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The Question of Power in *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe*

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There is a tempting model close at hand—the colonizer.... The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him.

Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

Two of the most famous plays about Haiti's 1791 independence and the years following are *Monsieur Toussaint* by Edouard Glissant and *The Tragedy of King Christophe* by Aimé Césaire. Glissant, a leading cultural critic, novelist and playwright from Martinique, and Césaire, Martinican and founder of the *négritude*¹ movement, dramatize what Glissant describes as "missed opportunities" in postcolonial² societies (*Caribbean Discourse* 87). Written in 1961 and 1963, respectively, at the height of the Third World independence movements from Europe, these dramas serve as stark warnings to African and Caribbean leaders regarding the use and misuse of power. Haitian political scientist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, explains that this phenomenon occurs when some postcolonial leaders are tempted to imitate the very self-serving colonials whom they ousted. He describes the procurement of wealth and privilege which rightly belongs to the people as the struggle of state against nation (163).

Through Glissant's and Césaire's fictional works, we witness the vitiation of the proud revolutionary ideals of Haiti into a stranglehold of tyrannical statehoods which ultimately victimize the very people they initially sought to liberate. For years, Haiti has attracted the attention of writers and historians throughout the Caribbean, since it was the first island in the region to wrest its independence from European control, as well as being the state with the most notorious reputation for autocratic and exploitative rule by its black leaders like "Papa Doc" Duvalier and successors such as his son, "Baby Doc." This fearsome trend was mitigated somewhat by the more populist-oriented leadership of past president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. However, Haiti's struggle to amelio-

rate its situation continues, and the island remains emblematic of the labors of oppressed peoples for self-determination. For that reason, *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe* remain relevant today, even though they are primarily concerned with that country's eighteenth-century black leaders. Furthermore, the plays are still timely in light of numerous recent media accounts of the exploitation of various populations in postcolonial African and diasporic countries.

In exploring how the trope of power functions in the two plays, I will examine, within both textual and historical contexts, how these early Haitian leaders responded to their populace in terms of class, color and gender. I will also investigate how the people reacted to them. This interaction is dramatically portrayed by various sets of characters. Aside from the peasants, soldiers and workers depicted in the texts, there are selected individuals who form what we might liken to Greek choruses. In both plays, these choruses act alternatively in an obsequious and admonitory manner toward their two leaders. These groups serve as a barometer of the psychological changes which Toussaint and Christophe undergo as they rise in society. This rise illustrates Albert Memmi's observation in the epigraph that the primary danger of such a trajectory involves the risk of imitating the colonizer to the extent that the revolutionary leader becomes someone who is no longer akin to the people he initially led. The interrogation of postcolonial power occurs at precisely such an intersection of the leader/follower relationship in these works.

In *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, this relationship revolves around the two actual historical figures, Toussaint L'Ouverture, who would eventually lead the 1791-1802 revolution against the French, and one of his most (in)famous successors, Henri Christophe, a revolutionary general who ultimately proclaimed himself "king" of Haiti and ruled briefly as such. Colonialism had a more beneficial psychological impact on François Dominique Toussaint and Henri Christophe than on other black slaves. Because of their skills, each rose to positions of relative prominence and privilege *vis-à-vis* the captive population on what was then known as the sugar-producing French colony of Saint Domingue.

Caribbean historian C.L.R. James describes Toussaint as being the son of a privileged slave and later one himself. His father had

been purchased by a liberal colonist who allowed the elder slave some discretion in his duties on the Breda plantation, as well as the use of five slaves to cultivate his own small plot of land. As a result, young Toussaint was able to study French, a little Latin and some geometry. He proved to be adept at the European education. This facility, coupled with his knowledge of herbs, brought him to the attention of the plantation owner who eventually made him steward of all the livestock on the estate, a responsible post which was usually held by a white man (19-20). As such, Toussaint held a coveted position and was part of a small privileged caste who repaid their favored treatment and somewhat easier life with a strong attachment to their masters. As James explains, "[p]ermeated with the vices of their masters and mistresses, these upper servants gave themselves airs" (19). Homi Bhabha characterizes such imitation as "colonial mimicry," being "almost the same but not white... the difference between being English and being Anglicized" (*Mimicry* 130).

