thus, his masculinity is both social and relational, requiring recognition and credence by a public. His power is further increased and reinforced by his ever-expanding network of VSN who carry out acts of brutality in his name; building his legend.



Dany Laferrière captures perfectly the experience of dictatorship, previously cited in Chapter 4, when he describes, “je n’ai pas connu autre chose que le monde inventé par Duvalier” (15). Indeed, many Haitians only knew Duvalierism to be the order of the world for those thirty years. They not only endured the dictatorship, it became their universe. Accordingly, Jean Élie Barjon recounts his childhood under dictatorship in his article “En grandissant sous Duvalier,” from a political science anthology of the same name. Having known the world only under the the two Duvaliers, his survival depended on a successful navigation of the networks of power in daily life. He narrates,

La gestion expéditive des conflits est un caractéristique majeur de l’identité macoute. En situation de conflit interpersonnel, l’homme duvaliériste ne discute pas. Son discours se réduit à des phrases de routine tels : “*Ki sa w ye ?*”, “*ou pa konn ak ki moun w ap pale la a ?*” (Pour qui te prends-tu ? Sais-tu à qui tu as affaire, insolent ?) qui souvent réduisent le parti adverse au silence... Dès mon plus jeune âge, j’ai appris à comprendre et à “parler le macoute”. Mon grand instinct de survie m’enseigna à identifier l’homme macoute par ses gestes et ses mots. (226)

Barjon highlights several important aspects of living and surviving in Duvalierist Haiti. First, he intimates the idea of a recognizable *macoute* identity that is defined by an unwillingness to engage in discussion. As the apex agent in Duvalierist society, he has already won every argument by nature of his association with the dictator himself. His questions further expound this point as they demand acknowledgement from their adversary. An enemy of the Macoute is also an enemy of the president and, therefore, an enemy of the state. With the weight of the nation behind him, the Macoute is nearly invincible. Secondly, Barjon discloses the importance

of being able to recognize this Macoute identity to his very survival. That is to say, he reveals a discernible archetype for the Macoute—who, moreover, is gendered as male—which is expressed through behavior, comportment, and speech. Finally, Barjon communicates the plight of average citizens with regard to the predatory state and Duvalierist masculinity. The Macoute's invincibility and untouchability are expressions of Duvalierist masculinity, whereas the interlocutor's position is silenced. The average man cannot fight the Macoute, he can only be silent. In fact, in order to survive, he must learn the language of the Macoute and learn to navigate the social hierarchies to ensure survival.

The Tontons Macoutes, as we have seen, were an extension of dictatorial power, that is to say, the dictator's masculinity. Their omnipresence menaced every corner of Haitian society and they continue to haunt the literary and psychic realms. They served as the reminder of the dictator's limitless power and infinite brutality. Through the vast network of VSN, the Duvaliers appeared to possess an unearthly power, leaving the rest of the country feeling powerless. In furtherance of maintaining the illusion of omnipotence, the Duvaliers had to dominate every aspect of life, but especially masculinity. Though masculinity is a fiction constructed by and through social and historical forces, it is a vital fiction that regulates social relations and identity construction in general. All men are measured against hegemonic masculinity, which is, in turn, used to legitimize power inequalities between men and women, but also men and other men. It polices behaviors and regulates society at large. As Frankétienne writes, in *Ultravocal*, “Nos fictions se révèlent plus vraies que la réalité” (125).

All of the narratives I have discussed represent a violent masculinity embodied and promoted by the dictatorship. My first chapter, “Homeland Security: Female Masculinity and

Property in *Amour* and *Colère*,” interrogates masculinity by detaching it from the male body. In reading Claire and Rose, from Marie Vieux Chavet’s *Amour* and *Colère* respectively, as female masculine characters, I reveal the fragility of dominant masculine positions such as the patriarch. Moreover, a female masculine interpretation of the texts allows for a broader understanding of gender performativity, especially as it intersects with the changing racial landscapes of Duvalierist Haiti.