James describes Henri Christophe as "a slave (who was) a waiter in a public hotel at Cap François, where he made use of his opportunities to gain a knowledge of men and of the world" (19). Neither Toussaint nor Christophe participated in the Haitian revolution at its onset in 1791. A field slave named Boukman led the first mass uprising, since at the time both men identified as much with the colonial elite as they did with the rebelling slaves. It would be several months before they individually joined their brothers from the fields. After that time, however, Toussaint rose quickly to prominence as his latent talent as a military and organizational tactician became apparent under duress. Calling upon the information he had gleaned about democracy and republicanism from his master's library, as well as his own natural analytical abilities, Toussaint was soon not only shaping a ragged band of determined rebels into a tightly-knit military command, but also designing a new socio-political and economic structure for the island.

However, as the post-revolution reorganization progressed, many black people in what would soon be the new Republic of Haiti thought Toussaint had gone too far in his protection of the French colonials during his reconstruction of the ravaged country. For instance, they criticized him for decreeing that the republic shoulder the expenses for restoring the plantation of Madame

Beauharnais, mother of Napoleon's first wife, Josephine. As Glissant explains in the afterword to his play, Toussaint had her plantation restored, even though it had been destroyed by the British during one of the revolutionary battles (101). Further, both Toussaint and later Christophe were condemned by the war-weary ex-slaves for forcing them, under penalty of severe punishment or death, to redevelop the land at a back-breaking pace. Christophe (who, after the death of Toussaint's successor, Dessalines, was appointed president and then became self-proclaimed king) would take this dictatorial passion even further after the institution of his monarchy. He actually conscripted the exhausted peasants as if they were in the army. He even forced small children to haul heavy stones to build a mountaintop fortress to protect the northern half of the island from invasion. He named his fortress "The Citadel," the ruins of which which still stand today as an infamous reminder of his obsession to outdo his former European masters (Césaire 45).

As described by James, Toussaint's and Christophe's contact with Europeans had already shaped them into *quasi-assimilés* while they were still slaves. Their experiences within the margins of the colonial elite would later be the underlying cause for their failure to synchronize completely with the revolutionary ideals of Haiti's poor people. The resulting alienation would end in their ultimate downfall. In this way, they prefigure Frantz Fanon's "native intellectual" described in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon gives a scathing description of the type of "know-all, smart, wily intellectuals" and the ways in which they carry intact the manners and forms of thought picked up during their association with the colonialist bourgeoisie (48). On the one hand, the *quasi-assimilé* may possess knowledge about the functioning of the society and/or its administration which can be useful in overthrowing the colonial regime. But on the other hand, when the time comes to visualize and organize a new postcolonial society, *quasi-assimilés* tend to rely on the values of the colonial structure with which they have been imbued. Thus, while the intellectuals may help advance the "native cause" to some degree, they also ultimately risk undermining it.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon examines the psychological dilemma of the black colonial attempting subjectivity. Fanon, a psychologist himself, offers insights into the dilemma of the person who may have been exposed to European culture just enough

to become obsessed with proving his worth in terms of that environment. Fanon asserts that "black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect" (12). Seen in the Hegelian terms to which Fanon refers, Toussaint and Christophe represent two black leaders who reinscribe themselves in the "new" Haitian society, not as liberated "slaves," but as self-conscious "masters" as they assume the role of oppressors. Thus, instead of the transcendence which Hegel suggests should be the result of the master/slave dialectic, this distortion of power means that yet another form of master/slave domination has come to pass, this time black-on-black. This black-on-black domination is also a major theme in both of Glissant's and Césaire's plays. These works describe Toussaint and Christophe as charismatic leaders who, even though initially revolutionaries, later demonstrate the manners and forms which they carry intact from their colonial masters, and which the playwrights suggest are ultimately detrimental to Haiti, the Caribbean's very first postcolonial experiment.

H. Adlai Murdoch points out that, given the internal paradoxes intrinsic to principles of cultural hegemony, reworking strategies of colonial dependency into patterns of resistance poses precisely the most cogent challenge to the establishment of an ideologically integrated postcolonial situation (3). From the very beginning of *Monsieur Toussaint*, the black general himself is a symbol of this disjunction. The play indicates this dilemma by being staged with abstract sets that symbolize Toussaint's prison cell in the French Jura Mountains at the end of the revolution, as well as pre-revolutionary Haiti while it was still battling with the French and British to keep control of the island. When the play opens, Toussaint has already spent four years as leader of Saint Domingue's revolutionary forces (1791-1795), another six years as General, Commander-in-Chief, Lieutenant Governor, and finally Governor for Life (in 1801) of the new nation of Haiti. Finally, alienated from his people, he has allowed himself to be lured away from there to his certain death by Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Leclerc. Glissant's interpretation of the ex-independence leader agrees with James in two ways: first, as a tragic hero who sacrifices himself when he realizes he can no longer meet the needs of his people; and second, as an overbearing plenipotentiary who eventually allows himself to be captured when he realizes that his

vision of an independent but Europeanized Haiti simply does not fit the actual mold of his country. Toussaint proclaims to the Chorus of the Dead, which represents the Haitian people: "Yes—I will go without trembling. For you I will leave the shores of life, see if I hesitate" (48).

The play unfolds in a "prophetic vision of the past" (17). Toussaint reviews his military and political career with the help of two choruses: The Dead, consisting primarily of early ex-slave rebel leaders, and The Living, made up of Toussaint's closest friends and enemies. In the first scene, the black general, still in his gilded uniform, is seated now, with his plumed hat, symbol of his authority, on his knees, leaving only a silk scarf on his head, reminiscent of a pirate.³ The dichotomy of his appearance as pirate/general symbolizes the duality of his thinking. In spite of his role in the revolution, Toussaint has remained a devout monarchist because of his early Europeanized training. He now appeals to Napoleon for a pardon and for freedom. As his warder, Manuel, jeers about Toussaint not wanting to die before being received in Paris, Toussaint becomes a metaphor for the partially assimilated black person who has internalized contradictory notions of power. He is simply "Monsieur Toussaint" now, an ordinary citizen again, not "his excellency," the revolutionary governor-general who struck awe in the hearts of his people for nearly a decade.

Members of the Chorus of the Dead appear, led by ex-runaway slave "Maroon"⁴ leader Mackandal and Mama Dio, the late Voodoo priestess. Mama Dio represents the authority of Voodoo and the heritage of Africa.⁵ Mackandal exemplifies the early precursors of the present revolutionaries. Mackandal poetically reminds the ailing ex-general that if he could somehow have integrated his vision of a new society based on European practices and ideals with that of the African-inspired ideals of the black peasants, he might have avoided downfall: "François-Dominique Toussaint.... His black suit is the night to bring us together. His smile is the sun which proclaims: Arise!" More cautiously, Mama Dio adds, "Take care! Have you forgotten your people on the mountain, by the Bois Caiman, peering down through the night teeming with bonfires?" (25). Exchanges such as these with Toussaint's ancestors and dead comrades highlight the dichotomy between Toussaint the revolu-

tionary general and the Toussaint who maintained an allegiance to France.

The Chorus of the Dead also includes members of the younger generation of black slave revolutionaries who followed Toussaint. For instance, his ex-lieutenant Moïse represents the peasants-*cum*-soldiers who were frustrated by the fact that, as governor-general, he saw fit to return many of the plantations to their white owners who had remained in Haiti under his rule. The former slaves felt they had been denied ownership of the very land for which they had risked their lives. In fact, it was a difference of opinion over this very issue which led to Moïse's death. Toussaint had him executed for plotting with other revolutionary soldiers to curtail what they considered to be the leader's excesses. These drastic measures which Toussaint's closest lieutenants were forced to take against him, and the general's subsequent decision to rely on force rather than analyze how their relations had deteriorated to such a point are illustrative of Toussaint's failure as head of state to really listen to his nation. This failure is symbolized by his reluctance to consider his Chorus of the Dead in the play as well. The Chorus provides a "prophetic vision of the past" by reinscribing Toussaint metaphorically within the circle of his lost comrades such as Moïse, as well as other leaders such as Mackandal, whose historical message he should have understood and heeded when there was still time. This troubled relationship creates a tension between what was and what could have been. Now, after he has lost his power and is immured in his Jura cell, his dialogue with the "shadows" of these historical figures about his mistakes has an especially poignant ring.