The second chapter, “Violent Offenders: Masculinity and the Poetics of Violence in Frankétienne’s *Ultravocal* and Georges Castera’s *Le Retour à l’arbre*,” delves into the violent landscapes of the dictatorship in the poets’ quests for the masculine subject position. I examine the ways in which the language of the dictatorship—that is to say, violence—is appropriated by both Frankétienne’s and Georges Castera’s texts, offering a scathing critique of the violence of Duvalierist masculinity. Furthermore, I situate these texts, particularly *Ultravocal*, in a genealogy of writing violence, which does not gratuitously reproduce violence and destruction, and, instead, seeks a generative violence that can create something different.

In “Poète Mystère Vaudou: Reclaiming Masculinity in René Depestre’s *Le Mât de Cocagne* and *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l’occident chrétien*,” I advance vaudou as a vehicle through which masculinity can be reclaimed. Through a vaudou conceptualization of the self, I explore concepts of masculinity that exceed Western gender paradigms. Furthermore, I insist Depestre’s intent with these texts is to revalorize vaudou and to repossess it from the exploitative practices of Duvalierism.

My final chapter, “Broken Down: Wounded Masculinity in Postdictatorial Haitian Literature,” engages with the lasting effects of the dictatorship on the Haitian psyche. Even after

the fall of the dictatorship, the memories and the violent legacy of the Duvaliers continues to haunt Haiti and Haitians. Through Kettly Mars's *Saisons sauvages* and *L'heure hybride* and Dany Laferrière's *La Chair du maître*, I evince a portrait of Macoute masculinity which I read as a performance of hypermasculinity. Moreover, I locate an alternate masculinity in the figure of the gigolo, who assembles his masculinity away from the violence of the regime. In this chapter, I introduce the concept of the autophagic dictatorial machine that powers itself by consuming its own agents and resources. The autophagic dictatorial machine is a voracious force that seeks total annihilation for the singular objective of amassing power, yet is doomed to collapse in on itself. Importantly, postdictatorial literature offers a healing space for the wounds and trauma inflicted by the dictatorship. These authors not only record and reflect their experiences of the dictatorship, they want to work through their trauma and heal.

The dictatorial texts examined in this dissertation are arranged somewhat chronologically with *Amour, Colère et Folie* (1968), followed by *Ultravocal* (1972) and *Le Retour à l'arbre* (1974), then René Depestre's *Un Arc-en-ciel pour l'occident chrétien* (1967) and *Le Mât de cocagne* (1979), and in the last chapter on the postdictatorship period, *La Chair du maître* (1997), *L'heure hybride* (2005), and *Saisons sauvages* (2010). These works trace and represent the experience of the Duvalier dictatorship that would last for more than thirty years, but more importantly, they offer a space within which different masculinities and systems of power can be imagined. In the works of the first two chapters, a need for an alternate masculinity is revealed. Refusing to accept violence as the only way of life, Marie Chauvet, Frankétienne and Georges Castéra explore alternate formulations of masculinity in their works. The later works seem to heed their call and produce unconventional masculine figures who resist, contest, and/or

reformulate Duvalierist masculinity such as the gigolo and the *zombi*. The violence of Duvalierist masculinity, in a way, creates the conditions for different masculinities to emerge; ones that do not necessarily covet power and favor violence.

In this period, masculinity becomes synonymous with the dictator who performs a masculinity that seeks total domination. Power and masculinity go hand in hand, thus the dictator embodies the dominant masculinity as the father of the nation, the head of state. However, the figure of the dictator, in reality and in fiction, reveals the extent to which a masculinity obsessed with power, violence, domination, coercion and invulnerability lead to a toxic practice of masculinity. We see this in the many representations of fictional dictators in literature, most notably for our purposes, René Depestre's Zoocrate Zacharie in *Le Mât de cocagne*.

While this study has been concerned with the representations of masculinity with regard to the Duvalier dictatorship, it has also intersected with several different fields and disciplines. Primarily it has engaged with the field of Francophone and Caribbean literatures, postcolonial theory, gender and sexuality studies and cultural studies. However, my research has also been influenced by psychological and sociological studies on masculinity, violence and sexuality. Furthermore, I have drawn on Latin American studies, black and African American studies, and trauma studies in my inquiry on the effects of dictatorship on the Haitian imaginary. During my investigation, I have attempted to establish a canon on Haitian dictatorial literature, trying to include it within the tradition of scholarship on dictatorial literature and the dictator novel. To a certain extent, I have advocated the inclusion of the dictator poem into the canon.