The spectator understands the irony of the Chorus's warnings. We know that Toussaint is already in prison when Mama Dio cautions: "Do not take the Acacia Way... the sentry... dreams of a beast at gunpoint; that beast is you" (24). It is also clear that Toussaint has fallen from grace long before Mackandal foretells the latter's rise to power: "You were not yet born, but we felt your kindness at our shoulder, where the heavy hoe leaves its mark" (25). Likewise, the spectator comprehends that Toussaint has already been labeled "nothing but a traitor, for all your preaching" (27), by former rebel leader, Macaïa, and many of the general's black followers. It was they who died for the promise of land and

freedom, but who had to watch their commander protect the plantations instead. Macaia spits out the following speech:

Before they even knew the word revolution, we were already running wild in the forest. We, the maroons. Dogs sniffed us a mile away, in the midst of a peaceful crowd. The runaway slaves smelled of freedom. We were building our republic! I, Macaia, chief of the Dokos, who have never bowed my head, fought for Toussaint when Toussaint fought for us! (37)

Being able to “eavesdrop” on Toussaint’s history in the play enables the spectator to witness the former general’s opacity, one which neither the Choruses of the Dead nor the Living have been able to penetrate. Throughout the play, we watch the black leader’s struggle to grant authority to either the spirit world or to that of the living. As well, we see his attempt to succeed at two diametrically opposed goals: overturning colonialism politically, while at the same time imitating it economically and culturally. As Trouillot points out, the “politics of production” was at the heart of the struggle to reconstitute Haiti. Would a plantation economy dominate, thus reinscribing power in the colonial domain, or would free agriculture enable former slaves to enjoy successful subsistence farming, as well as some small market production (39)? The hostility which develops between Toussaint and his lieutenants in *Monsieur Toussaint* is a metaphor for this conflict. Dessalines, Toussaint’s key subordinate, is an example of those revolutionaries who lose faith in the man they previously adored because he will not explain why he appears to favor their enemies: “You protect the colonials, but for them you are the butcher of the whites! You deal with the Consuls, while their leader is assembling a fleet in the ports of France to attack you! Don’t be taken in by their fine words! ... Make your reckoning” (62). Toussaint replies, “It must be a sign of my weakness that you dare speak to me like that” (64).

It is clear that the general’s goal is to be a part of the extended European world as a landowner and “scientific” (read European) man. A rift grows between him and the peasants and lieutenants who want to escape European and colonial influence altogether. Incensed, Christophe (still Toussaint’s lieutenant at the time) declares:

Toussaint ordered me to continue the negotiations with Bonaparte's generals.... [W]hile he inflamed the war and led the battle, secretly he was arranging the conditions for peace.... None of us knew the purposes of the general.... If Toussaint had included us in his advice, we should perhaps have kept the land (76).

This, of course, is exactly what Toussaint is not prepared to do. The black general's power increasingly translates itself into ambivalence and self-deception. This conflict is highlighted by his dialogues with his wife who, in spite of the family's elevated position after the revolution, remains a humble and practical woman. Guided by observation of her husband's penchant for misplaced trust, Madame Toussaint warns him not to meet with General Brunet, a member of Leclerc's forces: "If Toussaint does not understand that they must arrest him quietly and deport him immediately... then it is because Toussaint does not want to understand" (79). The black leader's response reveals the ambivalence which Fanon describes as a "leadership complex" as well as a "dependency complex" (*Black Skin/White Masks* 99). On the one hand, Toussaint speaks as if he truly believes his power and authority as the former governor and as a new member of the planter class may function as a bulwark which Brunet would not dare breach. On the other hand, the black leader appears afraid of the consequences of *not* going to see Brunet, in that the French might construe a refusal to go as being part of a plot against them and increase their attacks against the island. Such ambivalence also illustrates Trouillot's observation that Haitian elites, even today, severely "limit" or censure their "local identity" and modulate it instead to fit their emotional and intellectual attachment to France (38).

Madame Toussaint also illustrates this tendency and demonstrates a degree of ambivalence in the play. Rather than being dressed in silks as a governor's wife, she appears in simple cotton clothes like Mama Dio and the Haitian peasantry to illustrate her identification with the poor people. But during the scene when Toussaint finally makes up his mind to join the revolution, we see her imploring her husband to think first of the family and their white master who has befriended them. She reminds Toussaint that thanks to the largesse of Mr. Libertat, they already have a "patch of land" and "can buy their [children's] freedom" (26). Her only reference to the black revolutionaries is a reminder that the

men are being killed and their wives left to carry on alone. Madame Toussaint's equivocation must be viewed not only as that of a wife fearful for her husband's safety, but also as that of a *quasi-assimilée* fearful of losing her scant privileges. Like her husband, she too is trapped in a border zone between the people and the power.

Even in her grief and frustration at Toussaint's final capture, Madame Toussaint continues to be an ambivalent figure. She reflects traces of both the peasants' and *quasi-assimilés'* battered hopes and dreams when she declares: "Spirit of the Dead, protect me, I am under your dominion." Mama Dio steps forth from the Chorus of the Dead and attempts to comfort her, but then acknowledges her own failure: "All that you hear is the strength that I am losing. They no longer expect my help. They are beyond dying, they have only to plow. You hear my night slipping away" (93). With this, the dead Voodoo priestess clearly represents the Haitian peasantry whose attempts at cohesion with the *assimilés* continue to be thwarted.

The scene between Madame Toussaint and Mama Dio also reflects the relationship of the poor in many postcolonial nations to their postcolonial leaders. The peasants find themselves struggling under the domination of leaders who replicate colonial oppression, even after the supposed liberation of the nation. As Benita Parry notes, it is not enough to respond to the oppositions embedded in colonialism *on their own terms*. "[This] does not liberate the 'other' from a colonized condition... the founding concepts of the problematic must be refused" (28). But completely refusing the colonial model is out of the question for either of the Toussaints or later Christophe, who consistently fail to recognize the degree to which their power is a Eurocentric construction.

By the time of the revolution, the tiny black slave "elite" has been too "permeated with the vices of their masters and mistresses," as James puts it. The favored slaves have already begun to disdain their counterparts in the fields. They have become preoccupied with imitating the Europeans, even receiving their cast-off silk and brocade clothing. Dressed in it, they dance minuets and quadrilles, as James describes, "bow[ing] and curtsy[ing] in the fashion of Versailles" (19).

This colonial mimicry is captured perfectly in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, Césaire's sarcastic depiction of Christophe, who briefly becomes Haiti's king. The play depicts his fetishistic adora-

tion of European civilization's ritualistic paraphernalia. In one early scene, Haiti's former revolutionary lieutenant and his followers are portrayed as clumsy students of a French "Master of Ceremonies." The ceremonial "master" has been sent to them instead of the engineer they had actually requested for the newly developing country. Christophe's sycophant assistant and secretary, Vastey, all but swoons in supposed delight at the master's instructions and the very idea of a black kingdom being a "perfect replica" of the "finest courts" the "Old World" (21) has to offer. He exclaims over titles like "His Lordship the Marquis of Downwind" and "Sir Lolo Prettyboy" (23).

As Césaire demonstrates, a distinct difference develops between Christophe's view of Haiti's economic and political success and that of his followers. The reader sees increasing skepticism on the part of many followers, as demonstrated by one of Christophe's most trusted older military officers, Magny. When Magny (who has had a dukedom pressed upon him) makes reference to their days of combat under Toussaint and Dessalines, Vastey shrugs him off, calling him a "man of little faith" (21). He proceeds to lecture the older man on behalf of Christophe, with the French Master of Ceremonies looking on approvingly. Vastey lectures him on the importance of form over substance insisting without a qualm on form's "stupendous, generative, life-giving *emptiness*," (ibid., emphasis mine). The irony of this nonsensical statement is not lost on Magny, however, who contends that the entire concept sounds like "pretentious rubbish" (ibid.).

As the scene unfolds, it becomes obvious that Vastey and the other would-be courtiers are parroting Christophe's views. Yet, when he leaves the room, they reveal their hypocrisy by deriding their ostensible lord and master. They make lewd remarks about how the king's power to bestow titles and favors earns him favorable entry into many of the noblewomen's beds. This scene illustrates how the greedy courtiers function as a servile and hypocritical chorus to Christophe and to his mimetic preoccupations.⁶ Wrapped in their own self-interest, they are concerned only with pleasing Christophe as head of state rather than attending to the needs of the nation, so that he will continue to heap them with estates and riches.