In examining masculinity under dictatorship, I aim to foster dialogue on oppression and gender relations. Indeed, I hope to contribute to all the fields that have inspired this study as well

as others such as historical investigations on Haitian masculinity, religious studies on vaudou and its implications on gender which would intersect with political and queer studies, to name a few. I hope that an exploration of masculinity in an oppressive context can be generative of wider theorizations of gender performativity, construction and relations. Furthermore, I hope that more scholarly and public conversations will emerge around topics like sexual violence, predatory masculinities, and powerlessness. In light of these considerations, the role of literature in processing trauma and working through history must not be overlooked. New narratives are being created every day that testify to traumatic experiences of life under oppression. However, literature also offers us a space to imagine something different. It offers a healing space, for the writers themselves, but also for the public. It gives voice to the voiceless.

I have tried to probe complex questions such as dictatorship, social constructions of gender, violence, and power in literature in a thorough manner, and I hope that my intervention provides opportunities for further research and inquiry. Though my dissertation specifically examines fictional representations of masculinity under the Duvalier dictatorship, there is still much to do on dictatorships in general or in Haiti specifically. Moreover, I only begin to sketch out a canon of Haitian dictatorial literature which only addresses literature relating to the Duvalier dictatorships and not the many other dictatorships that Haiti has suffered. With this study, my aim is to expand the canon of Haitian dictatorial literature as well as Latin American dictatorial literature to include Haiti.

In addition, my treatment of and considerations on masculinity have largely been influenced by French and Anglophone scholarship on gender such as Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and bell hooks' work on black feminism. I hope that this study will

contribute to discussions on gender and Haiti or dictatorship, and that the new conversations will explore new terrains and questions. While I focused on power in relation to masculinity, there are many other ways of understanding masculinity without confining it to structures of power. Other lacunae, or opportunities, in my considerations include: portraits of dictatorial masculinity in different contexts, feminine perspectives on dictatorship and powerful figures, a more balanced treatment of sexual tourism with regard to gender and sexuality, distinctions between sensationalist Eurocentric views on Haitian dictatorship versus Haitian views on dictatorship, and, of course, cinematic and artistic expressions on dictatorship. Further, an examination of female Tontons Macoutes would have been an exciting avenue of inquiry. For example, one of the top Macoutes was a woman by the name of Madame Max Adolphe who served as the inspiration for the elderly and dying Rosa in Marie-Célie Agnant's postdictatorial novel, *Un alligator nommé Rosa* (2007). Unfortunately, the *femmes macoutes* have been neglected in scholarship on the Duvalier dictatorship. Given that Tonton Macoutes are generally gendered as male in both scholarly and non-scholarly conversations, the female branch of the VSN, *Fillettes Laleau*, has not received much attention.

While the fictional representations of masculinity in this study were quite extreme, I believe that they are useful in thinking through masculinity as it manifests today. They reveal the aspects of masculinity that are privileged by society and the factors that shape it. Furthermore, these narratives weaken the power of the dictatorship simply by representing it. They write back to the dictatorship and take back some of the power that has been stripped from them. Indeed, the fictional portrayals of masculinity evince the fragility of hegemonic masculinity rather than reinforce its dominion. Though these novels and poems do not offer a concrete solution, they

offer the possibility of reformulating masculinity and understanding power differently than what they find in their realities. It is literature that offers the public a way to process history and understand the conditions that bring about and sustain systems of oppression.

Importantly, these dictatorial narratives express a desire to break free from the violence that has imprisoned Haitian masculinity in a vicious circle. Having won freedom through a violent slave rebellion, Haitian masculinity has always been circumscribed by violence. While the slaves in Saint Domingue fought for their freedom, their right to personhood, they started a cycle of violence that would create the conditions for recurring dictatorships and tyrannical rule on the island. Though the slaves desired, as an ultimate expression of their personhood, a gendered subject position, their subjectivity came at a cost. Despite the pervasive violence, these works imagine a different world.



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