This tension between the nation and the state is highlighted in one key scene which pits Christophe's growing despotism against

the peasants' determination. The ex-slaves and petty farmers finally decide to rebel against him. Christophe sends his soldiers to crush them without mercy. But Magny allows the rebel leader, Metellus, to speak before putting him to death.⁷ The latter protests the harsh treatment the peasants are receiving under Christophe's absolute rule. He reminds the older soldier that they were originally going to build a country, "all of us together!" Metellus speaks passionately and at great length of the original idea to create a country "open to... black men everywhere. The blacks of the whole world." Then he criticizes the "politicoes" for "cutting the house in two." He repudiates Christophe, who by that time rules the entire northern half of the island in a self-serving manner. He also rejects Pétion, the mulatto who is president of southern Haiti, for privileging the lighter-skinned citizens over the black workers. Metellus scorns them both as "double tyranny" for the majority of the island's people (30).

Unfortunately, Magny is ever the military man. Unable to view any challenge other than in battle terms, he gives the order to have the rebel peasant shot on the spot. This scene demonstrates that despite Magny's continued scepticism about Christophe's methods, he still sides with the state against the nation. But by the end of this same scene, it becomes apparent that Magny begins to grow restive with Christophe, when the king unexpectedly decides to negotiate with Pétion, who up to now, has been considered an enemy. The self-appointed monarch does not even deign to explain to Magny, one of his closest noblemen, why he has changed his mind, but imperiously rejects the soldier's suggestions to march on Pétion and attempt a quick overthrow. Magny's skepticism turns into disillusionment as he dares openly to critique Christophe's apparently illogical behavior: "I only hope that your eyes aren't opened too late" (33).

Magny's warning (like Madame Christophe's which will come later) does nothing to stem Christophe's increasingly febrile attempts to solidify his power. His preoccupation with demonstrating that a black nation can also be grand begins to border on paranoia. Even though an emissary from France has arrived, Christophe insists that the country may be attacked at any moment. He insists that the black farmers (even their wives and small children) be conscripted into a worker's army to haul stones to build the massive citadel as well as huge castle he has decided will

be their means of protection and symbol of glory. When an aged peasant complains that “[y]our people are tired” (61), the king bursts into a fit of rage and orders that a nearby sleeping peasant, exhausted from overwork, be shot on the spot to make an example of him. Christophe even has his archbishop murdered in his bed when the latter begins “talk[ing] too much” (64). Afterwards, the king is convinced he has been visited by the archbishop’s ghost and after a fit of shouting, collapses with a stroke.

Christophe becomes completely “empty” as a black man, a husband, a revolutionary leader and a monarch. As Bhabha notes, “paranoia never preserves its position of power, for the compulsive identification with a persecutory ‘They’ is always an evacuation and emptying of the ‘I’” (*Sexual Subject* 142). Devoid of any self-reflexivity, Christophe, even as an invalid after the stroke, continues to be obsessed by his competition with European “civilization.” As head of state, he relies less and less on communication, and more on coercion. Symbolically, this coercion takes the form of the construction of the Citadel and palaces, and politically it devolves into devious negotiations and repressive laws. All the while, Christophe maintains a veneer of cultural sophistication with gestures such as the creation of another group of sham elite called the Royal Gumdrops.

Madame Christophe is the only person close to him who perceives the folly of his actions and who is also in a position of enough authority to speak to him. The language she uses when she tries to warn him is laced with African metaphors. She cautions: “Take care, Christophe! If you try to put the roof of one hut on another it will be too little or too big! Christophe, don’t ask too much of people or of yourself” (41). This linguistic choice reminds the spectator of Madame Christophe’s ties with Haiti’s poor, since many of the black people there continue to conceive of Africa as their homeland and dream of returning after their death. Thus, when her husband does not listen to her, he ignores the Haitian populace as well. Madame Christophe’s references to Africa also echo the previous African references in *Monsieur Toussaint* made by Madame Toussaint and Mama Dio. Like these other women, Madame Christophe is not comfortable with the trappings of power if they mean exploiting the very people, still suffering, who helped put them in control. She speaks boldly and angrily to her royal husband:

In the middle of the savannah ravaged by a malignant sun, the great mombin tree with its dense round leaves under which the cattle thirsting for shade take refuge. But you? You? Sometimes I wonder if you, taking everything into your hands/trying to manage everything if you're not the big fig tree that grabs hold of all the vegetation around it and stifles it. (42)

Unfortunately, Christophe, like Toussaint, is unmoved by the insights of his Living Chorus (in the form of his wife, his closest retinue and the peasantry). Thus, the reader glimpses once again how a leader may go from being at one with his "nation," to becoming a "head of state," in which he turns against the very people he originally wanted to protect.

Christophe justifies his motivation for copying Europe by stating this mimesis is actually an earnest project to revise the past and recuperate "Mother Africa." He insists that since the Europeans "stole" the Haitians' "real" names and nobility, replacing them with "humiliating brand marks" like "Pierre and Toussaint," and since the Haitians cannot "rescue [their] names from the past," they will have to "take them from the future" (25). The major problem here is that Christophe accepts framing the "future" in eurocentric terms as being necessary, while at the same time he posits his subjectivity in Afrocentric terms. The end of this scene presages the conflict that such an unreconciled viewpoint will engender, as Césaire juxtaposes conflicting images of Africa and Europe. First, Christophe muses on his West African Bambara ancestors and their "power to speak, to make" (26). But as the lights come up, the Cathedral of Cap Haitien is illuminated, symbol of Catholicism's power in the region.

Christophe only indirectly acknowledges this conflict. Ostensibly, he views his efforts to create a black European-like kingdom, not as slavish aping of whites, but as political and cultural subversion, a black "power play," as he explains it to his French architect and engineer, Martial Besse: "This people, forced to its knees, needed a monument to make it stand up.... It's alive... Lighting up in the night. Canceling out the slave ship... plowing through the sea of shame" (45). Ironically, Christophe's intense desire for the power of a black state leaves no room for the immediate needs of his people to be assuaged, nor, in the longer term, for the poverty of the nation as a whole to be circumvented. In an earlier dialogue with Pétion, he describes a "state that ...will oblige our people, by

force if need be, to be born to itself, to surpass itself" (13). Fixed on his concept of glory, he cannot see his own constituency dying in front of him.

Convinced that "time is holding a knife to our throats" (40), Christophe, like Toussaint before him, discounts the investment in time necessary to insure that the people fully understand and agree with his reasoning. This lack of insight on the part of both leaders into the needs of those around them, as exemplified by the warnings of their choruses, leads to their own loss of power and eventual downfall. The Haitian legislative Assembly in the south considers Christophe's regime to be a "caricature." Eventually, his own top generals agree and defect. The soldiers/workers who bear the brunt of labor and danger in executing his construction orders, become increasingly rebellious and malcontent. They end up only working when threatened by Christophe's Royal Dahomey troops.⁸ Ultimately, even Christophe's closest retinue (his chorus) begins to question him about how he is undermining the nation in the name of establishing a new black state.

Referring to the historical Christophe and Toussaint, Trouillot states that the fundamental contradiction of the latter's early regime was his failure to recognize that an unconditional freedom of Haiti's black population was fundamentally incompatible with the maintenance of a plantation system (43). As a revolutionary leader, Toussaint undermined his own power by reimposing a repressive labor system on the very peasants who believed themselves to have been liberated from it. This crisis would be further exacerbated when Christophe, obsessed with making his northern kingdom flourish, would impose his own version of "militarized agriculture" (Trouillot's term) with an iron hand. Ironically, it would be Pétion, a mulatto, someone not historically viewed as being concerned about the well-being of the black Haitian peasantry, who would eventually initiate a land distribution program. Thus, in 1818 when Pétion died, it was he—not Toussaint or Christophe—who was nicknamed "Papa bon ke" by the peasants in recognition for what he had done (48).

It may be concluded from reading *Monsieur Toussaint* and *The Tragedy of King Christophe* that the question of power is one of the most important issues postcolonial nations face. The contemporary situation in Haiti is a dispiriting testament to this fact. As the situation now stands, in spite of poor Haitians' efforts (at great

risk) to elect a government which would attend to their needs, their favored Aristide was forced to give way to present president René Préval, who was elected with a bare twenty-eight percent of the votes. According to recent reports, many old problems continue to exacerbate his government's redevelopment process. For instance, American-assisted disarmament efforts largely failed. Paramilitary and ex-military forces remain heavily armed and battle daily with that country's antiquated and understaffed police force.⁹ The gap between the rich and poor is as wide as ever. Unemployment continues at a staggering eighty percent, and many of those workers who do manage to secure jobs such as those in factories, are forced to work six days a week, ten hours a day, for twelve cents an hour.¹⁰

As Glissant and Césaire point out, in countries laboring to overcome the enormous economic, social, cultural and psychological problems induced by colonialism, power struggles among postcolonial elites can have the most direct, devastating effects on those least able to cope with them. Concerns about race, class, caste and gender in these two plays, as represented by the characters who form the various choruses, must be taken into consideration in ways that do not replicate asymmetrical colonial hierarchies. Thus, in cleansing themselves of the damaging residue of slavery and imperialism, postcolonial states will hopefully create new models which will no longer pit state against nation.

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Notes

¹ The négritude movement was started in the 1930s in Paris by a group of African and Caribbean students and writers. Principal among them were Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Léopold Senghor from Senegal and Claude McKay, one of the Harlem Renaissance poets from New York. The movement aimed at taking the most derogatory aspects of the black experience summed up in the French epithet "nègre" and turn them into a positive, self-affirming credo, which came to be known as "négritude."

² I am using the term "postcolonial" here, not in the sense of "post" as meaning "after," as if colonialism no longer exists. Rather, I wish to include an understanding that many of the same problems of hegemony still exist, but in altered forms, some of which are being executed by

people of color themselves. For a discussion of postcolonial discourse, see Madhava Prasad. "The 'Other' Worldliness of Postcolonial Discourse: A Critique," *Critical Quarterly* 34.3 (1992): 74.

³ The Chorus of the Dead functions as more than just a theatrical stylistic device. It is common in Haiti and other African diasporic countries to believe in and converse with the spirits of the dead, even today.

⁴ The name Maroon (in French "marron" and "marronnage") is an alteration of the Spanish name "cimarron" which originally meant "living on the mountain top." The term came from "cima" meaning "summit." In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the name Maroon was given to fugitive slaves in the Caribbean who escaped from the lowland plantations and made new lives for themselves in inaccessible peaks. In Haiti, one well-known community of Maroons were known as the Dokos. The Maroons became legendary symbols of the African fighting spirit and successful resistance to slavery.

⁵ Voodoo (in French "Voudou") is often misunderstood to be a zombie-like trance in which people can be made to do things against their will. Although one aspect of the Voodoo practice does include allegedly powerful spells and incantations, for our purposes, we are interested in the transgressive and revolutionary aspects of this religious and cultural practice. During slavery, Voodoo gained tremendous authority as the secret rite in which African ancestors handed down their power and protection to rebelling slaves to allow them to overcome their slave masters without benefit of superior weaponry. The ancestors were known as "loas" or Voodoo gods, the most well-known of which was Ogun, originally a Nigerian god of war. The priests and priestesses who embodied these gods and administered the secret ceremonies were also treated with great deference and consideration.

⁶ Although in Césaire's play, the stage directions do not call for this kind of "living chorus" to form as tightly-knit an ensemble as the one in *Monsieur Toussaint*, nevertheless, for the most part, they do function as a unit. As with Greek tragedies, it was customary to have a chorus on stage whose interaction with the hero provided the playwright with a means of commenting on the central character as a kind of subtext. Often, the chorus' agreement or admonitions reflected what the different members of the audience might be thinking themselves, thus providing a way for the subtle airing of diverse views within the dramatic context without unduly disrupting it. In this instance in *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, by glimpsing the chorus' otherwise hidden insults, the spectator is able to surmise their true feelings about the man they ostensibly laud.

⁷ Metellus's name is reminiscent of the character, Meletus, in Plato's *Euthyphro*, a dialogue about the unfair trial and death of Socrates. Meletus is the young man who first voices his concern about the corruption of the young Greek youth. For more on this, see Norman Melchert, *The Great*

Conversation: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy, 2nd ed. (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1995) 68.

⁸ Christophe's Royal Dahomey Troops are ominous fictitious precursors of Haitian president François Duvalier's gestapo-like personal army, the Tontons Macoutes, who plundered and murdered upon his orders between 1957 and 1971, and who still operate to some extent today.

⁹ Laurie Richardson. "Disarmament Derailed" *NACLA Report on the Americas* 29.6 (1996): 11-15.

¹⁰ Eric Verhoogen. "The U.S.-Haiti Connection: Rich Companies, Poor Workers," *Multinational Monitor* 17.4 (1996): 7-11.

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